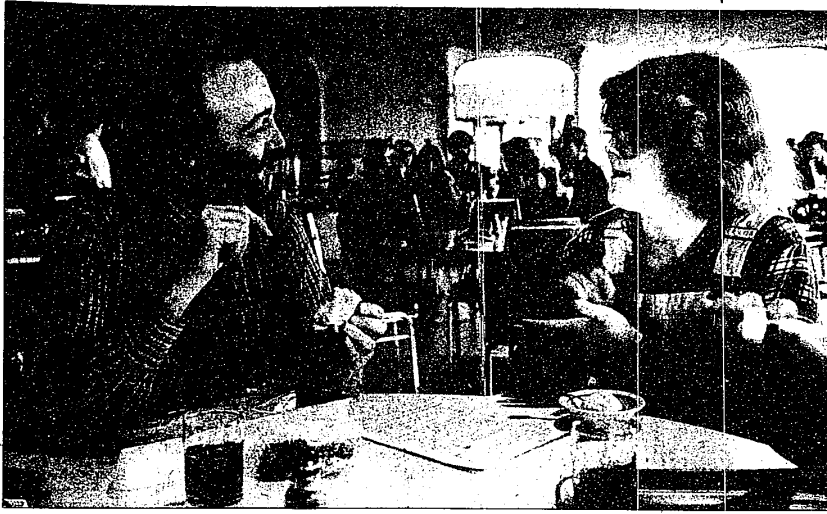


Staff photos by Bill Bresler



Mike Meldrum, director of support services at Madonna College, discusses his favorite foods with Kim Kirkman, a Madonna student. Students come from throughout the metro area to participate in the hearing-impaired program.

## Hearing impaired

### Doors are opening to new opportunities

By SHIRLEE IDEN

Lock yourself into a soundproof booth and have someone try to teach you Chinese.

John Ray, counselor for the hearing-impaired at Madonna College, says that's about what it is like for a deaf person being taught sign language.

"Sign language grammatically is closer to Chinese than it is to English," Ray says. "It's very complex."

At Madonna, a program of total communication, that is oral language and sign language is utilized. Last semester, Ray, a resident of Southfield, had 44 students he counseled. The number is increasing. Students come from throughout the area.

Ray has had a long-standing interest in deaf persons since he dated a woman with a hearing impairment about 15 years ago in Wisconsin.

"Then seven years ago, I did sign language stud-

ies at Madonna," he says. He has a master's degree from Marygrove College and has taught sign language at the Windsor Center for the Hearing Impaired.

Ray served as an interpreter for the Detroit Hearing and Speech Center and worked with language-impaired persons as well.

BORN IN Livonia, he was brought up in the Detroit area but went to high school in Ohio and began college in Wisconsin.

"I used to be a Franciscan Friar," Ray says. "I was quite mobile and didn't have to be concerned with making a living."

Now, as a counselor, he does a lot of outreach work and volunteers time with the Red Cross and other organizations. But he has a great interest in helping deaf persons.

"I know this man who was in an institution for 30 years," Ray says. "He was quite language-deficient and they thought he was mentally impaired. Instead, after testing, they found he had a hearing impairment."

"We've got him to be able to go out to a restaurant and order dinner."

Not everything Ray does is part of the structure of his job. He is involved in helping deaf persons socially, educationally, and in getting employment as well.

"We've formed a deaf club and have possibilities of getting members volunteer work," he says. "But I just want to be available to try to help the deaf meet their potential."

MADONNA COLLEGE has a nursing program for deaf-mentally impaired that is a first in the country according to Ray. It is to these new forays into areas heretofore unavailable to the deaf that he is committed.

Ray says it's easier for students who have been mainstreamed all their lives to communicate and get along in society.

"But some hearing-impaired have a distrust of hearing persons," he says. "We made their decisions for them for too long."

One of the controversies of educating the hearing-impaired is method. "Michigan is a strong oral state," Ray says.

"Some schools refuse our recruitment because we use sign language and some hearing parents are afraid to let their kids go. They fight the use of sign language."

"Madonna's philosophy is total communication, which allows a person to get along the best way they know," he says.

The college assigns a note-taker to every hearing-impaired student, a service Ray says is paid for by Madonna College.

"My position is paid for by a grant," he said. "And I really love my job. I enjoy going to work every day and often stay late."

RAY SAYS there are a number of things in his work that make it meaningful for him.

"I find the whole life and calling of deaf persons enriching," he says. "I don't like to call it helping, their own ability to succeed is there. I like to say I open possibilities. There's real tokenism in that hearing people have always helped them."

Under state law, deaf persons should be able to get services in any school of their choice, but the reality is more grim. "It's just not available," Ray says.

"At this time, there are doors being opened for hearing-impaired persons. When they are opened, their progress will be possible."

According to Ray, two out of every 100 persons are legally deaf and many have been closed out of a full life up to now.

But Ray is optimistic about the future. He's had close encounters with deaf persons and he puts it this way: "They have a lot to teach us."



John Ray, counselor for the hearing-impaired at Madonna College, participates in a therapy session with a student. At Madonna, a program of total communication, that is oral language and sign language is utilized. Last semester, Ray had 44 students he counseled.

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Student Annette Benzing raps via signs with Pat Cousins, interpreter-coordinator at Madonna College.



Using sign language, John Ray of Southfield, hearing counselor for the deaf, talks over concerns with student Helen Haberkorn.