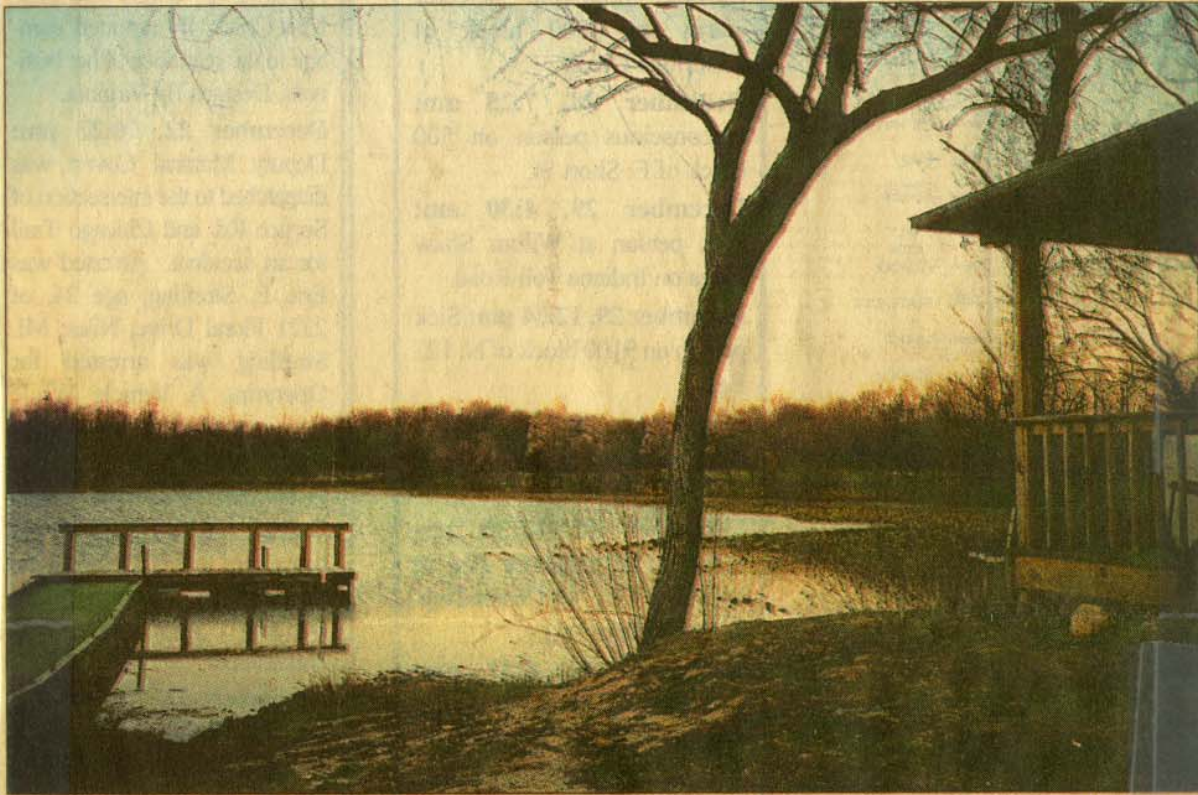


There are Leprechauns in the hills of Galena Township

by Ann Wolfe



Trail Photo/ANN WOLFE

Residents in Sharing Meadows enjoy the lake and summer playground.

Perhaps the best kept secret in Galena Township is the caring facility for the mature handicapped located at 600 N. 300 East.

A visit with Father Dennis Blaney at his residence in the green hills of Sharing Meadows offered an inspiring view of the successful recognition of a real need.

Sharing Meadows is the outgrowth of Father Blaney's 40 years of devotion to the handicapped. Originally from Michigan City, he found that parents often were so protective of their handicapped children, they resisted others attempts

to help them. His first efforts involved college student volunteers, who befriended and related to the disadvantaged, eventually gaining their trust.

This effort led to the establishment of small group homes in northern Indiana and summer camps in the Dunes.

An outgrowth of this commitment was the organization of the Share Foundation 18 years ago. Father Blaney describes the Foundation as the only group in northern Indiana which recognizes that handicapped individuals need more than surface talk.

Classes emphasize such

topics as, "What does it mean to be responsible?", and "What do real friends do?" The group also raised money for small agencies for the handicapped, respite care, and furnished death services in Lake & Porter Counties.

A newsletter was sent for 25 years, from the Methodist Church in Michigan City, to a mailing list of 11,000 across the country. The support received from this effort led to a ready response when donations were needed for the 1991 purchase of the 184-acre property in Galena Township.

A camp was operated on

the new property until the first of the buildings was completed in 1995. The only "Leprechaun Hunt" in this country was also organized that year. Last Spring, almost 2000 supporters visited Sharing Meadows to participate in the hunt for the 24 Leprechaun figurines. The foot-high figures offer prizes from \$50 to \$1000. A bountiful lunch was served of lamb, ribs, etc., and vegetables grown on the property, as well as desserts featuring local berries and fruits. The day also included a tour of the property and demonstration of the residents' crafts followed by Irish entertainment, as the concept of the Leprechaun Hunt originated in Ireland.

The community of Sharing Meadows now consists of one village of three homes, with two handicapped residents living with a house manager in each. This "Village of St. John" is

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named for the generous benefactor named "John" who donated \$100,000 for its construction.

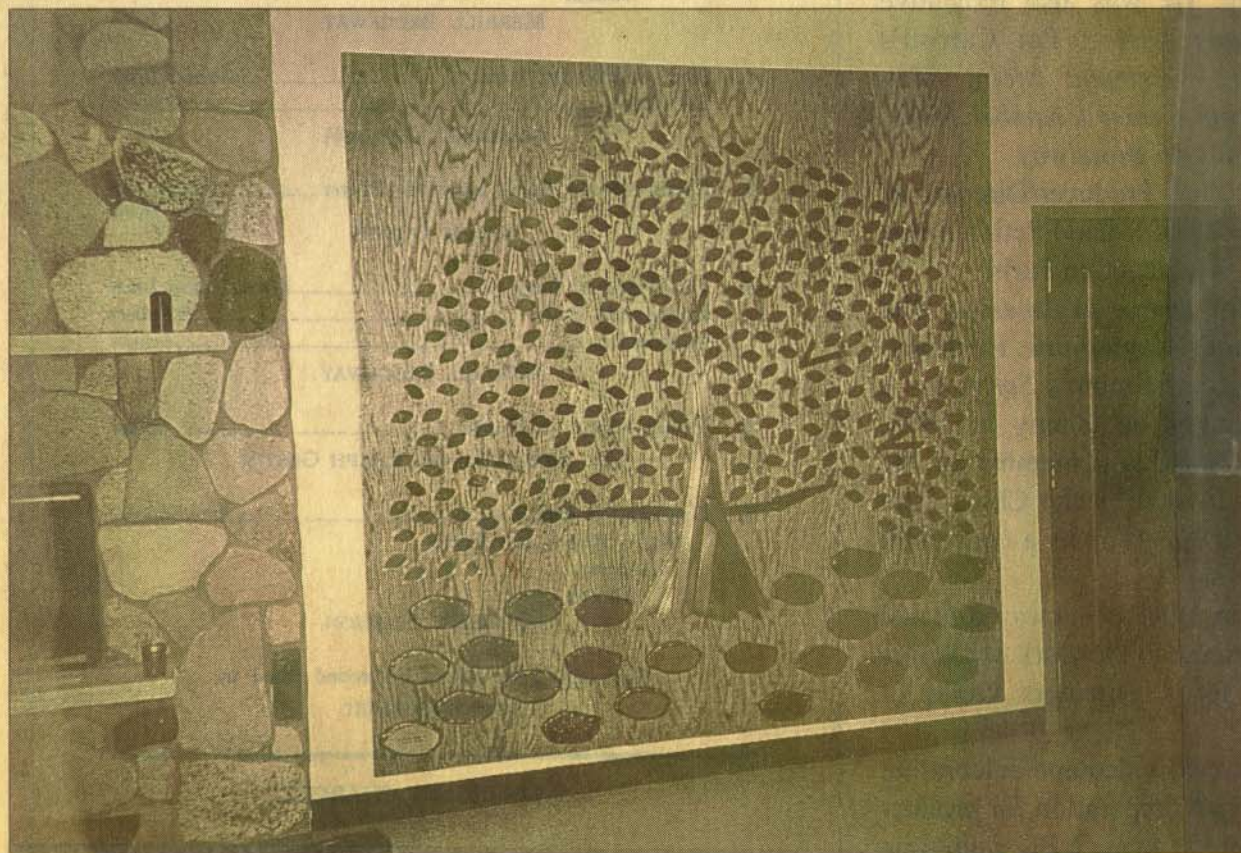
Sunday, November 28, 1999, saw the dedication of the 2nd village of three homes, "St. Vincent", so named for the generous individual who provided \$125,000 for its construction. Father Blaney hopes to eventually have 5 villages on the property with a total population of 45 – 30 residents and 15 house managers – continuing a 2-1 staff ratio.

There are no race or religious restrictions for residents at Sharing Meadows. Men and women over 18 who are handicapped or even totally care dependent are accepted—mentally retarded but not mentally ill. The uniqueness of the care and facilities accounts for a long waiting list of applicants.

To fulfill some of this need, a summer camp is conducted and has attracted as many as 800 during one season. Accommodations for the summer campers are furnished in the Camp-Craft building which has dormitory-like rooms for men and women and a spacious central room dominated by a large stone fireplace. On either side of the fireplace are "trees" with brass leaves engraved with the names of those who have made the facilities possible.

Kathleen Kelly, Executive Director of the Share Foundation, explains that these are called "The Tree of Life," symbolic of trees planted on the property. "Trees grow and people grow and become a full person."

Sharing Meadows has already received substantial commitments in its capital fund drive and hopes to reach a goal of \$1,400,000 to enable the construction of a greenhouse, woodworking shop, and swimming pool for the residents.



Trail Photo/ANN WOLFE

THE BRASS "Tree of Life" in the Camp-Craft building at Sharing Meadows.