



Inspiration Ministries - be Inspired in 2006

By Denise Schultz

Every day hundreds of cars pass through the intersection of State Highway 67 and County Road F, between Williams Bay and Fontana (WI.) Some may look at the signage for Inspiration Ministries and wonder momentarily about the facility, some may drive past hurriedly without giving it a second thought, while others stop for a moment and smile knowingly, acknowledging the power of inspiration and the amazing things that happen here every day.

My mission is to share with our readers the story behind this remarkable 155-acre complex dedicated entirely to serving people with disabilities.

Founded in 1948 by Charlie (Pastor Charles) Pedersen, the organization was originally known as “The Christian League for the Handicapped.” (Many local residents still refer to the organization by this name or simply as “The League.”) According to dictionary.com, “Although *handicapped* is widely used in both law and everyday speech to refer to people having physical or mental disabilities, those described by the word tend to prefer the expressions *disabled* or *people with disabilities*. Handicapped, a somewhat euphemistic term, may imply a helplessness that is not suggested by the more forthright disabled. It is also felt that some stigma may attach to the word handicapped because of its origin in the phrase *hand in cap*, actually derived from a game of chance but sometimes mistakenly believed to involve the image of a beggar. The word handicapped is best reserved to describe a disabled person who is unable to function owing to some property of the environment. Thus people with a physical disability requiring a wheelchair may or may not be handicapped, depending on whether wheelchair ramps are made available to them.” I found this information helpful in understanding not only the name change to Inspiration Ministries, but also daily perception of these special people and sensitivity to their feelings.

Thanks to the generosity of caring donors, Inspiration Ministries has flourished for over 50 years. “As far as we know, we are the only facility in the country to offer people with disabilities a camp, residential facilities and a place to work all on one campus,” says Erik Barber, Vice President of Development proudly. There are currently 80 residents, about half of which work on site. “Some residents work in our workshop, where we have piece work contracts with manufacturers,” Erik told me. Others work to support the facility itself, from housekeeping to staffing reception desks and other responsibilities.

“One of the most important things I want people to understand,” Barber says “is that we are not an institution. We are a caring community that enables and encourages people with disabilities. We do not and will not warehouse people.” I was shocked at Erik’s answer when I asked how long the average resident stays at Inspiration Ministries. “Twenty years,” he answered easily, citing specific examples of individuals who have moved on because they were able to take a further step toward independent living.

The obvious care and concern by every member of the staff is evident at Inspiration Ministries. There are approximately 50 people on staff, about half of them full-time. “We all sign a statement of faith, indicating our commitment to our shared beliefs,” Barber shared. “We are a religious organization, but not everyone here is religious,” he added with a smile. “We provide many opportunities for those who want religion, but we do not force those who do not.”

Opportunity is a key word at Inspiration Ministries. Where else would people with disabilities have the opportunity to experience camping, fishing, and camaraderie like this, not to mention a place to live and work?

Although they would hesitate to agree, I believe the leadership of the Board of Directors should be acknowledged as the cornerstone of the success of this organization. Led by William H. Peterson, Chairman, the Board consists of: John G. Rossmiller, Vice Chairman; Dave Rowland, President; Ferra Bawden, Secretary; Timothy L. Weeden, Treasurer; and Directors Chris K. Konnor, Jacqueline D. Love, Ed. D and William R. Meyers. Knowing some of these individuals as I do, I’m sure they would rather turn the spotlight toward the outstanding team of caring people who work on behalf of their mission every day. Both groups are to be commended.

What happens on a daily basis at this facility? First and foremost Inspiration Ministries is devoted to helping people with disabilities live radiant, fulfilling lives. The Community Living Residential Facility provides 16 private and companion rooms for those with moderate care needs. The Assisted Living residences provide private and companion one-bedroom and studio apartments with plenty of opportunity to belong to a community of those with similar needs. Independent Living Apartments are designed to offer as much independence as possible for those who are able and wish to live independently, but still enjoy the convenience and support available within the community. Full-time, caring nursing staff and an emergency call system are available around the clock, hot delicious meals are served daily, and the warmth and caring is felt throughout the campus. In addition to these services and the opportunity to work on site, these residents also enjoy accessible transportation to activities and appointments, on-site fitness and recreation programs including a swimming pool and whirlpool, 155 acres of natural beauty and plenty of opportunities for social interaction and devotion to their faith. Additional amenities even include a resident hair salon, laundry, dental office and coffee/resale shop.

Inspiration Place, located just off Highway 67, is open to the public. Take time to visit to enjoy a cup of coffee or cappuccino and browse for bargains that have been donated for resale. Some readers may have been familiar with the store as a Christian bookstore. When the daily operation of the store required staffing other than residents, the management evaluated whether it was meeting the original mission of providing a place for residents to work and made the decision to realign. Christian books and merchandise are still available online at: www.InspirationMinistries.SpreadTheWord.com.

When the winter weather makes way for warmer temperatures, the Inspiration Center is alive with activity. “Over an 18-week period we serve approximately 650 participants,” Barber said of the camping facility. Everything from basic platform tent camping to an air-conditioned lodge complete with a game room, conference rooms and more are available at the unique camp. People with disabilities from all over the country look forward to their visits to Geneva Lake and

Inspiration Ministries. “The camp acts as a gateway to the entire organization,” Barber told me. “Many campers come here and are inspired by the opportunities offered at our facilities.” When not in use, the camp and retreat facilities are also available for rental to corporate, church and not-for-profit groups. (Call 262-275-5753 to learn more about how you can enjoy what the facility has to offer and help an outstanding cause at the same time.)

How does all of this happen? You guessed it. Time, talent, volunteers and donations. Approximately 100 people per year volunteer to help the staff meet their goals. Take a moment to consider whether you could offer a few hours to visit or read with residents, help serve meals, drive residents to enjoy a day trip, help in the resale shop or offer assistance on a fundraising committee. (Call 262-275-6131 to see how you may help.)

Several annual fundraisers help contribute to the \$2.6 million dollar annual operating costs. “Nationally, 80% of donations come from individuals and not foundations or corporations,” Barber told me. “I think some people are surprised to hear it, but that is definitely the case here.” This statistic shows that every dollar counts.

The estimated amount of total contributions received in 2005 is near \$550,000. Two very popular auctions are held in the spring and summer which feature used boats, automobiles and more. This fall the first Sharing the Harvest Dinner-Auction was held at Big Foot High School in Walworth, bringing in almost \$18,000.

How can you help in 2006? There will again be auctions – four this year, in fact. May 27 is the Wheels and Keels Auction, August 19 will be the Field of Dreams Auction, and November 3 will be the next Sharing the Harvest event. Another exciting new event is being planned in conjunction with the Geneva Lake West Chamber of Commerce. “Golfing Fore Inspiration” will be held on Thursday, May 18, 2006. For the first time, golfers and members of the local business community will collaborate to raise funds for the two organizations while enjoying a day of golf and camaraderie at the prestigious Geneva National Golf Resort – on the Trevino Course, followed by a dinner and auction. “We are pleased to have this opportunity to work with Inspiration Ministries and support their honorable mission,” commented James Saxton of Walworth State Bank, chairperson of the event. Based on Saxton’s success with an annual golf outing benefiting the Chamber, the Walworth Fire Department and Big Foot High School Booster Club, and Barber’s auction expertise, both organizations have high expectations. Golfers and those interested in sponsoring the event should contact Saxton, Barber or log on to: www.GenevaLakeWest.com

The next time you stop at the corner of Highways 67 and F, take a moment to look over at Inspiration Ministries, think about what’s happening there, count your blessings and think about how you may be inspired in 2006. Stop in to learn more, call (262) 275-6131 for information or visit online at: www.InspirationMinistries.org.