

Citizen of Year

proceeds to go to

Cheshire House

By BILL DZUGAN

The 1982 Citizen of the Year committee proudly donates the proceeds from its Awards Banquet on April 25 at the Credit Valley Golf and Country Club to the Cheshire House home for the disabled.

"We want to make people aware that this place does exist and show how vital it is to the community," explained Heidi Weinhofer, chairman of the committee. "Through the efforts of Cheshire House the otherwise closeted disabled can develop greater independence and become more actively involved in the city."

One striking example of increasing activity thanks to Cheshire House is Joe Osborne, 26. Five years ago, he arrived at the Streetsville home from Sutton, Ont., paralyzed from the breastbone down and confined to a wheelchair.

As a 13-year-old, he and a friend went walking through the land behind their homes with duck hunting on their mind. When the expected flock never appeared, they took to blasting tin cans until a wayward bullet shattered Osborne's spine and much of his spirit.

"When I came here to Cheshire House five years ago I was scared," recounts Osborne. Before that day, he'd been totally cared for by his parents. "I was basically pretty shy and I never had the opportunity to make decisions for myself."

With his own room, hobbies and an upgrading course he takes daily at Humber College, Osborne considers Cheshire House "a good place." He has grown personally and his confidence accelerated to where he now considers moving out on his own.

BIG MOVE

"At Cheshire House you're living on your own, but with other people. And that's a pretty big move," said Osborne. "It prepares you for when you move out."

"It's part of our long-range plan when Joe came here that he would become self-sufficient," said Irene Pearce, administrator at the House. "He's matured and developed a lot more confidence and he'll be able to move out as soon as there's an apartment available in the area."

As she contemplates how much Joe will be missed by her and the other 10 residents at the House, Pearce smiles just thinking about how Osborne's "sort of become a big shot." With beaming pride she claims he passed his driver's test "first shot." And for the last year and a half he's been driving a Mazda designed to accommodate his disability.

"That was the easiest car for Joe to get into and fold up his wheelchair himself," said Pearce. Two specially installed rods, one to the gas pedal, one to the brake, allow Osborne to steer with one hand and drive with the other.

"It's easier than using your feet," he said. "The reaction time is faster and your foot won't slip." Osborne remembers being somewhat concerned about his driving test two years ago. "What really scared me was when the instructor took the extra mechanical brake off the passenger side. But I had to concentrate so hard that I didn't even know he was there."

For someone otherwise confined to a wheelchair, that black Mazda for Osborne is like "a pair of wings. It allowed me to go back to school (where he's aiming for an audio-visual course), out to the movies and visit with friends. It's definitely given me a lot more freedom," he said.

A DREAM

"The dream was there to have a car and be able to drive it," said Osborne. "But to put that dream into reality was, well, hard to believe."

The dream to open Cheshire House was a similarly difficult but highly successful effort. "It took such a long time to get going because people were so opposed to group homes," said Pearce, about the efforts initiated eight years ago. Headed by Joan Geurts, the past vice-president, and supported by the Rotary Club of Mississauga, Cheshire House became a reality six years ago. "The service groups and the churches were absolutely marvellous. And now, with last year the International Year of the Disabled, people have become so aware of the disabled," said Pearce.

Cheshire House at 361 Queen St. S. has helped many of the disabled residents step from the indelible tragedy marring their life and move into a future of startling accomplishments and independence.

A tragic car accident 16 years ago on the way to meet her parents at the airport took life from her five-year-old child and mobility from much of Giuseppina Radovini's body.

Suffering from brain damage

and partial paralysis the mother of three children spent five years in a chronic-care hospital and eight years in a nursing home before arriving at Cheshire House two years ago.

The Streetsville home for 11 disabled adults provides her with a spacious room, which she keeps immaculately, overlooking the backyard swimming pool. "It's wonderful for me here. I enjoy doing things much better," she said. "I've gotten over the crying now."

Harry Halpern had been confined for 33 years in a home for the mentally retarded, but now he has his own television show on Cable 10.

For the last six years, the House has provided a comforting alternative to adults disabled as much by their confinement as by their

handicap. The home offers an opportunity for them to dodge the image of sitdown, shut-down second-class citizens. It offers an inspiring stride toward becoming productive members of the community.

"We try to get them to take responsibility for their own life. A few years ago that would have been unheard of," said Pearce. "When they first come here apathy is the worst thing they have to fight. They'll just sit there."

A quick tour of the wheelchair-ramped 70-year-old structure, kept neatly by the inhabitants as much as the staff, indicates the active lives now being led.

Each room shows the interests, activities and ambitions of the residents, Shirley displays a host of ribbons attesting to her

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OVER
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Parked outside of Cheshire House, the Streetsville home for disabled adults, Joe Osborne proudly displays the Mazda he operates on his own despite being paralyzed from the breastbone down. (Staff photo by

Nomination forms, tickets still available from *The News*

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horseback-riding ability, despite missing a leg. Others are busy with macrame, copper-mounting or painting.

Down the convenient ramps — "like a little jogging track" — into the recreation area, chairs for visitors surround a room centred with a ping-pong table. "It's not a cold barren institution," said Pearce, about the Houses the world over stemming from the fertile ideas of Group Captain Leonard Cheshire.

Cheshire, a decorated war hero who headed the "dam busters," opened his own English countryside home to the disabled 32 years ago. While living alone, he was asked to take in a man dying of

cancer. Quite simply, the hospital needed a bed.

"He said he had no idea there were people who had no one to turn to," explained Pearce. "Cheshire got him up from the bed and actually cared for the man himself. Before he knew it the whole house was filled with disabled people."

The Streetsville residence, one of 42 around the world, is a "home for life if it's necessary, but we're always pleased if they move on," said Pearce.

"The idea is to get quite severely disabled people out of institutions and into more or less a normal living situation," she said.

Through the years the House has celebrated

two weddings. One wheelchair-confined woman met and married a visitor to the home and now lives in her own apartment.

"We took her in from a nursing home. Now she's doing everything for herself at home and working for the March of Dimes." Two other people met in the home, married, and now live on their own. "We encourage them to help each other," said Pearce.

The residence currently houses seven men and four women, ranging from 21 years of age to 51. They must be responsible for their own rooms, even if they're untidy, and their own laundry. Although meals are cooked for them,

many participate in the preparation and two people clean up after dinners.

"The more independent they can become, the better their life is," said Pearce. "Invariably what they often ask the staff to do they can do themselves."

Only three of 11 residents suffer from congenital defects; the others have had to rebound from unexpected tragedies. "When someone has been in a car accident they sort of give up. It takes a lot of hard work to get them back into the mainstream," said Pearce. "We try and help them pick up the pieces and get going again."

On the wall of one common room the philosophy of the Cheshire House is printed on a cardboard sheet. It reminds that the House is a place "of hopeful endeavor and not of passive indifference." It also reminds that Cheshire House is a place to "help others less fortunate."

By participating in the Citizen of the Year Banquet, Mississaugans can contribute to the financial needs of Cheshire House. Tickets for the Banquet starting with reception at 11:30 a.m. and a luncheon at 12:30 p.m. are available at \$20 per person and \$200 for a table of 10. They can be purchased at the Mississauga Board of Trade office in Square One Shopping Centre, the Events Office of Erindale College Cam-

pus, City Hall, 1 City Centre Dr., and through Melody Chard at The Mississauga News by calling 273-8156.

The organizers for the event, the Mississauga Board of Trade, The Mississauga News and the Alumni Association of Erindale College, in conjunction with the City of Mississauga, welcome all nominations to the Citizen of the Year. Nomination forms are available at The News, Rogers Cable 10 in the King-Ten Plaza and at check-out counters in many Dominion stores.

The deadline for nominations is midnight Friday, March 12 (this week), so forms should be submitted as soon as possible to The Mississauga News, 3145 Wolfedale Rd., Mississauga, Ontario L5C 3A9. Members of Cheshire House have got their table already for the April 25 celebration when they and others will applaud the unselfish efforts of all Mississauga volunteers.

The five Citizens of the Year finalists will be in attendance that afternoon and the winner will be presented with the Gordon S. Shipp memorial award. The previous two winners were Red Cross volunteer Margaret Leslie in 1980 and the late Ted Glista in 1981.