



Diagnostic Evaluations

Best Practices

Training

Autism

Day & Overnight Respite

Education Center

LEAP

Craig Academy

Special Education

Preschool

The Watson Difference

*Educating Exceptional Children
--and Their Educators*



Issue No. 04

Summer 2006

A NEWSLETTER FOR
FRIENDS AND
SUPPORTERS OF
THE WATSON INSTITUTE

Fulfilling the Need

When the Watson Institute acquired Craig House in 2001 (and subsequently renamed the program Craig Academy), one of the problems addressed was the need for a new building. The program's location at 751 North Negley Avenue in Pittsburgh's East End was previously a community center, built in the 1950s.

"The building was never meant to be a school," noted Marilyn Hoyson, Ph.D., Watson's chief operating officer. "And for the students we serve, this just isn't a suitable learning environment."

Craig Academy's programs provide education for children and teens with serious emotional challenges as well as a partial hospital component to address students' psychological needs. The East End location currently serves as a middle and high school program. Previously, Craig's elementary school program was also housed at this location, until students were relocated to Watson's newly renovated Sharpsburg building last year.

"Safety is our first concern," explained Denise Sedlacek, director of programs at Craig Academy. "Our students need to feel that their school is a safe haven, a place where they can concentrate on learning."

Since 2001, it has been the task of Watson's Chief Executive Officer, Raymond B. White, and Watson's Board of Trustees to find a solution to the Craig Academy building issue.

"It's been a long and arduous process," said White. "But, we all agreed that we wanted to find the best long-term solution for our students and staff, not just a quick fix for the problem at hand. We've looked at several options, from buildings that we could renovate or demolish entirely, to schools that were previously closed and available for purchase. We've also weighed staying in the City to moving to a more suburban location. It's been a long road, but we've really made great progress in our search. It's all coming together."

A key component of a new Craig Academy facility will be a better floor plan layout. "The current layout is not conducive to the specific needs of our students," added Dr. Hoyson. "Right now, the nutrition center is on the first floor, with other classrooms. During the lunch periods, the students, who may already have difficulty focusing, are further distracted."

Also, due to space issues, the offices of staff, such as social workers, are far

(continued on page 5)



Fulfilling the Need (cont. from page 1)

removed from the educational areas, making it difficult for students to access their support services. Testing and meetings are also constrained by office size and the lack of conference rooms.

For Craig Academy's students, the confined, enclosed spaces—and unairconditioned building—often increase tension and stress levels. A simple bump in the hallway between classes could be seen as the act of initiating a fight. The hallways are extremely narrow, and the problem is further exacerbated by the addition of student lockers. Consequently, because there is no available space, many students do not have individual lockers.

Classrooms are very small, which discourages interactive learning as well as a hands-on teaching approach. Because the nutrition center only accommodates 25 students, additional lunch periods must be scheduled.

“We also have virtually no storage for educational materials for our students or curriculum development resources for our professionals, which are vital to our programs,” Sedlacek added.

In planning the new facility, Watson will seek the expertise of others in the field

and Watson staff to offer the best and most state of the art educational center to serve students. Distance learning technology will be integrated into the design, to continue Watson's efforts to train school district professionals as well as college and university students in the fields of mental health, psychology, psychiatry and special education.

“We're committed to sharing our expertise with others,” White said. “We're able to help more children when we train others in the field, who can then use our best practice techniques to work with children with special needs.”

To be able to train others and conduct applied research at our schools, Watson must have exemplary programs, including the facilities in which they are housed. “We've made great progress with the Craig Academy program since we acquired it five years ago, recruiting highly-qualified staff and forming educational partnerships with the University of Pittsburgh,” Dr. Hoyson explained. “But we need a new building that takes into account the needs of a school and more specifically, the needs of the population that we serve.”

“We can better prepare Craig Academy students for the future if they have an appropriate, safe setting where they can learn.”