



Cheryl Ann Programs News Review

FALL 2017

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Open House Celebrates Fifty Years



Friends and family members found their way to Cheryl Ann Programs' facility on Mud Pike outside of Celina on October 25 for an open house to celebrate 50 years of County DD Boards. We've been observing the anniversary all year, looking back at the past with gratitude, at the present with commitment, and to the future with hope.



Cheryl Ann's open house was a quiet riot of smells, sights and sounds: chili bubbling in the refreshment tent; displays lining the halls; a new video exploring Cheryl Ann's history playing on a loop; and the cry of "bingo!"

coming from the all-purpose room. Visitors could jump into a photo booth or take a

A young visitor takes a "kindness rock" from a display.

Clockwise from top: Ribbons on a row of new trees celebrate the adults and children who have been helped at Cheryl Ann Programs; staff members talk with guests in the hall; Kelli Thomas and Melissa Kaup lead a game of bingo; a new banner honoring Cheryl Ann Coate hangs in the lobby.

longer look at photos, letters and news clippings from Cheryl Ann's archives. Offices were open throughout the building, and the staff was on hand to visit and answer questions. It was a great day for a party: and now on to the next 50 years!

Many Helped Build Cheryl Ann Programs Over the Years

History Makes Us Appreciate Contributions

This has been a very interesting and educational year for all of us at Cheryl Ann Programs. The surprise of having a 50-year celebration caught me and our staff little off guard—probably because most of us were not even born 50 years ago. Our most senior employee, Chris Schulte, started her career with us 35 years ago in 1982. It is amazing how quickly the past slips away and gets forgotten as we evolve throughout our lifetimes. Not one of us truly understood why we were named Cheryl Ann Programs.

I have never embraced a passion for learning much about history, but this year has taught me how addictive the search for history can be. The process of uncovering pieces of our past leads to more wonder and anticipation of what



Cheryl Ann Superintendent Shawn Thieman

might be found. Just as a fisherman may spend hours, days or months trying to catch “the big one”—the time spent digging into our history was built in anticipation and hope.

The “bait” for my pursuit of history came to me in a thick brown folder. The folder was the result of unbelievable work by Genevieve Bruns. Her passion to record her work and her attention to detail provided us with countless newspaper articles, notes, and letters from our beginning. As we have chronicled this year, she was our founder and everything in our past starts with her. (*See story on page three.*)

We kicked off the year by interviewing Boyd Granger, one of our original Board Members. He is a remarkable person and the very deserving recipient of the 2017 Albert Heckler Award. I will never forget the interview that we had with him at his beautiful home filled with his handmade furniture.

It was in my search for information about Cheryl Ann Coate that led me to sit down with

Evelyn Hoover. One of Evelyn’s nieces saw a newspaper article regarding our anniversary and reached out with Evelyn’s contact information. Evelyn met Cheryl Ann in the 1950’s and became both her caregiver and friend. While her responsibilities began as somewhat of a babysitter, she connected in a much deeper way with Cheryl Ann. So much so, that when Cheryl Ann passed away, it was while spending the weekend at Evelyn’s home.

There were other people who stepped up this year and made themselves available to help us tell the story of Mercer County’s Developmental Disabilities System. Betty Lange provided us with the story of her son Mark, the first student to leave the Cheryl Ann School to be mainstreamed. Former Superintendent Mike Overman filled in all of the blanks of the past 40 years. Thanks to them and everyone else who participated in our activities this year.

I also appreciate all of the efforts by staff to make this year special—from planting trees to organizing open house activities. The current and past staff at Cheryl Ann should be commended for their hard work and service to others for the past five decades.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to offer a special thank you to Jean Giesige. Jean’s work at providing quality newsletters is something that can be taken for granted when picking up the finished product. Her ability to organize and detail the stories of Cheryl Ann Programs will make our newsletters the next set of resources that tell our history. Jean performs a quality service with grace and professionalism. Thanks for all your time and effort.

SPOTLIGHT ON: **CRAIG ALBERS**

Featuring the
amazing people
at Cheryl Ann

Craig Albers has been a valuable part of the Reynolds and Reynolds workforce in Celina since 2003. There, he processes paper and runs the bailer. He works hard and pays close attention to the



Craig Albers

safety aspects of the job.

Craig, who lives in Osgood with his parents, is a Marion Local grad and proud supporter of the Flyers. He’s hoping to see them take home a state championship in football this weekend. Craig also loves the Buckeyes, Bengals and Reds.

Craig also enjoys spending time with his siblings, nieces and nephews.

Marion Township Mom Got the Ball Rolling

Daughter Recalls her Mother's Efforts, Stresses She Didn't Work Alone

More than 50 years ago, there were plenty of good-hearted people in Mercer County who were willing to do something for children with developmental disabilities. They recognized that these children were being cheated out of the pursuit of happiness by a lack of programs and opportunities at that time.

Somehow, those good intentions had to be put into action, and one of the first people to find a path to do that was a smart and determined school teacher and mother in Marion Township.

Genevieve Bruns was the smart and tireless “sparkplug” who began a letter-writing campaign for what became Cheryl Ann Programs. But she always acknowledged that she had plenty of help from the community.

In 1955, Genevieve Bruns, who had left her job as a high school teacher to raise her three daughters, was the chairman of the child welfare committee of the American Legion Women's Auxiliary with Legion Post 571 in Maria Stein. It was a job she took seriously, said her daughter, Janie Bruns Luebke. Genevieve's friend and former student, Lucille Drosch, was the women's auxiliary

president, and she urged Genevieve to find a project for April, which was the auxiliary's children and youth month.

Genevieve didn't have to look far. Her brother- and sister-in-law, Ermin and Irma Bruns, had a daughter with developmental disabilities and she witnessed the struggle that such families had in those days when there were few places to turn to for help. Genevieve also had been reading a series of article in the Celina Daily Standard about the need for special education in Mercer County. She wrote first to Mrs. Paul Gilberg of New Bremen, who had a child with disabilities, to ask for her guidance, and Mrs. Gilberg directed her to New Bremen Schools, which had just opened a classroom for children with special needs.

When Genevieve had the answers she sought, she began a letter-writing campaign for a similar classroom in Mercer County.

“Mom got the ball rolling with her letters,” Janie said. Genevieve composed the letter, and Leugers Insurance Agency in Maria Stein reproduced it for her. “She wrote to local businesses and organizations, other Legion Auxiliaries, and everybody she could think of to ask for support. She knew that there were families that needed help.”

Donations started rolling in. Genevieve kept copies, notes and scrapbooks about the efforts, so Janie can trace all that her mother did in those early days. Many organizations held special fundraisers, and the effort quickly gained momentum. “Later, the newspaper called my mom the spark plug that got the fund drive going,” Janie said.

With support from local communities, the first classroom in Mercer County intended for



Janie Bruns Luebke poses with a picture of her mother, Genevieve Bruns, that's part of the Cheryl Ann video. Janie is the little girl in the picture.

children with developmental disabilities opened in Coldwater's North Elementary in 1956. That was just the beginning. Through the years, that single classroom eventually grew into Cheryl Ann Programs, which this year is joining the state in celebrating the 50th anniversary of County Boards of Developmental Disabilities.

That her mom had the strength, the talent and the commitment to start such a campaign and see it through was no surprise to Janie Luebke. “My mom was so intelligent, and she did so many things well,” Janie said. “She loved to teach, loved to read, loved to sew and work with her hands.”

She was also quick to share any credit with others. If she was the spark plug of the special education project, she often said, Lucille (Continued on page four)

Marion Township Mom

(Continued from page three)

Droesch was the ignition point. “What good is a spark plug if it isn’t ignited?” Genevieve once said.

Genevieve spent her life in humble and loving service to her family, her students and her community, said her daughter. She set a great example for her daughters; the older two, Emily Bruns and Dee Starr, became teachers. Janie, the youngest, is now in her third term as Legion Auxiliary president. “I joined the Legion Auxiliary after my mom died,” she said. “I knew I wanted to continue the good work that she did.”

It was a special pleasure to attend Cheryl Ann’s open house on October 25 to see how the program has grown and evolved over the years, Janie said. It was an affirmation of how much good can result

when people see a need, and work together to address it. “My mom showed me that little places can do big things when they put their mind to it,” Janie said.

Thanks to all who shared in our 50th anniversary celebration of County DD Boards. We look forward to the next 50 years!



Trees planted at Cheryl Ann’s Mud Pike facility during the anniversary year will provide shade and beauty in the years ahead.

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