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Happy Day leader Mary Lohr dead at 90

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April 2, 2011

Mary Lohr, 90, who died Thursday, March 31, 2011, was one of the foundation stones of the movement to help children in Portage County with special needs.

Mrs. Lohr, with the help of her husband, Marshall Earl Lohr, initiated the building of Happy Day School in Ravenna Township in 1955. When the school opened five years earlier in a converted meat market on Mogadore Road in Kent through the efforts of a dozen parents, she was one of the first two teachers.

She became the administrator of the school in 1960 and remained there until her retirement in 1981.

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Born Feb. 22, 1921 in Ravenna, she graduated from Hiram College and went on for a master's degree in library science at Case Western Reserve in Cleveland. When her son, Mickey, was diagnosed with Downs Syndrome, she left the world of books to take up the cause of helping children with special needs, whose educational opportunities were limited.

"They were just lions in the DD community. We've lost a great person," said Dr. Pat Macke, superintendent of the Portage County Board of Developmental Disabilities.

As principal of Happy Day, she initiated the development of the sheltered workshop for adults (now Portage Industries), was active in the formation of Alpha Enterprises, which provided employment opportunities for people with disabilities, and helped open the first group home for residential services. She wrote the original bus drivers' manual for Happy Day, developing a transportation system that became a statewide model for facilities serving disabled clients.

Mrs. Lohr served as director of the first county councils that were setting up services for the developmentally disabled.

Following her retirement from Happy Day, the Mary Lohr Therapeutic Play Center was named in her honor. She also was inducted into the Ravenna High School Hall of Fame in 2003 in recognition of her career accomplishments.

In 2001, the Lohrs established Residential Resources for the Developmentally Challenged, a new charitable foundation aimed at helping local special needs residents. Mrs. Lohr chaired the foundation board. They turned over their home and property in Randolph to the foundation.

In 2007, when the Portage County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities created a special community service award it was named in honor of Earl and Mary Lohr. They were the first recipients of the award, and received a standing ovation.

Speakers at the presentation noted that the Lohrs touched the lives of children they had never met.

Mary Lohr modestly accepted the award, saying of all their hard work, "It didn't matter about the Lohrs. It mattered about the people of Portage County — that they had a school for their children."

Calling hours will be held from 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday at Wood-Kortright-Borkoski Funeral Home, 703 E. Main St., Ravenna, and from noon until services at 11 a.m. Monday at St. Joseph Catholic Church, 2643 Waterloo Road, Randolph.

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2. Posted by gramwisdom3 April 2, 2011

This precious Woman of God left a secure and permanent provision for those in Portage County with special needs. Her deep love and concern for people never waned. We are richer for having had her in our midst.

1. Posted by hknisley April 2, 2011

Mary truly was a dear woman. A pioneer and an angel to the families whom she has blessed.

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