



# Home Sweet Home

Jeanette Conway's dog Casey sleeps beside her chair. Garrah Gaumer's 2-year-old great-granddaughter plays at her feet. Ivah Alexander does her banking.

While none of these are big, important things, they denote a big change in the way people live in nursing homes and, more especially, how they live at the Good Samaritan Center in Oberlin.

Fifty years ago, Jeanette's dog would have been given away or put to sleep. Garrah's great-granddaughter would not have been welcome. And Ivah might have been medicated too much to do anything but sit quietly.

The culture of nursing homes is changing, Administrator Janice Shobe says, and Good Sam, as most people call the county-owned nursing home on East Ash Street, is working to make the mental and physical changes needed to shift to the new way of doing things.

In the 1950s and '60s, cities, counties and religious groups started building nursing homes. For the most part, they were built like hospitals — with long halls and a central nurses' station — and were used to warehouse the old and infirmed.

Good Sam was built by Decatur County in 1956 and has been operated by the Good Samaritan Society, a Christian-oriented group which provides care for the elderly, ever since.

In the beginning, the focus

was on the staff, Mrs. Shobe said. The nursing facility was an extension of the hospital and residents were frequently medicated to keep them from yelling or striking out. Most slept the days away or sat tied into wheelchairs.

"Imagine being scared and confused anyway," Mrs. Shobe said, "and then some stranger straps you into a wheelchair so you can barely move."

Federal and state regulations did away with most of the mind-numbing drugs, but nursing homes were still institutions. Visitors were expected to obey the rules and check in at the nurses' station — a large, prominent desk, from which orders were issued.

Patients were no longer drugged but boredom, loneliness and despondency were common even though programs began to give the residents something to do — Bingo, sing-a-longs, church services and outings.

In the late 1990s, a movement started to take the emphasis off of the staff and put it on the patients. Nursing stations were moved out of the way. Dining areas became more intimate and small amenities like real plates and glasses instead of trays or plastic ware were added. Tables sprouted flowers in vases and comfortable chairs. Residents started having more choices of when and what they ate.

At Good Sam, the big dining

room has been broken up. Part of it still holds tables and chairs but the other part is now taken by comfortable seating for residents and guests, a fountain and an area for music and entertainment.

The new smaller area is called Country Reflections Dining Room. A second dining area on the other side of the facility is called Angel Lane. An indoor porch with rockers and a couch with cushions has been added to give that "sittin' on the front porch" feeling.

Pets and children were no longer considered nuisances that caused untidy messes and should be avoided. Not only are children welcome, but the center has a day care center for the workers' kids. These children frequently visit with residents and, during the school year, youngsters come over from Oberlin Elementary to practice their reading skills on the helpful elders.

Talon the cat is a permanent resident at Good Sam and Mrs. Shobe brings her dog "Chester" to work. Then there's Casey, who lives with his mistress. Her room is right across the hall from the garden area — a good place for a small dog to check out the smells and do his business.

Mrs. Shobe said that today, Good Sam reminds her more of an old-fashioned boarding house than a hospital. Patients get the skilled care they need, but don't have to put up with regimentation.

**PROVIDING A PUSH** for her great-grandmother, Garrah Gaumer, Isabelle Erickson, 2, (above) visited in the living room and played on the floor at the Good Samaritan Center on Monday. While Mrs. Gaumer was entertaining her family, Ivah Alexander (below) wrote a check and figured up her finances in her private room.



**IN THE "COUNTRY REFLECTIONS" DINING ROOM,** Elva Shaugnassy (above left) had lunch with Garrah Gaumer. The meal — smothered steak, peas, mashed potatoes and gravy and peaches — was family style for those residents, like these women, who can serve themselves. Before lunch, Jeanette Conway (left) played with her dog "Casey" in their room.

**Story and photos by Cynthia Haynes**