

Dedicated to opening new doors of freedom

By PATRICIA LaCROIX

Recalling the history of the world-famous Leader Dogs for the Blind School in Avon Township is hardly a chore for executive director Harold Pocklington.

He has been an integral part of the sight-giving Leader Dog philosophy since 1950 — for all but 11 years of the school's existence.

In 1951, 58 visually impaired people were matched with Leader Dogs —

dogs that would serve as substitute eyes and open new doors of freedom for their masters.

Last year, 254 blind people saw the same door opened for them.

The school was founded by three Lions members: S.A. Dodge, Donald P. Schuur and Charles A. Nutting. All three later served as president of the school.

The trio began the operation by buying a small farmhouse on 15 acres southeast of the intersection of Rochester and Avon roads.

The farmhouse still stands in the center of the school complex, but now the facilities are valued at \$5 million. It is this growth that is being commemorated this week by the marking of Leader Dog Week, so proclaimed by the Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce.

AT THE SCHOOL, dogs are trained to serve as the eyes for blind students. During the five months of training, the dogs learn to warn the blind of various situations that often occur while walking on public streets.

By stopping before coming to a sidewalk curb, for example, the students

know there is an uncertain predicament just ahead.

The students then extend his foot until he reaches the curb. Once they the situation holds, they give the appropriate commands to the dogs both by speaking and with their hands.

It is a time-consuming and expensive process.

All of the dogs used in the program are donated, so costs normally associated with buying a dog are avoided.

Training a student-Leader Dog team during the five-month period costs \$4,750. The students don't pay any of the training charge.

All of the money is raised through donations, primarily through Lions groups across the country.

Last year, the Lions gave \$604,000 to the school. The Michigan Lions contributed another \$450,255; the group will at least match this amount this fiscal year, said Pocklington.

When dogs are donated for the program, they are usually given to 4-H students for the first year. After the year is over, the children return the dogs to the school.

They are examined by a full-time veterinarian employed by the school and either accepted into the program or rejected, Pocklington said.

TELLING AN owner that the dog isn't suitable for the program is one of the toughest things he has to do, Pocklington said.

"It's like telling some mother that her kid looks like a monkey," he said. "They really take it badly when you say their dog isn't good enough."

The school has strict standards to meet for each dog accepted into the program. Breeds most commonly used are German Shepherds, Labrador Retrievers and Golden Retrievers.

All Leader Dogs must be friendly, healthy, accustomed to people, fairly good looking and willing to accept responsibility.

The dogs must be 1-2 years old, and at least 24 inches tall at the shoulder.

THE FACILITIES AT the school have been expanding during the years.

The plant now includes administrative offices, a practice track which simulates conditions on city sidewalks, a dormitory building where the students stay during their one-month orientation program with the dogs, a kennel capable of housing 191 large dogs and a hospital with X-ray equipment and a pharmacy.

Staff photos
by
Mindy Saunders



Jim Bradberry, 42, of Flushing, quickly hits it off with his leader dog, Toby.



Harold Pocklington, known to close friends as "Poc," often has his dog Shane by his side.



Gorm Hansen, 21, of Denmark, greets his new canine companion, Jasper.

THE INSIDE * ANGLE

AS GERARD MILLER, Farmington Hills Finance Director bids farewell to the city, his co-workers decided to make his last day on the job a memorable one. They gifted him with a hat. Nice, but ordinary you say? This one possessed the added feature of a set of horns. Miller, reportedly, wore the hat Friday, his last day on the job. Angles — figures it can name other administrative types more deserving of that style in headgear.

WHAT ARE WE CELEBRATING THIS WEEK? May 13-20 has been set aside as Nursing Home Week. Continuing that excitement the following week is the Postal Service's contribution to commemorative days. The Post Office is putting its stamp of approval on Mailbox Improvement Week, May 21-26. That week is to call attention to the need for providing mail boxes which protect mail from weather and are neat in appearance, according to the Post Office.

PERSONS LIVING IN OAKLAND AND LIVINGSTON counties can speak out about their concerns at public hearings regarding the Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency (OLHSA). In Farmington, the hearing will be conducted from 2-4 p.m. and from 7-9 p.m. on May 15 at St. Alexander's Church, 27835 Shilawassie. OLHSA serves in areas of health, education, child care, housing, energy, employment and transportation as well as senior citizen needs. The hearings are conducted every three years to evaluate these areas as well as to find out about any other concerns which you feel should be looked into by OLHSA. After the hearings, the results will be reviewed by the OLHSA governing board which will set priorities for the next three years.

BOTSFORD HOSPITAL GUILD will be the state host for the Michigan Osteopathic Guild Association Annual Convention. The convention will be conducted from 8:30 a.m.-3 p.m. on May 21. Guest speaker Carol Duval will bring along her crafts. The convention is open to the public, registration is necessary. Tickets are \$7.95, including coffee hour, lunch and registration. It must be paid by May 15th. Call the Botsford gift shop at 476-7600, ext. 494.

JEFF PAYNE, a 1976 graduate of Harrison High School recently was honored at a banquet conducted for the staff of Western Michigan University's radio stations, WIDR and WIDR-FM. He was given an award for the most improved announcer of 1977-78. Payne was made production manager for 1978-80. He is the son of Reynard and Peggy Payne of Farmington Hills.

The history of Jerusalem will be discussed by Dr. Jay Stern, superintendent of United Hebrew School at 9:45 a.m., May 27 on Channel 2 during the program "Jewish Community Highlights."

CONGRATULATIONS are in order for Joe Zajac and John Glick of Farmington for winning the Michigan Ceramics '79 competition sponsored by the Michigan Pottery Association at Michigan State University's Pewabic Pottery. Public showing of the entries and winners is scheduled until May 26 at the Pewabic Pottery, 10125 East Jefferson Ave. in Detroit. Show hours are from noon-4:30 p.m.

WILLIAM ELLMANN of 28000 Weymouth, Farmington Hills, was reappointed by Michigan Gov. William Milliken for a three year term on the Michigan Employment Relations Commission. Ellmann, a Detroit attorney was first appointed in 1973 and serves as a Democrat on the three-member bipartisan commission. He was a president of the State Bar of Michigan and served as co-chairman of the State Bar's Committee on Judicial Qualifications and as a member of the American Bar Association House of Delegates. The reappointment is subject to Senate confirmation.

TED MANN, who teaches music history and theory at the Orchard Ridge Campus of Oakland Community College in Farmington Hills has set to music Dylan Thomas' poem, "Do Not Go Gentle Into that Good Night." Mann, a resident of Orchard Lake, says the music reflects the mood of the poem. The poem, written upon the death of Thomas' father, is translated into music which attempts to capture its anger and sadness.

THE FARMINGTON BUSINESS & Professional Women's Club will meet at 6:30 p.m., May 15 at Botsford Inn. Guests are welcome. For reservations, call Mary Samples at 477-0500. Membership is open to all women who work.

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