

# Poignant Tour Of Plymouth State Home

By KATHY MORAN  
Little Theresa can spot visitors a mile away and comes running down the hall, arms outstretched, ready to hug the first new face she is attracted to.

It takes Billy a minute to warm up to the strangers, but then he wants to shake their hands and play games.

Roger can't come to the guests, but if one of them wanders over to say "Hello" and smile, he breaks into a slow smile while his fragile body lays limp in his crib.

MOST CHILDREN at

Plymouth State Home are anxious to see new faces, swarm around visitors and clamor for attention.

And most visitors, after getting over their initial inhibitions, can't help but get involved with the children.

Between 800 and 1,000 persons are led through the home each month by Peter Schweitzer, director of community relations, and

probably 99 per cent of them end up playing with the children, holding them, and giving them horseback rides.

A large portion of the visitors are students from

psychology, child development and sociology classes that come to observe what they are reading about.

"It is not so they will pity the children," said Mrs. Margo Smith, a psychology teacher at Churchill High School in Livonia. "It is more so they will understand mental retardation better."

Schweitzer recently took seven classes from Churchill through the institution, giving the students time to mix with the children and learn how to relate to them.

ONE OF THE first things to strike a visitor is how seemingly happy all the children are.

Even in the infirmary, where the most severely retarded children are housed, a visitor may be jarred by seeing the grossly deformed figures, but after the initial shock he can see how pleased the children are to have visitors.

But just because some of the children appear happy, it doesn't mean they are content in their environment, Schweitzer warns the visitors.

A number of the children could be released into families in the community if it weren't for the shortage of state funds that is keeping the family-care program at a standstill.

"If the children can be in the community, they ought to be there," Schweitzer said. "The community has to accept the responsibility."

"Our kids get very little affection. They don't get it in the way they need it - there is just not enough staff."

THE ONLY WAY a child can learn how a normal family operates, is by being within the family - and institutions can never create a normal family situation, Schweitzer stressed.

He took the student groups through the brightly decorated wards where the children live and into the

## Regional Affairs

recreation building where the youths can swim in a shallow pool while under supervision and participate in recreational activities.

They stopped at the "no-fail" bowling alley where even the worst bowler can knock down a pin or two - it has no gutters - and at the crafts room where youths earn a

minimal amount of money putting plastic cars together for a toy manufacturer.

"The amount of money is not the important thing," he said. "The kids are earning something for their work."

The community could be benefiting from their gutters - and at the crafts

places where the older youths

could live in, right in the community, he said.

"A lot of the kids don't need to be here," he emphasized. "They have a right to be in the community."

ONE STUDENT asked if Schweitzer felt like he was putting the children on display by taking tours through the institution and if the children themselves sensed this.

"If we are going to make people aware of retardation, we can't just talk about it," he said.

By actually visiting with the children, people learn more about retardation, and the children get a break in the everyday routine of the institution, he continued.

"Those kids did respond to you, so there's a give and take," he said. "They like people very much. You are somebody else - a new face." "On" some wards the children do not respond to visitors so we don't take people there - it's not a zoo," he said.

HE SAID the tours are a "way of making people aware of people in an institution and of the needs of people in institutions."

No matter how brightly decorated the eight residence halls of the 13-year-old institution are, "you aren't able to forget, you are in an institution," Schweitzer said.

"Whatever they are doing, they are not changing environments," he said. "Essentially this is where they are - attached to the institution."



WHEN THE CHILDREN are too heavy to lift, they often have to settle for a hug and some companionship. Here shy Tommy is intrigued and flattered by the photographer taking his picture and hugs Reporter Moran. (Observer photo)



IT'S NOT UNUSUAL to be swarmed by children wanting to be held - and who can resist? -- as this Churchill High School student found out. The children often clamor for the attention that the small staff can not give them. (Observer photo by Bob Woodring)



WITH A LITTLE HELP from Peter Schweitzer, director of community relations, this little girl is trying to get up on her weak legs. Children who can not walk on their own often use "scoot-aboots" to get around when staff members are unable to give them individual help. (Observer photo)

## Jobless Survey Planned

The Bureau of the Census will conduct a survey of employment and unemployment in this area during the week of July 19, Robert G. McWilliam, director of the bureau's regional office in Detroit has announced.

This survey is conducted monthly by the bureau for the Department of Labor in a scientifically designed sample of households throughout the entire United States. The employment and unemployment statistics which are based on the results of this survey are used to provide a continuing measure of the economic health of the nation.

For example, in May the survey indicated that there were 84.1 million men and women in the civilian labor force; 6.2 percent were out of work as compared with 6.1 percent of the 83.8 million persons in the April labor force. The figures are adjusted for seasonal changes.

Facts supplied by individuals participating in the survey are kept strictly confidential by law, and the results are used only to compile statistical totals.

## Sidewalk Sale Is July 16-17

The "sidewalk sale", an annual feature of Wonderland Center, will be held Friday and Saturday, July 16 and 17.

Theme for the sale is "Country Carnival Days". Lending atmosphere to the event will be High Pockets, the stilt-walking clown and his son Bingo, Don Williams, emcee and carnival barker, and Tony and Chris, Wonderland's resident hardy-gurdy man and trained monkey.

Williams will emcee the two-day event over the Center's public address system.

High Pockets is a popular attraction for young and old alike wherever he goes. He and his son Bingo, who is training to enter his father's profession, will entertain with clown tricks and his specialty - creating animals out of balloons.

We've been so busy persuading you to keep your money and use ours—we forgot to remind you we offer *free checking* to those who maintain a \$99 minimum daily balance at any one of our 7 branch offices. So, we're reminding you—all you need is to maintain a 99-buck balance and you get free checking. Good idea. Great bank.

# we apologize

**LIVONIA NATIONAL BANK** Member FDIC

*The Saturday Bank (how convenient)*