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ARC acquires home of its own

Developmentally disabled have own space after 71 years

Christopher Key - Whatcom Independent

BELLINGHAM – An arc, if my fading mathematical memory serves me, is part of a circle. With the opening on May 30 of the Dan Godwin Community Center, The ARC of Whatcom County has just become a much bigger part of the community circle. The ARC has served those with developmental disabilities, their families and caregivers for 71 years. Until the opening of the new community center, its facilities were housed in a 750-square-foot office shared with the Opportunity Council on Cornwall Avenue. The new facility, located at 2602 McLeod Road, Bellingham offers 3,000 square feet of office, classroom, recreation and meeting space.

“ARC” was originally an acronym whose meaning has become, shall we say, politically incorrect over the years. It now stands for Advocates for the Rights of Citizens with developmental disabilities, but it is much more than just an advocacy group. ARC’s current mission statement is “To improve the quality of life, increase the independence and assure the full inclusion in the community of any person with a developmental disability.”

The new center will go a long way toward enabling the organization to live up to that lofty goal. The center’s namesake, Dan Godwin, inspired many people during his brief 20 years by displaying childlike unconditional love and concern. As a toddler, he was a poster child for the March of Dimes.

The original building, which dates from 1905, was part of the McLeod Homestead, several miles from its present location. It was moved in order to make way for the I-5 freeway. The Godwin family subsequently purchased the property, and wanted to honor the memory of their son by donating the property to the ARC of Whatcom County.

That donation was welcome, but it took almost three years and over \$600,000 to convert it from a single-family home to a facility that meets standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

“It’s a tribute to the generosity of this community that we didn’t have to divert one cent from our program funds to make this

facility a reality,” said ARC Executive Director Susan Jewell. “We now have a recreation hall, community conference center, volunteer work stations and a community kitchen all designed to enable those with developmental disabilities to integrate with the larger community.”

That’s the core issue: raising the consciousness of the community. It’s vital to ARC’s mission to change the paradigm regarding how those with developmental disabilities are seen by society as a whole.

“People with developmental disabilities are not different than the rest of us,” Jewell said. “They have the same hopes and dreams. This new facility will help us integrate them into the community by including everyone.”

Space considerations, unfortunately, do not allow us to give credit to all those whose contributions made the Dan Godwin Community Center possible. Suffice to say they range from huge corporations to a plethora of local construction firms. You can find a complete list of the donors at on ARC’s Web site.

To be completely accurate, the building actually houses the offices of The ARC of Whatcom, Island and Skagit Counties. Their programs include:

The Choice Project, focusing on young adults learning the principles of self-determination;

The Down Syndrome Outreach Program, providing support to individuals and their families;

The Parent Coalition Program, helping individuals and families connect with programs offering assistance.

There are a multitude of classes and focused newsletters The ARC provides to those with developmental disabilities and their families. The Dan Godwin Community Center is a stunningly beautiful new facility that will make The ARC a larger piece of the circle. They invite everyone to come see their new digs and become a part of the organization making a major impact on how we learn to accept those who were once on the margins of our awareness.

For more info visit: www.ARCwhatcom.org

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