



SEVERAL GOODSAMARITAN CENTER EMPLOYEES shared "Hair Day" with resident Edla Olson (center), including (front, from left) Becky Alstrom, Kasey May and Penny Smith, and (back row) Carla Britton, JuliAnna Baker, Tina Perrin and Montine Alstrom. — Good Samaritan photos

Good Samaritan SocietySM

DECATUR COUNTY

Celebrates 50 years Of service to others

By MARY LOU OLSON

The dream of a small group of farm women more than 50 years ago became a reality when the Decatur County Good Samaritan Center opened March 4, 1957.

Much of the credit for Oberlin's first nursing home goes to the 12 members of the ABC Home Demonstration Unit, who went to the county commissioners with a proposal to sell a half section of land in Olive Township, which had housed the old county poor farm, and use the money to build a county nursing.

Members included Irel Lohofener, now a resident at the center, and Vera Landau, Mary Preston, Audra Steinmetz, Laurene Bryan, Glee Jorn, Zoe Castle, Lena Eiler, Lura Stiner, Mamie Paddock, Agnes Morrison and Grace Norton. Laurene Bryan Van Otterloo, the only other living member, said she and other members of the extension unit urged the commissioners to build a nursing home instead of continuing to operate the old county poor farm.

"Our unit members went to every community in the county, in addition to clubs and organizations, to promote the nursing home," she recalled.

Commissioners Walter Torluemke, Howard Benton and Fay Brock took the issue to the taxpayers in 1954. Voters gave approval by a 3-1 margin, also approving a one-mill property tax levy for the next two years which would raise \$32,000.

In 1955, work continued on the

project with the razing of the old high school building at 108 East Ash and the sale of the poor farm in July.

The \$35,250 received for the half section was added to the fund required for construction and equipping the home.

Final plans for the nursing home gave commissioners a cost estimate of nearly \$200,000. Again, the voters responded favorably, approving a \$160,000 bond issue so the county could borrow the rest of the money.

By March 15, 1956, Decatur County's new home for the elderly began to take form after three years of discussion and planning.

The home would have 31 rooms and 51 beds and total contracts amounted to \$180,335. Construction began 30 days later. Part of the foundation of the old high school building was used under the center.

John G. Busbook, Salina, was the general contractor; Morrish, Inc., Oberlin, provided the plumbing and heating; and Ridgway Electric, Oberlin, the electrical contracting.

The Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society, based in Sioux Falls, S.D., has leased and operated the facility from the county since it opened.

The first administrators were Mary and Walter Oehninger. Velma Magers, Mae Guy and Ilene Wright were the first nurse aides when the home opened. Asa Ames, maintenance man, worked there from the time the center opened until his death in July 1969.

Nearly 1,500 people signed the

guest book when the center opened. The first resident was H.R. Robinson. At that time, the kitchen, dining room, laundry and chapel were in the basement.

The successful operation of the nursing home and the continuing waiting list of people wanting to live there prompted Commissioners Ralph Unger, R.W. Fredrickson and Howard Benton to plan an addition on the east and north sides of the original building in 1974 with the help of advisory board members Dr. Ren Whitaker and Amelia Sulzman.

With the addition, the center added a quiet room, five private rooms, 14 semiprivate rooms, plus a medical room, nurses' station, shower room, bathroom and bathing area with whirlpool and residents' lounge.

Between the old and new parts of the building was a courtyard with patio, sidewalks, trees, flowers and garden spot.

Since that time, numerous projects have been completed within the building, including creation in recent years of two separate dining rooms, new floor covering, a new kitchen and redecorating throughout the building. The nurses stations have been removed to create a more home-like atmosphere.

"A recent improvement is the addition of Angel Lane and Country Reflections, a neighborhood concept, which allows staff to work with fewer residents at a time to give them more individualized care," said Administrator Janice Shobe.



RECALLING EARLIER DAYS, Irel Lohofener (left) and Eva Bryan enjoyed dressing baby dolls during a reminiscing session at Decatur County Good Samaritan Center.

Anniversary party planned for March 15

The Decatur County Good Samaritan Center will celebrate its 50th anniversary next week with a ribbon cutting at 2 p.m. Thursday, March 15, for a new adult day room for Alzheimer's patients.

Activities Director Lisa Stacy will talk about the purpose of the room and how it will help meet the patients' needs. The public is invited for the ceremony at 2 p.m. and an open house from 2 to 4 p.m.

At 5:30 p.m., residents and invited guests will sit down for a banquet prepared by the center's kitchen staff. Music will be provided by Alesia Hock on the cello and flute and Cheryl Christner on the harp. Both are from McCook.

The public is invited to attend a

program at 7 p.m. to recognize the center's 50 years of service to the community. Speaking will be Mayor Ken Shobe, Ralph Unger, chairman of the Decatur County Commission, and Good Samaritan Society Regional Director Randy Fitzgerald.

"We believe our mission is a calling from God to care for these special people who can no longer care for themselves," said Administrator Janice Shobe. "I see this as an opportunity to take a step into the past, and a leap into the future. We can look back with pride and fond memories at the last 50 years, while looking forward to new innovations in the care of the elderly."

The center is home to 45 residents who are kept busy with daily activities, made possible by the staff and many volunteers. Among the activities are monthly birthday parties, treats served by Dennis Brown of the Forget-Me-Nots, Bible study, reading to residents by First Hand

Friends from the Oberlin Elementary School and others, musical programs, church services, bingo, spelling bees, and much more. A monthly activities newsletter is published by the staff and a quarterly newsletter, "Sunny Reflections," is printed at the home office.



DECATUR COUNTY GOOD SAMARITAN CENTER has been the home of many since it was completed 50 years ago.