

Southwestern In Focus
EDITH ZANKER DEDICATED
TO WORK WITH MENTALLY
RETARDED CHILDREN

EPT Sundial 2/19/67

The Edith Zanker Building, dedicated last week in the name of the executive director for the past 10 years of Memorial Park School for Retarded Children, honors a woman who is dedicated to her work

“Although a great deal has been accomplished in the field of mental retardation, I feel that there is very much more to be done,” Mrs. Zanker said.

“In the past, there has been a stigma to retardation and little or no realization that the parents have a problem, that they need help as well of the children. Today the medical profession and educators are recognizing that it is a family situation.”

The new, \$8,000 Zanker Building, housing the pre-school children who eventually will go into public schools, includes two classrooms and facilities constructed for the 3 to 6 year old age group.

It is the fourth building at the school in 12 years, following the Community Building in 1955, The Hoblitzelle Building in 1956 and the Herbenar Building in 1957.

ENROLLMENT OF 80

Today, the school, which was organized in October, 1953, with quarters provided by the First Christian Church, has an enrollment of 80 and 12 on the waiting list.

“They are wonderful children with which to work,” Mrs. Zanker said. “Each has his own personality and after you have been around them for a while, you forget that they are different. The retarded child is affectionate

and so proud of any achievement. Your satisfaction comes in seeing them have some victory, however minute.

Mrs. Zanker pays warm tribute to her staff of six teachers.

“I would not trade them,” she said. “They are working for the children and not for the money involved.”



EDITH ZANKER

The remainder of her staff includes a secretary, a nurse's aide and two bus drivers, one of whom also cooks for the school and another who is responsible for the maintenance.

The executive director, a native of Stanton, Tex., came to El Paso in 1920 and was graduated as valedictorian for Loretto Academy in 1932.

With both Bachelor's and Master's degrees from University of Texas at El Paso, she began her teaching career in 1939 as the only

women football coach in the United States, competing with elementary school male coaches in her work at the old Bailey School, site of the Central YMCA.

BECAME DIRECTOR IN 1957

Mrs. Zanker became the first teacher of retarded children in El Paso and one of the first teachers of established classes for the retarded in the state. Called the "Opportunity Room," it included children at all levels of mental retardation, with Mrs. Zanker working under the guidance of the late Dr. I.M. Epstein, local pediatrician and psychiatrist.

Mrs. Zanker retired from El Paso Public Schools in 1944 after 6½ years of work in special education. Going to Los Angeles, she became interested in ceramics and, from 1950 to 1956, was co-owner with Miss Johnell Crimen of The Ceramic Room in El Paso.

In 1956, Mrs. Zanker returned to special education, teaching the class of older students at Memorial Park School, and she was appointed the school's director in 1957.

She has permanent state teaching certificates in mental retardation, secondary education, elementary education, counseling and guidance.

In 1964, she was honored for her service by the El Paso Association for Retarded Children Inc.

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