The Villages

a history

by Katie Guyot

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Chapter One

Origins

"Prevention requires that instead of concentrating on the stricken individual, as doctors have always done, we must also simultaneously concern ourselves with the environment in which the individual lives..."

–Dr. Karl Menninger, "A Project for the Prevention of Crime, Illness, and World Suicide," July 27, 1970

In 1964, a nine-year-old boy walked alone into a crowded area of Shawnee County, Kansas. Several pairs of eyes watched him approach the vending machine—a stout, windowless lockbox characteristic of 1960s street corners—but none belonged to his parents. His mother and father had abandoned their four children to the care of the boy's eldest brother, who had later been sentenced to the Kansas Boys Industrial School for delinquency. The nine-year old, the second born, was now attempting to parent his two younger siblings, though he was prepubescent and baby-faced himself. Hardly a hardened criminal, bystanders thought, but there was no telling how such children would turn out.

The police were not long to arrive when the boy attempted to break into the machine by force. He did not run. After all, he hadn't intended to steal food or coins. His goal was more long-term than that. He wanted to be taken into police custody.

Reviewing the case from his chambers at the Shawnee County Courthouse, Judge Malcolm Copeland was restless. That the outside world was harsher for a child than incarceration was a crime indeed—one committed by society.

The Shawnee County probation officer and juvenile court consultant agreed. Both were sympathetic men, each having built his career upon a desire to help human beings. The first was E. Kent Hayes, who had begun his career as the superintendent of the Boys Training School in Nebraska before moving south to Topeka. He would later serve as The Villages' first executive director between 1967 and 1973.

The second, a consultant to the judge, was Dr. Karl Menninger—nationally acclaimed psychiatrist, co-founder of the Menninger Clinic and the Menninger Foundation, author of several influential books on mental illness and crime, and, to those who knew him, simply Dr. Karl. Despite his prestige, even the many journalists who interviewed the psychiatrist often came to refer to him on a first-name basis, such as in an article that appeared in *The Kansas City Star Magazine* in 1973: "In partnership with his

brother, Dr. William Menninger, Dr. Karl revolutionized the treatment of the mentally ill several decades ago. His earliest books [*The Human Mind* and *Man Against Himself*]...helped bring a turnabout in social attitudes toward the mentally ill."[1]

Dr. Karl's interests only expanded after the books' publications, spreading particularly to prison reform and crime prevention through improved care for children who were "homeless, dependent and neglected."[2]

"We shake our fists at them with the thought that if we make them suffer a bit longer they will grow better," he once told a Senate subcommittee in Washington. "They don't."[3]

It was no surprise, then, that the nine-year-old's arrest caught the pair's attention. Hayes and Menninger left the judge's chambers disquieted but determined to improve the chances of children in similar situations.

At the time, few options were available to children with unstable or absent families, and the foster care system was a common target of criticism due to its tendency to "bounc[e] [children] from one foster home to another."[4] One seventeen-year-old sued the agency in charge of his case for sending him through sixteen separate homes and giving each of his new schools "a mistaken diagnosis that he was mentally retarded," which consistently landed him in remedial classes.[5] Juveniles who entered the court system, either for committing crimes or for being "status offenders"—minors who are punished for acts that would not be punishable against an adult, such as truancy and running away[6]—were subject to arbitrary decisions based on judges' personal biases and lack of space at facilities like the Boys Industrial School.[7] The vending machine thief was one child in a large and disjointed system.

The boy was also, however, one of the children whose stories sparked the creation of The Villages—a program for the preservation of youth and the conservation of nature. In 1964, Dr. Karl began contacting friends, colleagues, and others concerned about children's welfare to share and develop his ideas (and also, it may be supposed, to generate the nationwide support that proved vital when it came time to raise funds for The Villages).

The plan was simple but innovative, perhaps even utopian in its planning stages: small groups of youths in need of stable families would be brought to live together in

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[1] Margaret Olwine, "The Villages: Dr. Karl Menninger's Remarkable Project," *The Kansas City Star Magazine*, Aug. 26, 1973.
[2] "So You Want to Start a Village?" Villages document circa 1975.
[3] Joseph A. Lastelic, "Youths Need Home, Not Jail," *The Kansas City Times*, Oct. 26, 1977.
[4] Jonathan Kwitny, "Nobody's Kids: Foster-Care System Is Accused by Critics Of Harming Children," *The Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 6, 1978.
[5] "Foster child filing suit over life," *Topeka State Journal* Nov.,
[6] Karen Diegmueller, "The Forgotten Juveniles: 'Crime-Less' Criminals," *Reading Eagle*, Sept. 3, 1978.
[7] Ralph Marsh, "He's a Juvenile—But Jailed," *The Topeka Capital-Journal*, April 17, 1966.

large cottages, which would be under the care of a married couple, the house parents. These "parents" would not attempt to replace the residents' biological parents, but would provide the care and attention hoped for in mother and father figures—cooking meals, helping with homework, setting bedtimes, even taking family vacations. A college student or two would also be recruited to live in the house as a brother or sister figure,[8] and at one time the concept of a cottage grandparent was tossed into the brainstorm as a way to create a three-generation family.[9]

Key to Dr. Karl's design was the role of the natural world in children's growth and healing:

> "Birds, beasts, butterflies, grass, flowers, trees, soil, air and water comprise the natural environment, instead of alleys, factory walls, smog, garbage and refuse heaps, pavements and billboards. Not for an exercise in esthetics, these surroundings. They are a part of a new philosophy of living—one which emphasizes preservation and appreciation instead of destruction and exploitation."[10]

He thus considered it integral that the first cottage be constructed in a rural area, and yet near enough to the city that residents could be actively involved in the larger community.

E. Kent Hayes expressed after his retirement in 1973 that possible community backlash was also taken into consideration when choosing a location for The Villages, as distance would allow the children a degree of privacy and "protect[ion]."[11] Scouting out funds, Dr. Karl approached the nonprofit Menninger Foundation, which he had cofounded with his brother, William Menninger. Their father, Charles, a cofounder of the Menninger Clinic, had passed away in 1952, leaving leadership of Topeka's mental health initiatives to sons who were frequently in conflict, though William would soon succumb to cancer in September 1966.

In The Villages' early stages, the Menninger Foundation was not prepared to lend its support to what was then only a concept, a dream of its most idealistic cofounder.

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[8] "Profile of The Villages," Villages document circa 1976.

[9] Margaret Carroll, "Menningers build foster homes of love," *Chicago Today*, Jan. 3, 1971. Watching the married duo interact in Dr. Karl's office, Carroll noted, "Mrs. Menninger herself could be the 'pilot grandmother' in the project. Both she and her husband are very interested in American Indian life and customs. Her Indian lore stories would fill many a rainy day hour."

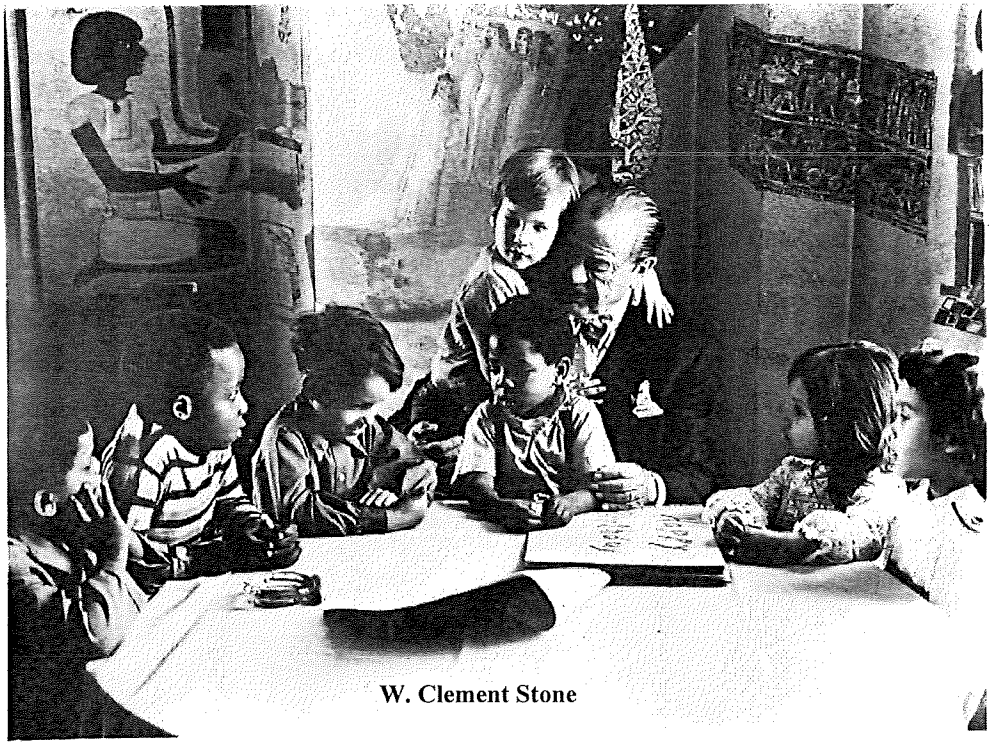
[10] Karl Menninger, M.D., "A Project for the Prevention of Crime, Illness, and World Suicide." July 27, 1970.

[11] "Children's Hill," article archived by The Villages circa 1974.

"The foundation's trustees never saw the importance of the Villages," Dr. Karl told a reporter in 1974. "They felt we had enough land and enough work to do. I suggested the foundation needed this to complete its program. My brother didn't think so."[12]

The answer came in the pencil-mustached form of Chicago businessman W. Clement Stone, founder of the Combined Insurance Company of America and a friend and supporter of Dr. Karl's since the latter's time working in Chicago in the 1960s. As the author of several books on success and what he called a "positive mental attitude," Stone was perhaps best known for his philanthropy and his unparalleled talent for giving money away.

Raised by a single mother after the death of his father, Stone began hawking newspapers in the South Side of Chicago at age six. Seven years later, he became the proud owner of his own newsstand. He started his own insurance business in 1922, shortly after dropping out of high school, and the Combined Insurance Company eventually grew into a multibillion-dollar enterprise,[13] reportedly making Stone one of the ten richest men in the United States by the time of The Villages' inception.[14]



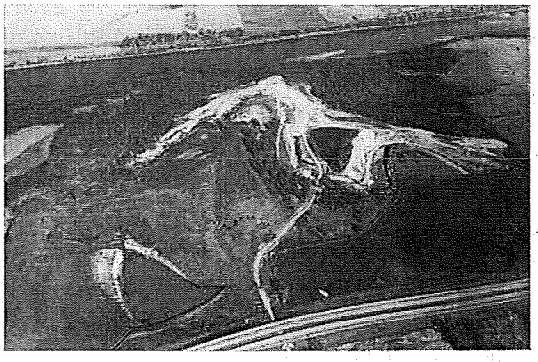
W. Clement Stone

[12] *Ibid.* The quote continues, "I always asked my brother's opinion on things. He was a very wise man, my brother."

[13] Douglas Martin, "Clement Stone Dies at 100; Built Empire on Optimism," *The New York Times*, Sept. 5, 2002.

[14] Stannie Anderson, "Village Construction to Start Soon," *Topeka Sunday Capital-Journal*, Aug. 25, 1968.

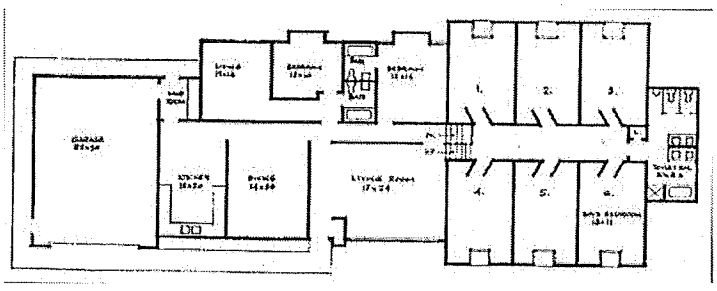
In March of 1966, Stone quietly purchased 320 acres of land on the western edge of Topeka, just south of the Kansas River and one mile west of the Menninger Clinic's West Campus. The partially wooded prairie was sold for approximately $283,000,[15] the equivalent of about $2 million in 2014. Of this property, 20 acres were donated to The Villages for the construction of the Topeka cottages. Later, in 1986, the Stones and Menningers jointly gifted the rest of the original purchase as well as additional land for use in the organization's conservation and ecology programs.[16] The W. Clement Stone Nature Education Center was born in 1989 with a $500,000 grant from Stone "for a nature center to provide environmental education to the residents of the Villages and the community." The Villages' property now extends over approximately 400 acres of woods and prairie, as well as a prehistoric American Indian burial mound that has never been disturbed.



Aerial view of the undeveloped land that is now The Villages' property in Topeka

The Villages Inc. was officially incorporated in 1966. In 1969, the Menningers and a few celebrities—including Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Len Dawson, actor Donald O'Connor, and comedian Rip Taylor—passed around a single shovel to break ground for the first all-boys cottage, dedicated to Dr. Karl's brother.[17] Construction of William Menninger Cottage was made possible by a large donation from the Fraternal Order of Eagles, an international nonprofit organization founded in the late nineteenth century. It was for the Eagles that the cottages in Topeka were collectively named Eagle Ridge Village.

As construction began in the spring of 1969, The Villages experienced the first of many obstacles that would also delay its plans in Indiana and, most notably, Lawrence.



Original floor plan for the William Menninger Cottage, printed alongside the story "Village Cottage Is Under Construction In Topeka," *The Greater Topekan*, a publication of The Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce, June 16, 1969.

[15] *Ibid.*
[16] "The Villages Inc. receives donation of land," *The Topeka Capital-Journal,* Jan. 22, 1986.
[17] "Stars Dig for Village Here," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, April 2, 1969.

Heavy rains in the spring and summer "brought work on the house to a virtual standstill."[18] Though the cottage was completed in the fall, the boys' move-in date was delayed again when Rural Water District Number Two stated that it would be unable to provide Eagle Ridge with water due to a water pressure problem. The Villages ordered a 7,500-gallon tank and resolved to haul water to the property in trucks.[19]

By the winter of 1970, the William Menninger Cottage was fully inhabited. Dr. Karl and Kent Hayes wrote to contributors,

> "On December 26, 1969 three small, homeless boys, each with frightened eyes and a box of clothes under their arms, stepped through the front door of the first cottage in Eagle Ridge Village. They touched, inspected and smelled every room in the house, full of misgivings. They could hardly believe their senses. ... They were the first."[20]

The second were the girls of the Helen DeVitt Jones Cottage, named in 1971 for a Texas philanthropist and devoted supporter of The Villages. Having graduated summa cum laude from the University of California in 1921, Jones used her family's fortune to support a variety of educational and cultural institutions, most notably Texas Tech University, to which she gave $1 million between 1965 and 1987.[21] Jones was named a lifetime trustee of The Villages for her contributions to the organization.

In 1972, the Moorman Co. of Quincy, Illinois, a manufacturer of agricultural food additives, stock feeds, and fertilizer, donated $65,000 for the third house, the Karl A. Menninger Cottage.[22] The company's CEO, Robert Hulsen, later became the president of The Villages' board.

The fourth and fifth cottages—Robert Brock and Edwin R. Linquist, respectively—were completed in 1974. The two men after whom these houses took their names were business partners in the 1950s, obtaining "two of the first Holiday Inn franchises in the nation, in Topeka and Lawrence. Their company, Inn Operations Inc., later known as Topeka Inn Management Inc., was at one time the largest Holiday Inn franchise in the country with 76 hotels in 23 states."[23] The pair eagerly supported The Villages' mission, at one point even offering to help the organization expand nationally.

As Dr. Karl often told reporters, however, the most difficult part of running the agency was not funding the houses, but finding qualified personnel to run them.

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[18] Jett Carkhuff, "Eagle Ridge Village Moves Ahead," publication unknown, October 1969.
[19] Stannie Anderson, "Six to Get New Home," *Topeka Daily-Capital*, Dec. 18, 1969.
[20] Letter from Dr. Karl Menninger and E. Kent Hayes sent to 1,300 contributors in December 1970.
[21] Danette Baker, "Helen DeVitt Jones," *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, June 25, 2000.
[22] "Gift Sent To Villages For Growth," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, Jan. 12, 1972.
[23] "Edwin R. Linquist Sr," obituary in the *Lawrence Journal-World*, March 20, 1999.

"Why, getting land or money isn't enough," he once exclaimed. "We've got people who have put their lives in back of it, to hell with the money!"[24]

The Villages interviewed forty-three potential house parent couples for the single position at the newly constructed Helen DeVitt Jones Cottage.[25] There was no being too careful. The organization had not yet forgotten the first house parents to live in the William Menninger House, a minister and his wife who had stayed only a few weeks before a physical altercation with one of the boys led them to pack up and leave without forewarning.

With the home suddenly abandoned, Kent Hayes called up the weekend relief parents, Ben and Judy Coates. The Coates moved into Eagle Ridge the next day and stayed for two years.

"It was pretty impulsive," Ben reflected several decades later, adding that they didn't think much before taking their eighteen-month-old son, Benjamin, to live with them in the cottage. Young Benjamin soon proved to be a positive addition to the house: the older boys took to him almost immediately, and one, James, developed such a close bond with the toddler that Benjamin would often sleep in James's room for company.

Forty-four years after taking responsibility for the boys of Eagle Ridge Village, Ben said, "When I look back, it might be the best thing we ever did."

At the time, the couple had only spent two or three weekends at Eagle Ridge, and with Ben in graduate school, spare time was not plentiful. Still, Ben had worked at the Menninger Clinic's children's hospital and was accustomed to working with teenagers, and Judy was prepared to take on what would eventually become a family of fourteen.

The first few weeks were the most difficult, but unlike the previous couple, the Coates pushed through these growing pains. When the boys, most of them unaccustomed to home-cooked meals, refused to eat Judy's vegetables and pot roast, she made it clear that she would only be cooking one dinner.

They ate. ("Pretty hardily," Ben added.)

Before long, the whole household was helping with the cooking and cleaning. Ben once came home to find his wife, then pregnant with their second child, lying down while the boys fixed dinner. They had convinced her to rest because they were worried about her health.

As much as the Coates worked to create a family atmosphere, their intention was never to replace the youths' parents. The boys called them Ben and Judy.

"You have a mom and a dad," they hoped to convey. "You have parents. You don't have to call us Mom and Dad to get close to us."

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[24] "Children's Hill," article archived by The Villages circa 1974.

[25] Margaret Carroll, "Menningers build foster homes of love," *Chicago Today*, Jan. 3, 1971.

As the first permanent house parents, the Coates would perhaps have as much influence over The Villages' future as the donors after whom later houses were named. Media attention was almost constant. Government officials were waiting for results. The question on everyone's mind: Would The Villages work?

For their part, the Coates were only distantly aware of the broader implications of their parenting, busied as they were with the day-to-day challenges of raising a family the size of a club soccer team. It was only later that Ben reflected, "That place was us. There was nothing there before we came."

They baked cakes for birthdays and made grand events of holidays. They took in a dog—whom the boys named Dog—and taught the teenagers to drive in an old Volkswagen, which was the only car on the premises that could make it up Eagle Ridge's hill during the icy winter months. Ben woke up early every morning to begin the two-hour breakfast period that was required of a household with kids in elementary, middle, and high school. It wasn't just cereal, either—with ten or eleven growing boys to feed, he cooked eggs, bacon, and pancakes before loading each age group onto their respective buses.

Judy helped design the Helen DeVitt Jones Cottage while Ben planted grass in the muddy expanse that was then their home's front yard. Now grass grows throughout Eagle Ridge Village, sprouting up ceaselessly over the hill and between cracks in the houses' walkways, almost as though it has been there all along.

Chapter Two

The Pioneering Spirit

"I would like to see programs like this in every community in America."

—former senator Birch Bayh[26]

Dr. Karl's focus remained always on national expansion. Despite the bulging shape of his schedule, he consistently made time for newspaper interviews, editorial writing, and congressional hearings, thus keeping The Villages in the media's attention. In a 16 mm film in which he describes his vision for The Villages, he refers to Eagle Ridge as a "demonstration Village," a model for homes that he hoped would pop up wherever there existed children in need.

The Villages of the 1970s and 1980s was possessed of a kind of Manifest Destiny that predicted the "spread [of] the concept of such small villages…to every state, county, and city in the nation"[27] from its home in Topeka, the center of the country. It had a patent that allowed it to oversee other startups and ensure that they followed The Villages' mission. The agency even produced an exuberant document called "So You Want to Start a Village!" that presented a step-by-step instruction manual for reproducing Eagle Ridge.

In 1973, The Villages hired Herb Callison, the superintendent of the Riverview Release Center in Des Moines, to develop a Villages satellite in Iowa. Callison's experience with community development under the State of Iowa Department of Corrections had caught the attention of the board, and he was brought to Topeka to spend a year training at The Villages before heading an Iowa project. During this year, however, the agency's executive director, Samuel Howie, passed away, and Callison was asked to serve as Howie's replacement. He remained in the position until 1987.

Callison headed The Villages during the zenith of expansion fever. "My goal for my original position was to expand The Villages by making the Topeka homes a model program, then add homes in Lawrence, Indiana, etcetera," he said. He also communicated with interested parties in Michigan and New Mexico, including several Native American groups from the Southwest.

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[26] Roger Myers, "The Villages Draw Praise," *Topeka State Journal*, March 26, 1973.
[27] "How Are The Villages Different?" Villages document circa 19__.

The Lawrence and Indiana homes were completed as planned. The biggest challenges for Callison, however, were always financial—stabilizing the budget and finding donors who would contribute large sums of money to the project.

Current executive director Sylvia Crawford became the agency's Youth Care Services Coordinator in 1989, near the end of the pioneering wave.

"When I started at The Villages, the executive director [Gary Duncan]...was at The Villages, here [at the office], on average maybe a week out of the month, and the rest of the time he was travelling and going to conferences and spreading the idea about The Villages' model," she said. "At that time I think there was kind of this idea that The Villages was going to be replicated all over the country, kind of becoming another Boys Town. His focus was very much outside of the agency, and he was not visible much at all."

When the board of trustees brought in a consultant to find ways for The Villages to operate more efficiently, he advised that the agency narrow its focus from the national to the local, putting its resources toward running existing houses. Now the executive director is in the office almost every day.

"If people want to learn about our model, we're more than willing, they can come," Crawford said. "But it's not our job to go out there and tell people, '[Y]ou really should start a Villages model.'"

In the 1970s, the agency certainly did believe that it was its job—indeed, its mission—to spread Dr. Karl's teachings. As proposals for Villages began coming in from countless postal codes, however, Dr. Karl and E. Kent Hayes were routinely frustrated by administrative deficiencies and attempts to depart from The Villages' core principles. By 1973, would-be donors in over thirty states had offered land for the next Village,[28] expecting The Villages in Topeka to provide personnel. After his retirement, Hayes expressed doubt that the organization could develop the national network for which he and Dr. Karl had originally planned:

> "We worked in 15 programs in 15 states and we learned very quickly they change the concept. They get bigger, they start a school, they vary the staff and generally destroy the concept to make it cheaper or easier. The Villages concept is not necessarily cheap or easy."[29]

The Villages' people-centered philosophy did not go unappreciated elsewhere in the country. The training program for the first set of house parents—called "The Art of Parenting"—caught the attention of government officials and childcare workers from coast to coast. In 1974, The Villages began offering training workshops for childcare

[28] Roger Myers, "The Villages Draw Praise," *Topeka State Journal*, March 26, 1973.
[29] "Children's Hill," article archived by The Villages circa 1974.

workers, social workers, administrators, and house parents from a variety of regions at its headquarters in Topeka. The secret ingredient was integrity, according to Hayes:

> "I don't care if you act stupid in front of those kids. Just don't 'act' human. Be human. Don't be afraid to cry or giggle at the wrong time. And don't be afraid to show your faults."

Spearheading the workshop initiative was Jeanetta Menninger, Dr. Karl's wife and partner, of whom he said after 35 years of marriage, "Marrying her was the smartest thing I ever did."[30] The success of her program led the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Assistance, Research and Statistics to award The Villages a series of grants to conduct workshops free of charge to participants.[31]

The Moorman Foundation provided scholarships for many participants, as did individual organizations that sent their employees to be trained in Topeka. College credit was available to participants working toward degrees.

The Dr. Karl and Jeanetta Lyle Menninger Educational Center (2209 W. 29th) was established in 1983 as the program's headquarters.

The first workshop , held in 1974, was called "The Art of Parenting." At left, participants in a later workshop, "The Art and Science of Group Home Foster Parenting," pose for a picture in front of The Villages' Solar I Office Building (5100 W. 10th) in March 1982.

The workshop initiative was only one of the outreach programs that The Villages conducted in an attempt to spread its childcare philosophy outside of Eagle and Pleasant Ridge Villages. In 1982, The Villages became one of the first sponsors of the newly created Dr. Karl Menninger Community Service Lecture Series, which hosted speakers on a variety of topics relating to Dr. Karl's interests.

Lectures often aligned with The Villages' mission, like in a 1983 presentation by lifetime Villages trustee Sen. Bob Dole, in which Dole asked listeners, "Are we content to allocate more and more of our wealth to building prisons—or will we invest some of that wealth and still more of our imagination in saving children before it's too late?"

Charitable organizations listened. In 1972, the Women's Division of the Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce worked to help The Villages expand its operations,[32] as

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[30] Kay Bartlett, "Dr. Menninger at 84: Still Curing Society's Ills," *The Washington Post*, Oct. 2, 1977.
[31] "The Villages receives grant for workshops." *Topeka Capital-Journal*, March 8, 1984.
[32] Martin Hawver, "Villages Seeking Building Funds," *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 12, 1972.

only three cottages were then in existence. A decade later, the Phi Delta Theta fraternity at Washburn University raised $1,300 for The Villages,[33] and in 1987 the Delta Upsilon fraternity at the University of Kansas made a gift of $8,000 to the agency.

Private individuals have continued to make sizable donations throughout The Villages' history. One notable gift in recent years came from Lota E. Jacobey of Evanston, Illinois, a teacher and librarian who asked her Lawrence relatives for help finding a children's organization to include in her will. They recommended The Villages, and after Jacobey's death in 1998 at the age of 92, half of her estate—valued at $300,000—went to The Villages.[34]

Though large portions of The Villages' human and financial resources during its early years were used to spread the agency's concept across state lines, the next Village was an extension of The Villages of Topeka, constructed just thirty miles east in nearby Lawrence, Kansas. This time, though, acquiring land proved to be more of a challenge than Dr. Karl and others at the organization had expected.

The Pleasant Valley Puzzle

Building a Village in Lawrence, Kansas

The original land for the Lawrence homes was donated in 1975 by Raymond and Anne "Petey" Cerf, a couple noted for their odd balance of personalities as well as for their tireless service to the local community. "One of Raymond Cerf's close colleagues at KU noted the contrast: Raymond, the quiet, shy and elegant artist; Petey, the outgoing, outspoken crusader; both of them generous with their money."[35]

Born in Ostend, Belgium in 1901, Raymond travelled the world as a violinist, conductor, and music teacher, eventually becoming the chairman of the Department of Stringed Instruments in the School of Music at the University of Kansas.[36] Anne, nicknamed "Petey" by an older sister,[37] was the daughter of Lawrence's Elizabeth Ballard, in whose name Petey helped create the Ballard Community Center in North Lawrence.

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[33] "Fraternity 'stomp' aids the Villages," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, Jan. 27, 1982.
[34] "The Voice," newsletter of The Villages, Spring 2000.
[35] David Chartrand, "When Mrs. Cerf Acts, Things Happen," *Lawrence Journal-World*, Nov. 19, 1978.
[36] Raymond Cerf's obituary in *The Topeka Daily Capital*, Jan. 26, 1978.
[37] The reason for this nickname is unclear, though it was apparently a reference to young Anne's small stature and was perhaps a variation of the word *petite*. A children's book published in the 1966, *Petey the Peanut Man*, also carries the unusual moniker. It is possible that there once existed a peanut company called Petey that inspired Anne's sister to compare her younger sibling to a peanut, but no reference to such a company has yet been located.

The Cerfs were drawn to The Villages as a way of helping their town's neglected and abandoned youth. However, their donation of property for the construction of five group homes attracted the ire of nearby landowners, who worried about the proposed lagoon sewage treatment facility and about the proximity of at-risk youths. These protests led Villages trustees Charles and Tensie Oldfather to propose a trade: they would donate a portion of their own land in Pleasant Valley, about three-quarters of a mile north of the original plot, and take the Cerfs' land as their own.[38]

The Oldfathers were prominent and well-liked Lawrence residents, having used Tensie's significant inheritance and Charles's salary as a professor of law at the University of Kansas to support the Red Cross, the Bert Nash Community Mental Health Center, Head Start, Haskell Indian Nations University, and many other causes, as well as to foster several children in need.[39] Both Charles and Tensie were life trustees of The Villages.

The new site fared little better, for although only two cottages were planned for Pleasant Ridge Village, the neighbors in Pleasant Valley were no less upset about the lagoon sewage treatment facility. Thirty-four percent of nearby landowners petitioned against the project. According to the Douglas County Commission's interpretation of Kansas law, a petition signed by at least twenty percent of landowners within 1,000 feet of the site required a unanimous vote by the commissioners to allow The Villages Inc. to utilize the property.

In the summer of 1976, the commissioners voted 2:1 in favor of The Villages, too small a majority due to the need for a unanimous vote. I.J. Stoneback, the single nay voter, represented the district in which Pleasant Valley was located and stated that he was obliged to vote with his constituents, 710 of whom had sent him complaints.[40]

Jean Menninger breaks ground for the H. Roe Bartle Cottage while her husband watches from behind an open car door. Published in "Menninger cites Villages goals," *Lawrence Journal-World*, June 3, 1976.

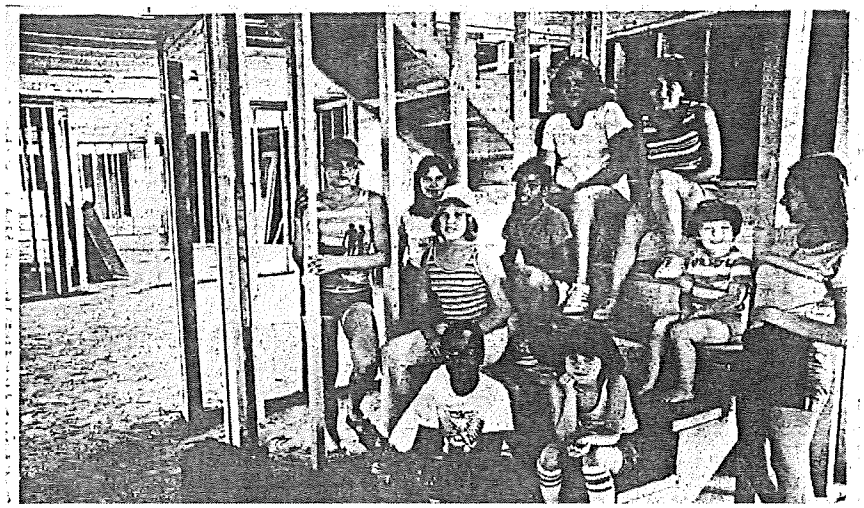
[38] "The Lawrence Project." The Villages Inc. document, March 2, 1989.
[39] "Charles and Tensie Oldfather." Website of the City of Lawrence, Kansas.
[40] Mary Ann Daugherty, "Views on Villages project to be presented in court," publication information unknown.

Lawrence project director Lance Burr hadn't expected to go to court for The Villages when he'd signed on for the position, but as a former assistant attorney general for consumer affairs in Kansas, he was well prepared to sue the City of Lawrence over its interpretation of state law. In what he called a "friendly suit,"[41] Burr argued that the commissioners had misread the requirement for a unanimous vote and that a two-thirds majority was indeed enough to move the project along.[42]

The judiciary agreed. In 1977, a district court mandated that the county commission approve The Villages' permit to inhabit Pleasant Valley.[43]

Ground for the H. Roe Bartle Cottage had been broken on June 2, 1976, but no more progress on the cottage was made until the next year, when the precise location of the cottages and the sewage treatment facility was moved twice to accommodate a nearby resident.[44] Slow construction of the lagoon presented yet another obstacle, and the house was not completed until November of 1977.

Before the land dispute began, The Villages had planned to move eight girls between the ages of 10 and 18 into the new Lawrence home by 1976. The girls had already been enrolled in Lawrence public schools and were then commuting to Lawrence from Topeka. Facing delays, Burr procured a one-year permit to house the family in a



The McPhail family poses outside the frame of the H. Roe Bartle Cottage. The McPhails' own children, 8-year-old Stephanie and 4-year-old Brad, sit on the steps. One 12-year-old girl told the reporter of the accompanying article, "I've always wanted to live in a big house like this. Isn't it wonderful?" Published in "Move in sight for Villages family," *Lawrence Journal-World*, July 19, 1977.

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[41] *Ibid.*
[42] "Children's Hill," article archived by The Villages circa 1974.
[43] "About 225 see Villages residence," article archived by The Villages circa 1976.
[44] Linda Sanderson, "Move in sight [sic] for Villages family," *Lawrence Journal-World*, Sept. 19, 1977.

converted triplex at 2901 Missouri Street in Lawrence, which became their home in early 1976.[45]

The house parents of the family in transit were Phil and Pat McPhail, who had started at the Helen DeVitt Jones Cottage in 1971.

"We've all been a little discouraged by the delay," Pat McPhail said a few months before the cottage was completed in 1977, "particularly because we're a bit overcrowded in the place we live now."[46]

In November, the wait was over. The following summer, the H. Roe Bartle Cottage was officially dedicated to a prominent member of the Fraternal Order of Eagles, which had donated $25,000 for the construction of the house, [47] part of the $105,000 that the Eagles gave to The Villages between 1966 and 1976.[48] Bartle passed away in 1974.

The ever-popular H. Roe Bartle served as Kansas City's mayor from 1955 to 1963, but as reporter Jim Lapham once wrote, that is "[t]he easy way out in identifying H. Roe Bartle."[49] With a name like Harold Roe Bennett Sturdyvant Bartle, it was expected that Bartle would lead an accomplished life. In addition to his stint in public office—which he described as "the longest eight years of [his] life"—he served as the chief[50] area executive of the Boy Scout movement in Kansas City, the director of the American War Dads, and the president of Missouri Valley College in Marshall, Missouri, to name a few. He frequently refused salary for all three of the above positions, and he even anonymously paid for lighting for Missouri Valley's school library out of his own pocket.[51]

It was probably fitting that the cottage to draw the most attention in Lawrence was named after a man known for his boisterous oratory.

"I'm big as a horse and I roar like a bull," Bartle told Lapham, who had asked about Bartle's side career[52] as a public speaker. "They had to listen to me."

The second Lawrence cottage built in Pleasant Valley, the last of the Pleasant Ridge Village homes, spent less time in the local newspaper and was completed much more rapidly. The Raymond Cerf Cottage opened in 1980, two years after Raymond's death.

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[45] "Villages may retain site in city." *Lawrence Journal-World*, Nov. 18, 1976.
[46] Linda Sanderson, "Move in sight [sic] for Villages family," *Lawrence Journal-World*, Sept. 19, 1977.
[47] "Pleasant Ridge Village dedicated," *Lawrence Journal-World*, July 17, 1978.
[48] "Eagles' Check to Villages," January 1976.
[49] Jim Lapham, "Bartle: Loud, Long and Lovable," *The Kansas City Star Magazine*, Oct. 4, 1970.
[50] Among the Boy Scouts, Bartle was known as Chief. It was out of affection for Bartle that Kansas City's football team was renamed the Chiefs in 1963. (Dr. Jason Roe, "Hail to the Chief," The Kansas City Public Library website.)
[51] *See footnote 45*
[52] "Long ago Bartle organized a one-man lecture bureau with himself as the star and only performer. For decades this Rent-a-Roe service provided speeches at a minimum charge of $500 and up to $2500. He may have peaked in 1947 when he gave 781 formal speeches..." *See footnote 45*

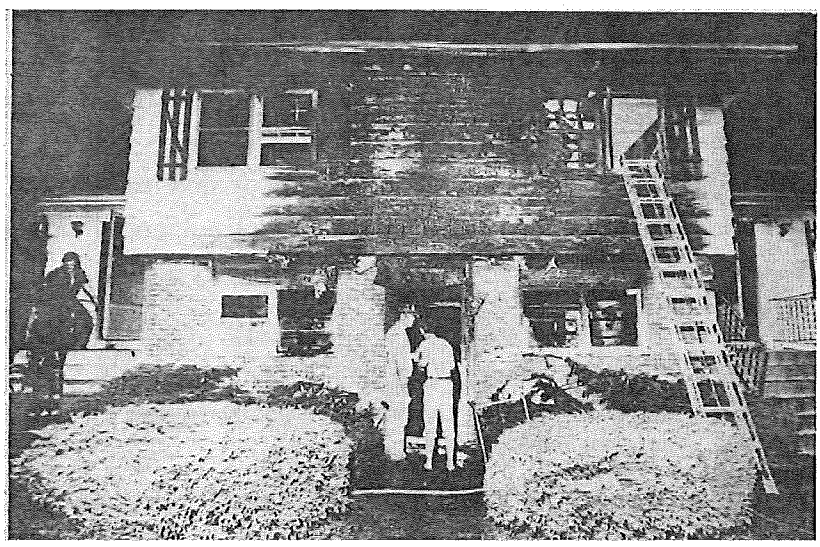
Petey attended the dedication. The Raymond Cerf Cottage is sometimes referred to as the R. Petey Cerf Cottage.

While Bartle's cottage was still on its way to court, the McPhail family's first year in the temporary 2901 Missouri St. home proved an unexpected success. In the winter of 1976, Burr revealed to reporters that The Villages was considering approaching the city for a permit to turn the address into a permanent group home.

"Things are going so well over there and the neighbors like the kids," Burr said. "...The more of these facilities we can have, the better it's going to be for the community."[53]

Despite a few anonymous protests from neighbors, the Lawrence house was purchased in 1977 and soon became home to house parents Bob and Geri Rooks and nine girls, along with the couple's two biological daughters. According to one Villages document, the converted triplex was afterward referred to as the McPhail Cottage, though the McPhails had by then moved to Pleasant Valley. Their involvement with their old house, however, was not yet over.

Around 4 a.m. on Friday, July 10, 1981, a short circuit sparked a fire in the cord of an electric organ at 2901 Missouri and spread throughout much of the home. In large part due to the Rooks family's diligent fire safety preparations, each resident escaped unharmed, though the center of the house was ruined, the family's cats were killed, and many of their belongings were destroyed.[54] Geri Rooks later told reporters that the bedroom nearest the fire had miraculously been empty, as the girl to whom it belonged



Fire damage to 2901 Missouri Street was estimated at $60,000. Photo by Richard Gwin, "Fire guts home; family safe," *Lawrence Journal-World*, July 10, 1981.

[53] "The Villages may retain site in city," *Lawrence Journal-World*, Nov. 18, 1976.
[54] David Toplikar and Don Winingham, "Fire guts home; family safe," *Lawrence Journal-World*, July 10, 1981.

had decided to sleep in another room that night. "It was one of those unexplainable things," she said.[55]

The week after the fire, the eleven girls of 2901 Missouri wrote a letter to the editor thanking the community for helping them in the wake of disaster:

LAWRENCE JOURNAL-WORLD

Saturday, July 18, 1981 Page 4

Letters to the editor

11 grateful girls

Editor, Journal-World:

Friday morning, July 10, our home (Villages, 2901 Mo.) was seriously damaged by fire. Sometimes it is hard to feel positive when almost everything we own has been destroyed and our pets are dead. However, right now we feel glad to be alive and we have found some real special bright spots in all that's happened. All in all, we're feeling very lucky and very loved.

A whole group of people on the Villages board who we don't even know are already doing things to help us. An awful lot of Lawrence people we don't know are helping us or offering to help.

The Villages office people, Mr. Callison, Mrs. Ellis, Mrs. Duffens, Mrs. Engle and Mrs. Lehane, are making sure we have everything we need. Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Duffens played games with us and did everything they could to make us feel better Friday. On Saturday, Mrs. Ellis watched the little girls all day and then had our whole family to dinner that night. The Ulaby family visited us at our hotel and cheered us all up.

Mr. Linhos, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. McConnell were especially considerate when they emptied out all our personal belongings from our bedrooms. Mr. and Mrs. Dyer were especially great because they are keeping a lot of our things in their garage. They also let us in their house Friday morning before the fire trucks came. Mr. Dyer stayed with our dad while the fire was going on. We used their phone all day Friday and the whole Dyer family helped carry out our things. The Dyers kept our dog for three days. And he is a very big dog.

The Bartkoskis have been super, as have all of our neighbors who came by and helped. Mr. Snook nailed our doors and windows shut. The Huffmans worked all day to get all of our clothes and blankets out of the house.

We want to thank the fire department, especially the fireman who went in and found our cats. Even though they were dead, he was kind to them.

We want to thank Dillons for the food on Friday and Litwins for helping us get clothes Friday evening. Lawrence Launderers and Dry Cleaners are doing our clothes and stuffed animals. We also have an extra-special big thank-you to Mr. and Mrs. McPhail and their family. They came to get us at 4:30 in the morning and found us some clothes to wear. Mr. McPhail worked at the house right with our dad for several days. The list of what the McPhails have done for us is miles long. Right now we are living in their house while ours is being fixed.

And we want to thank our home parents just for being our parents and for all of us being here safe tonight.

Mr. Edwards wrote a letter thanking people already. But we wanted to write our own letter and thank everyone ourselves. And we wanted to tell people that we are okay.

Erma, Jacque, Kahla, Linda, Dee, Robin, Sue, Paula, Renee, Paula and Nikki,
2901 Mo.

The house was rebuilt in only three months, during which the Rooks family stayed with the McPhails and Ron and Karen Cruise in the two Pleasant Valley homes. Insurance covered all of the remodeling but only $10,000 of the property lost inside the home. Lawrence citizens donated another $10,000 after The Villages went to the community for help in October.

"It was a terrible thing, but out of it has come this wonderful support from the community," Bob Rooks said the following summer. "The overriding feeling was that we came through it."[56]

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[55] Bill Woodard, "Back in business: Lawrence foster home, rebuilt after '81 fire, plans open house Sunday to thank citizens," *Lawrence Journal-World*, May 21, 1982.
[56] *Ibid.*

One Family, One Home

Establishing The Villages of Indiana

While The Villages was searching for a foothold in Lawrence, a private philanthropic foundation based in Indianapolis approached Menninger with the idea of funding a Village somewhere in Indiana. The foundation, the Lilly Endowment, had been created in 1937 by three members of Eli Lilly and Company's Lilly family and possessed the resources to jumpstart a network of Villages across the state. Before committing to a larger project, however, the Endowment wanted to create a demonstration Village of its own to test the feasibility of Dr. Karl's design.

In response to the Endowment's request for a partnership, The Villages Inc. wrote,

> "Dr. Karl invites the Lilly Endowment's participation and assures the Endowment that he and his wife, Jean, who has served The Villages as its constant supporter will fully cooperate. The successful transference to Indianapolis, once removed from Topeka, will guarantee that it can be transferred anywhere under vicarious management, but trained by him at Topeka."[57]

The Lilly Endowment made a grant of $300,000 to The Villages in Topeka to head the project. Indiana's first Village was constructed 75 miles south of Indianapolis in the small town of Bedford, on 64 acres donated by former Bedford resident Dr. John Pless.[58] A survey of the area determined that Bedford could serve youths in 18 nearby counties, in which an average of "178 young people were placed in foster homes outside their home area" each day.[59]

Ground was broken for Leatherwood Village's two ten-bedroom houses in July 1978.[60] The first house was opened to residents in April 1980. The second was completed in 1981.[61]

From there, the Indiana project developed rapidly. In 1982, The Villages announced not only that it planned to build two homes in Indianapolis, but also that it had contracted to operate two group homes in Evansville (the Roy G. Long Home) and Bloomfield (the Rebound Home) that were struggling after state funding cutbacks. The Lilly Endowment issued a $400,000 grant plus a $100,000 challenge grant to fund these initiatives.

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[57] Villages document circa 1976
[58] Website of The Villages of Indiana, www.villages.org.
[59] Patrick Siddons, "Bedford is site of first 'Village' in state for children," *The Courier-Journal*, July 16, 1978.
[60] Mary Johnson, "Second Villages home to open soon," *Sunday Herald-Times*, Feb. 15, 1981.
[61] "The Villages take over county youth home." *Linton Daily Citizen*, March 30, 1982.

The above photograph, picturing the house parents and youths of a Bedford home, was published in an unknown newspaper a few years after the house was completed.

One of the Indianapolis homes was set to open in an existing house at 6131 N. Meridian Street, much like the 2901 Missouri Street house in Lawrence. It was located in a neighborhood of fairly large houses with fairly small yards, and the Meridian home was up for sale by the family of 13 that had previously lived there. The Villages considered it an ideal residence both for its size and for its proximity to the larger community.

In the spring of 1983, however, the Metropolitan Development Commission filed a lawsuit against The Villages seeking an injunction to prohibit a group home from moving into the neighborhood. The Commission argued that a group home would violate zoning requirements for single-family homes.[62]

Municipal Court Judge David A. Jester disagreed:

> "The needs and desires of both groups are the same—a quiet, peaceful neighborhood. ... It seems axiomatic that this [The Villages'] goal is favored by public policy. The opportunity to live in a stable neighborhood, with the attendant benefits of going to school there, developing friendships among one's neighbors and schoolmates and developing the community ties permitted by such a manner of living, is highly desirable and must be favored by the law."[63]

Jester ruled in favor of The Villages on the grounds that ten foster children and two house parents constituted one family. The Metropolitan Development Commission relented, and the Villages family moved into their new home.

Dr. Karl's concept of national expansion predicted that offshoots of The Villages would work with the Topeka headquarters to get their programs off the ground and then

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[62] Paul Bird, "Residents Protest Children's Facility," *The Indianapolis News*, March 4, 1983.
[63] Mary Beth Balika, "Judge says Meridian is OK for foster kids," *The Indianapolis Star*, April 21, 1983.

operate independently once they were capable of self-sufficiency. Thus, by the mid-1980s, the six Indiana homes had split off to form The Villages of Indiana.[64]

"The development of The Villages of Indiana is a better illustration of community development than Kansas because it expanded statewide rather than being restricted to Topeka and Lawrence," Herb Callison commented.

The organization is still in existence today, though it has changed much since the 1980s. It no longer operates group homes, having closed the existing six after "changes in child welfare made them too costly to operate."[65]Instead, The Villages of Indiana now offers adoption, foster care, and family services, and it has been recognized as one of the state's most effective nonprofit organizations.[66]

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[64] Linda Berry, "The Villages sets sights on national expansion," *The Topeka Metro News*, April 28-May 4, 1988.
[65] The Villages 2008 Annual Report, http://www.villages.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Villages_Ann Rep08-web.pdf.
[66] *Ibid.*

Chapter Three

The Youth of The Villages

"A Village, by virtue of its philosophy, is a community[-]based program... Village children attend public schools, participate in community recreation, and other activities as any other members of families in their respective communities."

—Villages document circa 1976

The late 1980s was the era of the Fowler Racing Team, an eight-person group of young BMX racers who drove with their coach and a few fans to competitions around the Midwest.

The team was also a family—the Fowler family, comprising house parents Dale and Chris Fowler, their two biological children, and eight boys under the care of The Villages in Topeka. They attended races when traveling wouldn't interrupt the boys' schoolwork and other responsibilities and paid for entry fees and transportation costs out of the house's vacation budget and the coach's (Dale's) pocket.

According to Coach Dale, racing wasn't just a pastime for his boys: it was also a confidence builder and a lesson in self-discipline.[67]

From its inception, The Villages has striven to provide youths with the joint experiences of being part of a family and members of a community. According to Dr. Karl, activities within a Village were meant to center around home life—studying in the living room, playing basketball in the driveway, cooking and cleaning according to a schedule of chores. Equally important was that the youths be involved with the world outside The Villages, participating in the larger community through their schools and activities—though it is unlikely that Dr. Karl envisioned this philosophy manifesting itself in BMX racing when he first wrote of his ideas in the late 1960s.

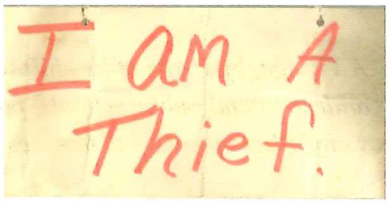
Community involvement was not without barriers—some of them physical. E. Kent Hayes said years after the purchase that part of the appeal of the land on which Eagle Ridge was built was its geographic position between the Kansas River, Interstate 70, and the quarry:

> "[W]e knew that the first time one of those kids got in trouble, we could get kicked out. It may not be fair but the primary objective is a house where two

[67] Rick Dean, "A reason to race," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, Aug. 30, 1980.

good, strong personalities can give, love and share. To do that we had to go out of town to protect these kids from an angry community."[68]

Over time, The Villages' ties with the community grew stronger, but the difficulties of the first few years were not so far in the past as to be forgotten. House parent Richard Mathes recalled a boy in his household who had been accused of stealing money out of a secretary's desk at his school. The boy had stolen items from school and home before, having been raised to empty the wallets of men who came to see his biological mother, but his role in this particular crime was never confirmed. Lack of evidence, however, did not stop the principal from hanging a sign around the student's neck declaring, "I am a thief."



A school principal once used this sign, kept in The Villages' archives, as a form of discipline. House parents quickly reacted against his treatment of one of their boys.

"Now whether he did it or not isn't the point," Mathes said. "It's how it was handled."

Mathes and several other house parents, accompanied by Hayes, who was at that time The Villages' executive director, went to the school to speak with the principal.

"I was so damned mad I don't remember what he said," Mathes later admitted.[69]

In hindsight, the principal's words are perhaps less important than The Villages' response to them. Dr. Karl had posited in his work *The Crime of Punishment* that society's punitive actions against individuals were causes of rather than cures for criminal behavior. While Villages households have always had to enforce rules to keep chaos from touching their large families, the organization's founding principles are based on the encouragement of young people and optimism for their futures. The principal's form of discipline was irreconcilable with what The Villages hoped to do for youths: bring them up, not push them down.

Despite some strains, The Villages' relationship with the public school system has been overwhelmingly positive. Ben and Judy Coates, the first permanent house parent couple at The Villages, recalled only good experiences with school administrators.

"Some of our kids were problems [in school]," Ben admitted. "Had a great principal, though. He didn't want to give up on anyone."

The Coates attended every PTA meeting and every parent-teacher conference, developing close relationships with teachers and administrators. The elementary school principal, who was also the bus driver, noticed when two of the littler Eagle Ridge

[68] "Children's Hill," article archived by The Villages circa 1974.
[69] *Ibid.*

residents didn't show up on the bus one morning. He went up to the house to find them, but Ben and Judy had last seen the pair heading toward the bus stop. After a fruitless search of The Villages' property, the Coates contacted the police. Hours passed and still the children had not been located.

At four in the afternoon, the lost boys came marching up the walkway as though they had just come from the departing school bus. They had been hiding on the property all day, listening to the search party's calls and becoming quite proud of themselves. They were only practicing what they had learned in the classroom, after all.

"The teacher had said in class one day something to the essence of, 'Everybody plays hooky once in a while,'" Judy laughed, smiling now that the scare was over forty years in the past.

One of the older boys under the Coates' care, James, had been passed along by teacher after teacher despite the fact that when he came to Eagle Ridge in the seventh or eighth grade, he didn't know how to read or write.

"Probably nobody wanted [him] back from the year before," Ben guessed.

James was, as Ben described him, "a big husky kid," accustomed to intimidating onlookers without even trying. But Ben refused to be intimidated, and perhaps that was why the two of them became so close.

"He was probably the one that gave me the most trouble," Ben said with mock seriousness, "but he was in many ways the most loving and stable."

James bonded quickly with young Benjamin, the Coates' son, who would sometimes crawl into bed with James until the latter woke up to make breakfast for the two of them. When the elder Ben and James fought, James would "pat [Benjamin] on the head, tell him he loved him," Ben said. "He had that soft spot in him."

And despite their arguments, Ben had a soft spot for James. At Ben's urging, The Villages leased a Texaco gas station at 10th and Wanamaker in 1970, giving the older residents of the William Menninger Cottage an opportunity to work as attendants and the younger ones a chance to help out behind the scenes. Their wages were split between pocket money and savings for life after The Villages. But in Ben's mind, the real benefit was in learning how to work—for James in particular.

"He was good at mechanical things," Ben reminisced, and not so good at school. Since James's difficulties with reading and writing set him far behind the rest of his class, Ben convinced the school to give James vocational credit for working at the gas station from noon to 4:30 Monday through Friday. Ben had been a mechanic in the service and taught James how to change spark plugs and tires, among other tricks of the trade.

The Villages stopped leasing the station after a year or so due to the significant human labor needed to keep it running. In its time, it gave young James the training he

needed to become a mechanic after leaving The Villages, though his inability to read manuals later left him behind the technology wave of later decades.

Ben next ran into James at Washburn University—Ben as a professor, James as a custodian. It was a chance encounter: neither knew they were working for the same employer, albeit under different circumstances.

Their paths had split, but Ben could still remember when they'd worked together under the hoods of cars, just "two working men."

The service station was something of a microcosm of Eagle Ridge's role in Topeka, exemplifying how the community could help The Villages and how The Villages could help the community. As older generations are often quick to note, youths are the adults of the future, soon to carry all of the privileges and responsibilities adulthood entails. With the new millennium looming thirty years ahead, Dr. Karl wrote early on in the project, "These lads need us, but we need them more!"[70]

Key to this assessment was Menninger's concern about the damage society had done to the environment.

In the 1980s, The Villages employed conservation-ecology educator Malcolm Smith, who taught youths about The Villages' property and the wider world. One conversation about California's decision to adopt out its rampant population of wild burros led the boys of the Karl Menninger Cottage to take two of the animals into their family, a ten-month-old female and a six-month-old male.

"The kids feel they've done something for wildlife," Smith said. "They've saved these burros."[71]

The parallels between the rescue and The Villages' mission was not lost on the journalist who reported on the adoption, who titled her article, "Formerly neglected adopt the rejected."

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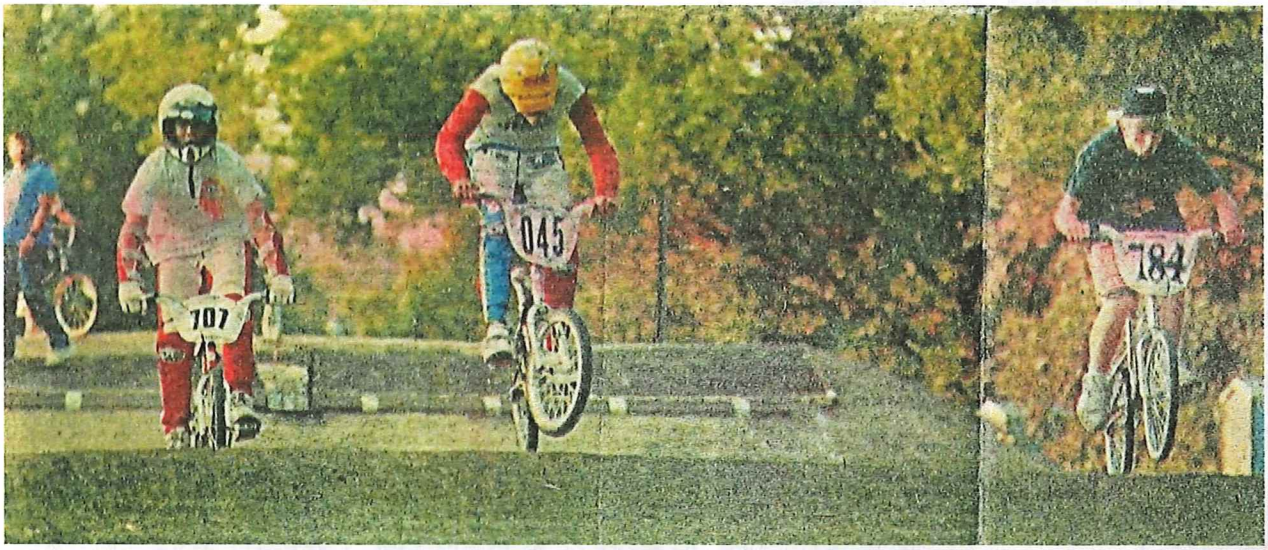
[70] Karl Menninger, M.D., "A Project for the Prevention of Crime, Illness, and World Suicide." July 27, 1970.

[71] Vickie Griffith Hawver, "Formerly neglected adopt the rejected," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, March 27, 1982.



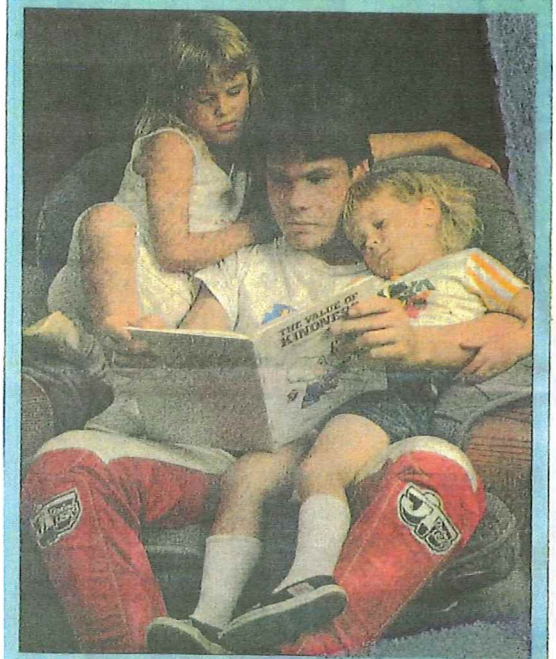
USA TODAY

Life

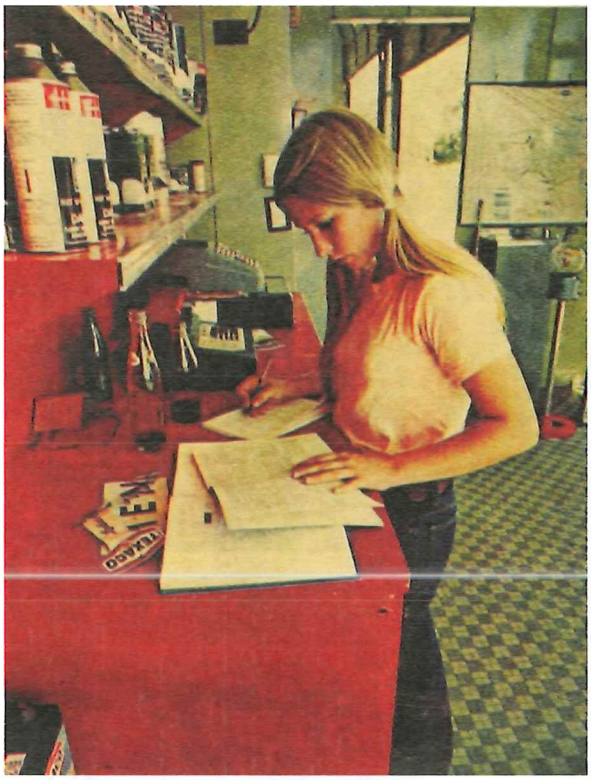
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 25, 1988

Beating the odds

Why some children thrive despite adve



A GOOD READ: An honor student and champion bike racer, Troy Byrd, 14, reads to Mike Fowler, 6, left, and Nathan Powell, 5, whose parents run the group home where Troy lives.




FOWLERS
BMX


RAIDERS
ABA
PRIME
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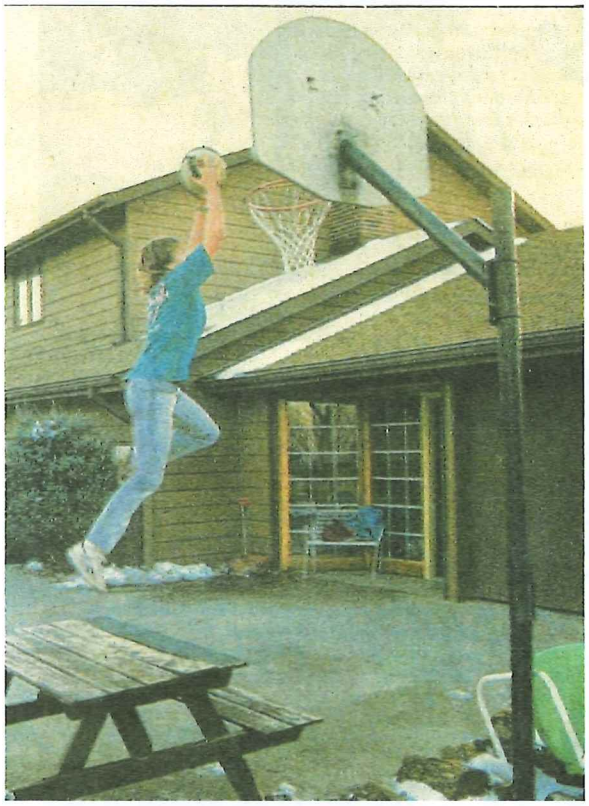
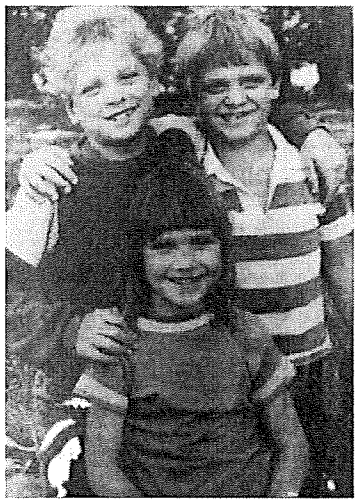


Changing Times

Whom and How to Serve in the 21st Century

Adoption was not part of The Villages' original mission, but for a time the agency was able to offer adoption services for youths in its care who hoped to find parents of their own. In 1981, the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation of New York granted $75,000 to The Villages to jumpstart an adoption program for "hard to place" preadolescents and adolescents at The Villages.[72] Qualifying as "hard to place" could mean that a youth required particular physical or emotional accommodations, or merely that he or she was a teenager. Adoptive parents, too, could be traditionally "hard to place." The Villages did not necessarily require prospective parents to meet the state's usual adoption standards, such as the requirements that they be a married couple or bring in a certain amount of income.[73]

The most unusual feature of the adoption program was its method of connecting youths with potential parents. Instead of waiting for adults to come to them, youths who hoped to be adopted advertised themselves in newspaper articles with the help of reporters from the *Topeka Capital-Journal.* One bold nine-year-old, the oldest of a trio of siblings who qualified as hard to place because they would only be adopted together, even attempted to convince his teacher at school to adopt them. She told him that it would be best if he could find a married couple so he and his siblings would have a father as well as a mother.



Tommy, Oley, and Uteoka, pictured in the *Topeka Capital-Journal.*

Undeterred, the boy tried to talk a few school custodians into marrying his teacher before his search for a family was published in the *Capital-Journal.* The article described the children as one might now see a product advertised on Amazon:

> "The boys [Tommy and Oley] are protective of Uteoka [their younger sister] and good to her.
>
> The three respond well to oral discipline. They are lively but not demanding, and their teachers at school speak highly of them. … All the children have blond hair, but Oley and Uteoka

[72] "A Voice From The Villages," archived newsletter.
[73] "Adopt a child," editorial in the *Topeka Capital-Journal*, Sept. 17, 1981.

> have blue eyes, while Tommy has brown eyes. All are of average height and weight for their ages and are tanned from being outdoors a lot during the summer."[74]

The program was successful but short-lived. Between June 1996 and May 1997, the State of Kansas privatized many of its child welfare services, including foster care and adoption. [75] Formerly the responsibility of SRS, these programs are now provided by private contractors. There is no longer a need for agencies like The Villages to provide adoption services, according to Executive Director Sylvia Crawford.

The privatization of certain child welfare services led to long-term changes in the population of youths cared for by The Villages. The organization began as an agency that served the needs of youth who had been neglected, abused, or abandoned. In modern terms, these services would fall under the Child in Need of Care (CINC) system, which is overseen by the Kansas Department for Children and Families, previously SRS. Placement of children in need of care in foster homes or group homes is the responsibility of the private contractors, who tend to favor foster care over group homes.

"There's a cost disincentive for contractors to put kids in programs other than family foster homes," Crawford explained. The cost of housing a child at The Villages, which employs full-time house parents and social workers, is significantly higher than the average cost of placing a child in a family foster home.

In the decade following the privatization of the CINC system, only a minority of referrals received by The Villages were for children in need of care. The rest were for juvenile offenders, whose cases are supervised by the Department of Corrections. The Villages had begun accepting juvenile offenders in its early years, and for most of the organization's history, the two groups—juvenile offenders and children in need of care—were housed together at Eagle and Pleasant Ridge Villages.

That changed in 2013, when the Juvenile Justice Authority announced that children in need of care and juvenile offenders could no longer be housed together. Agencies across the state had to choose which population of youths they would continue to serve.

Since the majority of The Villages' referrals came from the Juvenile Justice Authority, it was clear that in the wake of JJA's decision, the agency could do the most good by transferring to caring solely for juvenile offenders.

Another recent change, the advent house manager model, came about almost by chance. At a meeting of the Juvenile Corrections Advisory Board, Sylvia Crawford listened as the representative from the juvenile detention center described a population of

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[74] Stannie Anderson, "A child needs you—Introducing: Tommy, Oley, and Uteoka," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, Sept. 28, 1987.

[75] "Early Responses to the Move to Privatization of Child Welfare Services." Kansas Chapter, National Association of Social Workers. October 1997.

youths at the center who, under normal circumstances, wouldn't have been in juvenile detention: youths who were waiting for spots to open up at other programs, such as in-patient drug and alcohol treatment, and had been sent to the juvenile detention center for lack of another place to go.

"Basically they were just being held in the juvenile detention center until they could be moved. That's not really an appropriate use for juvenile detention."

The Villages decided that it possessed the resources to offer these youths in transit another housing option while they awaited admission to their intended destinations. It was thus that one of the houses was briefly turned into a short-stay program to house youths for a few weeks at a time until they could move into permanent programs—"briefly" because for many of these temporary residents, The Villages became their long-term home.

"To make a long story short, the short-term piece didn't quite pan out," Crawford said. "Once they had kids placed here, nine out of ten times the worker said, 'Well, I don't really think I need to move them to Wichita,' or, you know, 'They're already established here. We'll just leave them here with you.'"

One aspect of the short-stay program has remained. Because The Villages worried that the frequently changing roster at a short-stay house would be stressful to house parents, the agency created a house manager model, in which the duties of a house parent are instead overseen by a single professional, such as social worker. This less family-like atmosphere has been beneficial to youths who may not benefit from a family-style environment, such as those who have been diagnosed with attachment disorder, said Crawford.

"I think it's been kind of nice having both models, and ideally that's how I would like to keep it, so we have some houses that are house-parent-based and some houses that are house-manager-based, because certain models I think work better for certain kids."

Chapter Five

Beyond Dr. Karl

"They talk about 'founder syndrome' in nonprofit literature. And I think that's very true, that when you have an agency that was started by a strong person that basically set the tone for the whole agency—it was his or her baby—it takes a long time even after that person is no longer involved in the agency to kind of become independent in a way. It hasn't been really very long that I feel like we've been completely separated from that. Right now I feel like The Villages is an agency with its own agency identity rather than, this is Dr. Karl's life work. It's taken a long time to come to the point where The Villages truly feels like it stands on its own feet."

– Executive Director Sylvia Crawford

Dr. Karl often seemed to become the face of the initiatives he spearheaded, and for no organization was this truer than The Villages. Most of The Villages' original supporters were his friends and admirers, and his ideas and personality influenced the very character of the organization. It was from his writings that The Villages drew its current motto: "Conserving Youth, Preserving Nature."

By the time of The Villages' founding, Dr. Karl had already accumulated national prestige as a high-profile psychiatrist and member of the Menninger family, along with his father, Charles, and his brother, William, cofounders of the Menninger Clinic.

In a 1953 radio talk on NBC, Dr. Karl reminisced about his boyhood in Topeka and his early curiosity about the human mind. He and Will used to walk by the Topeka State Hospital, an institution for the treatment of the mentally ill that operated from 1872 to 1997,[76] to peek in at the men kept in "the great stone castles with the barred windows."[77] When the Menninger Clinic came to town in 1925, Dr. Karl hoped to break down the walls that isolated mental illness from the community:

> "... [I]t is not only the sick people who are benefited when a town gets interested in psychiatric illness. There is something about work with sick minds and hearts that makes ordinary people more sensitive to suffering,

[76] Kansas Historical Foundation, http://www.kshs.org/p/topeka-state-hospital-records/11317.
[77] Qtd. in Stannie Anderson, "The man, Menninger," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, 1990.

> more tolerant, more human—even to each other. They discover that love cures people, the ones who receive love and the ones who can give it, too."[78]

His belief in the importance of openness carried over into The Villages, which was intended to help and be helped by the community. It was not so much charity as it was collaboration—making society, in Dr. Karl's worldview, better.

Dr. Karl's second wife, Jeanetta, whom he often called his "partner," was perhaps his greatest collaborator. Prior to their marriage, Jeanetta worked as Dr. Karl's assistant at the Menninger Clinic. She continued to edit the organization's bimonthly journal for thirty years after she became Mrs. Menninger, as she was frequently referred to in newspaper articles. She helped her husband write the book "Love against Hate" in 1942, just a year after they were married.[79]

"Karl has always had a sixth sense for society's next sore point,"[80] Jeanetta told reporter Kay Bartlett, though her husband consistently said that she had been the impetus behind initiatives like the Menninger Foundation and The Villages.

Dr. Karl's desire to fix these "sore points" seeped into his personal interactions as well as his professional life. His friend Dr. Paul Prysor once described him as a "giver," and not merely in a metaphorical sense.

"If he has an apple, he'll peel it and practically put it in your mouth," Prysor said.[81]

Prysor was not the only person to notice the psychiatrist's peculiar generosity with apples. Another of Dr. Karl's friend, *Topeka Capital-Journal* reporter Stannie Anderson, wrote in his obituary,

> "Undoubtedly hundreds of [people] carry with them the memory of sitting beside [Dr. Karl's] desk while he talked and peeled a bright red apple, the curl of peel growing longer and longer and longer. The visitor would always be sure the chain would break, but it never seemed to do so.
>
> "Once the apple was peeled, he would cut out the core, then carefully cut the apple into four pieces—two for the visitor and two for himself—all the while continuing the conversation."[82]

While undoubtedly caring (if his fruit sharing habits were any indication), Dr. Karl was not a soft man. "His official biography, in fact, uses the word 'cantankerous'" to describe him, [83] and his nephew, Dr. Roy Menninger, said his uncle "was not an easy

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[78] *Ibid.*
[79] Margaret Carroll, "Menningers build foster homes of love," *Chicago Today*, Jan. 3, 1971.
[80] Kay Bartlett, "Dr. Menninger at 84: Still Curing Society's Ills," *The Washington Post*, Oct. 2, 1977.
[81] *Ibid.*
[82] Stannie Anderson, "The man, Menninger," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, 1990.
[83] *Ibid.*

person to deal with."[84] Even Anderson only became Dr. Karl's lifelong friend after his fury regarding an article she had published without his permission about one of his land purchases had subsided. And yet, Bartlett wrote,

> "[Dr. Karl] seems genuinely surprised when he is told that some people find him frightening. 'Why would anyone be afraid of me?' he roars. Then he thinks for a moment and answers softly: 'That hurts me. I do speak a little loudly and I am emphatic.' Next he says, 'I guess I have always been a bit of a curmudgeon, but I like things done right."[85]

This last attitude came across clearly in meetings of The Villages' board, of which Dr. Karl was president, and in his general oversight of the agency. The Villages gained a reputation for rebelliousness because its founder's ideas of how things could be "done right" did not align with those of the state.

"When Dr. Karl was alive, The Villages did things the way they wanted them to be done, and Dr. Karl was not interested in what the rules and regulations were," executive director Sylvia Crawford recalled. This included, among other resistances, a refusal to incorporate social workers in the organization. Dr. Karl was committed to a model in which house parents were the only adult influences needed in the youths' lives, despite state requirements that youths in group homes have access to social workers.

When Crawford started her position as the Youth Care Services Coordinator in 1989, her job was not quite what she had expected.

"I was really hired to get things in compliance, because the state was getting increasingly assertive about things needing to be done a certain way."

But the state was not the only assertive player in this game of wills.

"Nobody really was going to tangle with Dr. Karl," Crawford said. "People just kind of let him do what he wanted to do. He was a pretty strong-minded person."

In person, Dr. Karl could be a fright. In front of a crowd, however, he was captivating. Ben Coates once travelled with him to the National Eagles Convention, hosted by the Fraternal Order of Eagles, where the psychiatrist "worked the VIP room." Attendees gathered around as each parent vied for five minutes of his time to address their children's latest developments. He entertained their requests with captivating charisma.

After a long career with the Menninger Clinic, Dr. Karl crafted The Villages as his new pet project and held it close for the rest of his life. He made the decisions; his friends

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[84] Nancy Tompkins and Linda Laird, "Former C-J reporter, editor dies," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, Jan. 29, 2000.
[85] *Ibid.*

footed the bills. But there were some aspects of the agency—namely, its residents—that were hard to predict and impossible to control.

"He wanted them to be children like he had been a child," Coates said, "and that was sort of a problem at some level. He thought they should be excited about getting up at 5:30 in the morning to go watch birds. He was always sort of nonplussed that they didn't see this as a great opportunity." Chuckling, he added, "And they saw it as no opportunity at all. I had to threaten them with their lives almost to get them out there."

Their lack of interest in bird watching did not mean that the youths didn't care for their founder. As Stannie Anderson once recalled, "The Villages children always…made a great event of Dr. Karl's birthdays." [86] Like other birthday parties, Dr. Karl's had plenty of cake and presents, but they also tended to feature outlandish visual spectacles for the entertainment of the many high-profile guests.

At his 95th birthday celebration in 1988, 120 guests watched Dr. Karl arrive in an antique Chandler Phaeton escorted by a 1930s-vintage fire truck, which was driven by Topeka's fire chief and several young Villages children. The youths of The Villages presented him with a 4-by-8-foot card and released 95 balloons filled with wildflower seeds into the atmosphere, along with written requests that the finder of each balloon plant the seeds in honor of Dr. Karl's birthday.[87]

It was a more festive occasion than his 94th birthday the year before, which fell just a few days after the tragic drowning of seven-year-old Starlett Haynes at a Topeka Parks & Recreation camp in Gage Park.

Starlett had lived at the Edwin Linquist Cottage since the age of five. The birthday celebration had the feeling of a funeral, with all those in attendance silently mourning the loss of the little blue-eyed girl. Anderson later wrote,

> "Finally, one little boy walked up to him and asked,'Dr. Karl, if you could have any gift in the world for your birthday, what would you choose?'

[86] Stannie Anderson, "My Friendship with Dr. Karl," *A Website for Stannie Anderson*, www.stannieanderson.com.
[87] Charles R. Zin, "Dr. Karl celebrates 95th," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, July 23, 1988.

> "The room grew silent. What would he want? Something grand, no doubt, such as world peace, an unpolluted environment, a cure for mental illness?
>
> "But Dr. Karl said quietly, 'I'd like to have Starlett back.'
>
> "There was a noticeable lessening of tension in the children. Dr. Karl had found the right way."[88]

Dr. Karl passed away almost exactly three years after this event, on July 18, 1990. He had experienced a variety of medical complications in the last decade, including a brain tumor that had been removed in 1977, and he died of abdominal cancer just days before his 97th birthday. A Villages newsletter published two days prior stated that the organization planned to celebrate its founder's birthday on July 22 and present him with a photo album of pictures taken at the recent Villages reunion on July 15.

His death sparked an outpouring of love and admiration across the United States. Obituaries ran in *The New York Times, USA Today*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and countless others. Perhaps most in the spirit of the man, the *Topeka Capital-Journal* invited readers to send in their own recollections of Dr. Karl. Topeka resident Carl F. Crumpton wrote, "Knowing Dr. Karl, I expect he is already telling someone how heaven should be run, who should be admitted, and telling someone about the Crime of Punishment."[89]

The question following Dr. Karl's passing was how The Villages would fare in its popular founder's absence. In terms of both its reputation and its finances, the agency had become dependent upon his strong-willed presence.

"It used to be with Dr. Karl, he did things the way he wanted things done, whether that was with rules or regulations or whether that was with finances," Crawford said. "Literally at the end of the year, The Villages was in the red and there wasn't enough money, and he would call some of his friends and say, 'We need X amount of money to fill the gap in the budget.' And they would send money."

After 1990, this phone-a-friend option disappeared. The board brought in a business professional as executive director to attempt to fix the budget, but his unfamiliarity with childcare proved divisive within the agency. After his departure, the board asked Crawford to temporarily take over as executive director.

As with the recent short-stay program, temporary soon became permanent as Crawford began steering The Villages toward a more sustainable future. Financially, the

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[88] Stannie Anderson, "The man, Menninger," *Topeka Capital-Journal*, 1990.
[89] *Topeka Capital-Journal*, Sept. 25, 1990.

organization has become leaner by cutting unnecessary positions and adopting a minimalist approach toward its office purchases.

"I always tell people that nothing at The Villages is fancy, but it's all functional."

The Villages also immediately set to work on getting in compliance with state requirements. Over the last two decades, social workers have been fully incorporated into the program, with the original tension between house parents and social workers resolving into mutual appreciation. The organization has developed strong working relations with government agencies and fellow nonprofit organizations. It is not the kind of agency Dr. Karl envisioned in 1964. But it is the kind of agency the community needed, and the kind of agency The Villages needed to become to continue to serve its mission after fifty years of change.

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