

# Lifestyles

Wednesday, May 23, 2007

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## Old home, new face

### St. John's Lutheran Home keeps mission, changes methods

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Reporter

For nearly 150 years, the St. John's Lutheran Home has provided services to Western New York children.

Established in 1864, the home was originally intended for children who had been made destitute by the loss of a father or family support source.

The home was established by the congregation of St. John's German Evangelical Lutheran Church, then on Hickory Street in Buffalo and now at 6540 Main St., Williamsville.

In 1868, the congregation purchased 20 acres of land on the west side of Harlem Road in West Seneca, where the home was located. An additional 85 acres was later purchased.

"I suppose it was good for what it was," said Charles Moore, who was a resident of the home from the age of 9 to 13. "But the regimen bothered me."

At one time, the property was home to as many as 200 children and saw the greatest number of residents from World War I through the Great Depression.

The regimen Moore referred to involved farming and caring for livestock. Residents attended primary school, and when they graduated from eighth grade were either put to work or attended South Park High School.

"I didn't want to go to South Park, so I ran away," Moore said. After leaving the home, Moore attended what is now Hutchinson Central Technical High School and later went on to graduate from Syracuse University and become an architect.

Even though he had made up his mind to be an architect before entering the school, Moore noted that his time at the St. John's Children's Home made him and his brother and sister, who were also at the home, self-sufficient.

After World War II, the state mandated that changes for the home had to be made. The Board of Trustees

determined that the cost of such changes would be too excessive and beyond the home's capabilities, thus forcing it to close in 1960.

However, the St. John's Lutheran Home remains a charitable organization that continues to provide support for Western New York children through Lutheran Charities that include The Lake Chautauqua Lutheran Center, the Lutheran Youth Organization and the Samaritan Pastoral Counseling Center.

Ed Kinkel, who has been a member of the St. John's board since 1970, noted the changes that the charitable organization has made are due to wise investing on the part of the board.

The sale of the home and the land it was on, as well as the material assets within the building, were the initial funds that were invested.

As of 2002, St. John's had raised \$3 million to put to use in grants and loan forgiveness.

"We're able to fully finance a youth director for all of Western New York," Kinkel said. "As far as I know, we're the only organization of this type that does that."

The St. John's Lutheran Home also rents two homes — at \$1 per year per house — to Gateway-Longview Inc., an organization that provides holistic solutions for children, youth and their families, improving their lives by providing care, treatment, education and sup-

portive services.

"The homes are for high school kids," Kinkel said. "It's supervised living, and they attend public school."

Kinkel also attributed the changes in the board itself to the continued accomplishments of St. John's.

While the physical nature of the St. John's Lutheran Home has changed, the mission remains to serve the children of Western New York.

For more information on the St. John's Lutheran Home for Children, call 632-2623 or e-mail to [amluth@buffnet.net](mailto:amluth@buffnet.net).

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The St. John's Lutheran Board held a dinner on May 15 to honor former residents of the home. Board President Ed Kinkel, left; Treasurer Mike Heckerman; Vice President Joan Runcke; Secretary Ronald Peters; and Financial Secretary William Dannebrock attended the dinner.

### Spanish story time slated at Barnes & Noble

"Spanish Especially for You Story Time" will be held for toddlers and preschoolers at 9:30 a.m. Thursdays, June 7 and June 21, at Barnes & Noble, 1565 Niagara Falls Blvd., Suite 1, Amherst. No knowledge of Spanish is necessary. Call 867-6585 or visit the Web site [www.StartSpanishNow.com](http://www.StartSpanishNow.com).

### Delores and John Reitmeier



John and Delores Reitmeier were among the former St. John's residents honored.

Delores Schumacher's mother died when she was a year-and-a-half old.

When she was 4 years old, her father dropped her and her sister and two brothers at the door of the St. John's Lutheran Home for Children.

"He wasn't really much of a father," she said.

She spent most of her childhood at the home, attending primary school and later South Park High School.

"Most boys and girls graduated eighth grade at 16, but I graduated at 13," she said. Because she attended South Park, she was not made to do housework at the home like the girls who didn't go to school.

While some residents of the home viewed their experiences there as more prisonlike than anything else, Delores' opinions are more varied.

"We didn't have much, but we had some good times," she said. "We had some bad times too, though."

She recounted memories of washing the outside windows as a punishment for talking back and then falling from her perch, breaking both of her wrists, and of a supervisor with an affinity for castor oil.

"Every year we had a picnic at Delaware Park, and you could eat all that you wanted, but you got your castor oil at night," she mused.

At 13, Delores met John Reitmeier, a fellow resident who was also 13. The two began a secret courtship.

"We'd sneak down to the basement for a quick kiss, then run like hell," she laughed. "There was a handball court that everyone called the lover's court because we'd always be there playing handball."

"Like I said, we had some good times."

At 16, Delores and John decided to get married.

When John left the home, Delores remained as a supervisor but eventually ran away to be with John. "I swam across the Cazenovia Creek," she said. "I lost my Bible, and my bag of shoes broke open in the water."

During World War II, John joined the Army. Delores was living with one of his sisters, and on April 23, 1944, while John was home on leave, the couple was married. They were both 19.

"I didn't have time to get a wedding dress, so I wore my Easter outfit," she said.

The Reitmeiers have been married for 63 years. They have eight children, 16 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren.

"I always wanted a lot of kids because I grew up with a lot of kids," she said.

As far as the St. John's home is concerned, Delores looks back on it with a certain amount of reverence.

"We had a roof over our heads, clean clothes and three meals a day," she said. "What would have happened to me if I didn't go there?"



The St. John's Lutheran Home for Children was originally built in Buffalo during the Civil War, but was moved to West Seneca in 1868.