

# Totally barrier-free

## Disabled students set up network on Orchard Ridge campus

By Loraine McEllish  
staff writer

Campus, Oakland Community College.

It is the first such organization of its kind, spearheaded by students Florence Beigler and Joy Offutt, and backed by counselor Sue Pickering. "We've got a lot of purposes and a



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lot of goals," Beigler said, who attends classes in a wheelchair. "Our main purpose is to provide emotional, academic and social support for students with disabilities, which is why we're calling our group Orchard Ridge Special Student Network."

"A closely related purpose is to increase awareness and sensitivity of the needs of students with disabilities on campus," she said.

"We want a totally barrier-free environment, no matter what that barrier is," Offutt said, who has dyslexia.

"I spent 20 years convinced I was stupid and was constantly punished for not learning. I was feeling stupid, but looking normal. That's a barrier," she said. "Now I've got a 3.75 grade point average."

Beigler related similar barriers she encounters once in a while. "People have assumed that I have lost all of my senses. Or they will talk to my assistant, but not directly to me. Or they will speak to me as though I was a foreign student who didn't speak English."

"Sometimes I've had a hard time facing that. There is a lot of catching up to do about disabled students on many levels," she said.

"IT TAKES A lot more effort to get to school and produce the work for a disabled student and they need all the back-up they can get," Pickering said. "The organizational effort alone is tremendous — just at

lowing enough time to get from one place to another."

"What the nucleus of this group is doing now is voicing some of those problems and concerns and transferring them to the faculty — from there we'll get them transferred to the student body."

Pickering estimates there are about 300 known disabled students on campus now, and she emphasizes the word "known."

"We know there are more that are hidden, but there is no count on them because they choose to hide," she said. "These can be the dyslexic or those with some kind of learning disability — whose intelligence level is generally high but who just learn differently — and who somehow slide through the system without assistance."

"Someone with something as serious as a closed head injury could hide if that's what they wanted to do."

"There's no reason to hide. And you don't have to stay home if you don't want to," Beigler said.

"We want the disabled in the community to know we're here and what we are doing and that we are a support system for one another," Offutt said.

What the network is doing is planning programs for the membership.

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— Florence Beigler



The most recent was bringing in a motivational speaker who told about hiring practices of the physically disabled at General Motors.

SOME OF THE proposed activities of the Special Student Network will be developing a scholarship fund for students with disabilities and the development of a peer counseling program following the model established by Womencenter on campus. Also on the agenda is a tutoring

program, group discussions and informal problem solving groups and workshops aimed to develop self-advocacy skills.

"All of our goals are the same. We just achieve them differently," Beigler said.

Those wishing information on the Special Student Network are invited to call Fran Gunderson in the Special Needs Office on campus, 471-7734.

## Antioch Church sets special services

Antioch Lutheran Church at 33360 13 Mile invites the community to participate in four special Christmas services to celebrate the season.

Sunday, Dec. 17 at 11 a.m. the Sunday School presents its annual Christmas program. Children of all ages tell the story of the Nativity based on the Gospel of Luke using dialogue and song, while in costume. The congregation is invited to sing Christmas carols. A punch and cookie reception follows.

December 24, Christmas Eve, Antioch offers evening services at 5, 7:30, and 10 p.m. to appeal to all ages.

At 5 p.m. the children's service celebrates with a Birthday Party for

Jesus. Along with the story of Christ's birth, children are treated to favorite carols sung with piano and guitars, presents, balloons, and birthday cake for each child.

Antioch's family service begins at 7:30 p.m. The service includes children's sermon, carol singing, communion and special music by the Junior Choir. The 10 p.m. candlelight service features musical offerings by harp, brass, and choir in addition to caroling and communion. The evening traditionally ends with the singing of "Silent Night" by candlelight accompanied by harp.

For more information on these services or any other activities at Antioch Lutheran Church, call the church office at 626-7906.

## new voices

MR. AND MRS. STEPHEN THOMAS PADGETT of Farmington Hills announce the birth of their son Michael Thomas, born Nov. 25 in Providence Hospital.

The infant's grandparents are Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Padgett Jr. of Farmington Hills and Mr. and Mrs. Lee Majors of Novi.

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