

DIALOG

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3,500 Adoptions

They've come in all shapes and sizes, and ages as well.

They've come singly and in groups. And they've come from many places, representing numerous nationalities and races.

They've come, too, at least some of them, with varying physical, emotional, and mental challenges.

Despite such differences, they've all come with one thing in common—a desire for permanence.

Translation: They want to be part of a family, forever.

Since 1972, the adoption programs of Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries have helped 3,500 of them—children ranging in age from infancy through their late teens—to achieve that goal.

Marking 30 years of adoption services this year, Diakon also is celebrating its 3,500th adoption finalization.

Families in each of Diakon's primary adoption regions—central Pennsylvania, northeastern Pennsylvania, and Maryland—are

being highlighted as part of the recognition of this milestone (a feature story on the regional family appears in the center *Diakonnection* section of this newsletter).

Both Tressler Lutheran Services and The Lutheran Home at Topton, whose programs are continued today by Diakon, began adoption services in 1972. Both organizations originated in the 1800s as homes for children, with adoption services one of the most significant ways Diakon continues this historic heritage.

In mid September, Adoption Services celebrated its 30th anniversary with a picnic and ceremony for families, attended by nearly 500 persons. Permanence was a familiar topic of conversation that day.

As one attendee noted, "I didn't have to worry about being left behind. You had a family... it was permanent—you knew it was permanent."

"It's amazing when you think of it—3,500 children have found the love and stability they needed over the last 30 years as the result of this service," says Linda Ciampi, vice president for Diakon's Congregation, Children, & Family Services.

"But what's even more important is that so many children continue to wait for a family. We hope the next 30 years will be even more successful in ending that wait for as many more children as possible."

Introducing our regional format

This is the first *Dialog* in a regionalized format. Beginning on Page 3, you will find our newsletter content now focuses on your geographic area. The section you receive—which we call *Diakonnection*—depends on your address or interest in a particular Diakon program or facility.

Four regionalized inserts are being produced: Delaware-Maryland, Lower Susquehanna, Northeastern Pennsylvania, and Upper Susquehanna. The regions parallel synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The regionalized *Dialog* takes the place of the many community newsletters published for our retirement villages, such as *Life at The Lutheran Home at Topton* or *Life at Perry Village*. Much of the information in those publications will be found in the insert.

If you are interested in receiving an insert different from the one in this issue, please contact Mary Seip at 1-888-582-2230, ext. 1215. In addition, each of the four inserts will be available for viewing on our web site, www.diakon.org.

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Children at the anniversary celebration.

Beginning our journey in the Year of Quality

If 2002 was the Year-of-the-Turn-Around for Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries, 2003 will be the Year of Quality.

Yes, of course, there was quality before. And, no, our quality service won't end on Dec. 31, 2003. Let me explain.

As I've written before, we spent much of 2001 and 2002 engaged in what we called our turn-around plan. The plan was designed to stem significant operational losses and generate the funds necessary to meet our bond covenants, pay down debt, and expand our programs.

The turn-around plan was such a success that other health-care and social-service executives around the country have cited it, lauding our effort to ensure that we continue to provide the ministries for which we've been known since 1868.

Quality service has always been of vital importance to us. A number of indicators bear that out, including our positive history of state and federal survey results. But two other factors underlying our drive for quality aren't as readily apparent.

The first is that Diakon, from early in its history beginning in 2000, has had an office devoted to quality assurance and improvement. Headed by Terri Rodeheaver, long associated with our organization, the Office of Quality Improvement focuses on standardized policies and procedures, internal auditing and monitoring of quality indicators, the development of best practices, staff training and development, and much more.

The QI unit also works cooperatively with our Office of Corporate Compliance to assure that quality is supported by careful attention to federal and state laws and regulations.

The second factor lies in the values we hold, especially our belief that "All people are unique gifts of God to be valued."

Taking that value seriously, we have no choice but to strive, as we have throughout our long history, to focus our time,

energy, and resources on quality care for those we serve.

What, then, do I mean when I cite 2003 as the Year of Quality? Simply this: As we put our considerable resources and strengths to bear on our turn-around plan in 2002, we will now do likewise with our focus on quality.

For example, we are establishing a staff committee on quality oversight, on which members of our board of directors will serve. This is an innovative step and positions the board for its true mission—to serve as a liaison to our communities and moral owners (the church), helping us to assure that our ministry always meets needs and does so with a focus on quality.

Our continuing efforts include:

- Creating and implementing a standardized Quality Assurance and Improvement System across the agency, so that all programs meet or exceed quality standards. In this system, performance data are gathered, measured, and reported in a standardized format by all programs. The program intervenes in any cases of non-

compliance with standards and oversees the QA&I system so that reports are timely and accurate.

- Creating an agencywide professional-development program so that not only do we enhance the quality of care, but we also retain skilled staff members.

While state and federal surveys are important in setting quality benchmarks, Diakon also has set internal standards against which we routinely measure our programs. For example, our facilities are scored in such areas as resident rights, safety and security, physical environment, infection control, and more.

The federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) collects data from skilled nursing facilities across the nation, based on information provided through a report called the Minimum Data Set, or MDS. As you may have read in the news recently, CMS is now using this data to generate quality measures that rank skilled nursing facilities against others in their state. The information is available on the Medicare.gov web site.

While there are inherent concerns about such rankings—for example, a facility could have a higher-than-average number of residents with pressure sores precisely because its staff members are skilled at treating the condition and hospitals regularly refer patients for this type of care—we welcome this initiative to promote quality care and to help consumers make better choices.

And they—those who choose care or service for themselves or a loved one—are the real reasons for our continued emphasis on quality. Who really determines quality, after all? While regulators and accrediting organizations set benchmarks, quality is best determined by the people we serve, as well as by our moral owners, those on whose behalf we serve.

We invite your comments as we begin our journey in the Year of Quality.



*The Rev. Dawn E. McKee,
Ph.D., President/CEO*

Wilderness Center Drive: Co-Chairs Keep Campaign on Course



John Rhodes

When Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries began planning its \$2 million capital campaign to build new housing and classrooms at the TresslerCare Wilderness Center, it became obvious someone had to chair the campaign who had a close relationship with the center's programs and the impact they have on young lives.

It turned out the best person for the job happened to be two people—co-chairs John Rhodes and Frederick Rice.

The Wilderness Center, located on nearly 200 mountainous acres near Boiling Springs, Pa., houses four programs for adjudicated delinquent and dependent teenagers—30-day Wilderness Challenge, residential Wilderness School, short-term residential Wilderness Challenge+Plus, and the Weekend Alternative Program. The programs serve youths from every region of Pennsylvania.

Rhodes was an obvious choice, says the Rev. Kenneth C. Feinour, Jr., executive vice president for Advancement.

"John has a passion for the programs at the Wilderness Center, which give adjudicated youths a second chance," he says of Rhodes, whose relationship with the organization goes back 30 years. "He's a firm believer that there are no bad kids, just kids who make bad choices."

In the mid 70s, Rhodes, who is a real estate developer and property manager, was involved as a banker with the financing for several nursing homes for Tressler Lutheran Services, one of the agencies that created Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries in 2000. "I also financed the original acquisition when they bought the [site for the] Wilderness Center back in the mid 80s," he says.

"From personal experience, I know that the Wilderness Center has successful results in changing young people's lives," he adds, noting that two sons have worked as counselors at the school. The school offers "a unique experience. It puts [students] in an environment that they never anticipated they would be in."

It was that environment that attracted Rice, a financial planner, to co-chair a campaign for a facility about which he knew little. "As an avid outdoorsman, Fred was very interested in chairing the campaign," explains Myra Conway, director of advancement. "He is very much in touch with nature and feels that this is an avenue we can use to reroute these youths."

As a former Dauphin County commissioner, Rice also understood the expense that would be incurred if adjudicated youths could not benefit from the programs at the Wilderness Center and became adults housed by the justice system.

"Having been in county government, I saw the great need for social assistance for the kids that have had a problem, but are not in such dire straits that they have to go to jail," says Rice. "The Wilderness Center is doing a fantastic job with great results for children who need a second chance."

That is the message Rhodes, Rice, and their campaign colleagues are approaching the community with in their request for financial assistance.



Fred Rice

"Even though it is more difficult with the economy as it is, we find people very receptive to assist," Rice says.

As the co-chairs continue to convey the campaign message to potential donors, TresslerCare is on its way to providing improved housing, new classrooms, and potentially a gym for the youths it serves. As of late fall, the campaign had exceeded the halfway point.

"I would think in the next 90 days we will see a significant increase in our contributions," says Rhodes. "There is no doubt in my mind that we will meet our goals."



Address Service Requested

TIMELINE: 1918

A few years after 45 Lutherans assembled in First English Lutheran Church in Baltimore to organize and adopt a constitution for “The Inner Mission Society of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Baltimore and Vicinity” in 1913, the society’s first superintendent, the Rev. Frederick W. Meyer, noted “the need to establish a Christian home for non-resident girls.”

The establishment of that home—called a “hospice”—established the role of a pivotal figure in social ministry in Maryland: Sister Zora Heckart.

The hospice had opened at 509 Park Avenue in 1917 because Inner Mission society members believed it was important to provide a faith-based home for non-resident young women coming to Baltimore to work or attend educational institutions.

Sister Zora was a 1916 graduate of the Baltimore Lutheran Deaconess Motherhouse at 2500 West North Avenue. Two years after her graduation, she joined

the Lutheran Hospice as housemother, serving in that role until 1958, when she became housemother for students at the Deaconess school.

During her 40-year tenure, Sister Zora created a Christian home for more than 800 young women. Admired for her administrative skills and deep sense of dedication, she showed personal interest in each member of her “family.”

On the 25th anniversary of her service,

she wrote: “I am indeed thankful for the blessed privilege of service in the Master’s name. The joys and friendships which only service can give are my most treasured memories.”

Today, the award for significant social ministry in the Delaware-Maryland Synod is named in Sister Zora Heckart’s memory. Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries continues the heritage of service begun by the Inner Mission Society.



Sister Zora Heckart, center, with residents of the Baltimore “hospice” for young women in the 1940s.