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NEWS RELEASE

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UNIQUE PROGRAM FILLS VOID IN EDUCATION FOR EXCEPTIONAL
ADULTS; FEW EXIST NATIONWIDE

by Susan Closter-Godoy
Special from The Newport College - Salve Regina

Going to college is an impossible dream for the vast majority of retarded adults, even for those who live in apartments or group homes and work in their local communities. But talk with any one of the 33 students enrolled in the tuition-free Continuing Education Center for Exceptional Adults at Salve Regina College; they'll tell you, with great enthusiasm, that they're going to college.

One evening a week they have a chance, just like other adults enrolled in continuing education programs, to further their education, to prepare for job advancement, to learn more about life, and most importantly, to experience something education can offer everyone -- dignity.

Our social history indicates the retarded adult has been treated, in most cases, like a child. But things are changing. The trend

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is, today, to structure social programs in welfare, housing and employment that encourage these people to leave the institution, to become more adult and independent, less child-like and dependent. Partnership and "full participation in the mainstream" is the philosophy behind this designated "International Year of Disabled Persons." Yet, is there the necessary development in education for special needs adults? Are programs preparing these people to live outside the institution and in society?

The Center at Salve addresses both concerns: 1) it offers an organized education program for exceptional adults and 2) incorporates teaching methods that respect adult personalities. Armed with this philosophy, program director and special education instructor Kathryn Flood advises the Center's teachers to create curriculum and instructional materials that do not "challenge the integrity of the person" by appearing juvenile.

The program is unusual, not only because of its teaching philosophy and methods, but also because its very existence places it in a precious and few category. During the exhaustive nationwide search for curriculum guides for the Center, program developers discovered few models of continuing education programs for exceptional adults exist. The most well-known program of a similar nature is the College for Living. When Public Law 94-142 made educational opportunities mandatory for exceptional individuals through the age of 21, apparently little consideration was given to what happens to these special needs people after the age of 21. Just a few educational institutions, and Salve is one of them, reach out to serve these adults.

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The student-teacher ratio at the Center is one-to-one. Serving as personal tutors for the mild to moderately retarded adults (ages 21-40) are 33 Salve students most of whom are pursuing degrees in special education. Three students are in nursing and two are business majors. Under Kitty Flood's direction, the teacher-volunteers are responsible for developing education goals and instructional materials for each exceptional adult.

Individual goals are as simple as learning how to read safety words or as complex as preparing for the high school equivalency exam. Teaching what is practical to help build self-confidence and independence is an important method used at the Center.

One adult is studying for the written test of the driver's license examination. Another student is preparing to move into his own apartment. He's learning money management and budgeting. Two special activities are planned by Kitty. One is for the students to write, direct and present an informative, videotape show similar in format to the popular PM Magazine. The other involves Industrial National Bank in developing a curriculum guide to teach basic banking skills i.e., checking, savings, to exceptional adults.

Every student-teacher learning situation is important. The exceptional adults love the program; they arrive eager to learn and are serious about achieving. They're happy when they're at Salve. The teachers are dedicated and never miss a session. They, too, are serious about their work. Those who have observed the Center are convinced of its important service in the field of education.

Since 1975 when the Center first opened with six students, it

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has been under the supervision of several dedicated administrators at Salve. Sister Charles Francis Dubuque, head of tutorial services at the College, has helped with the program since its inception. Also participating have been professors from the special education department and advisors from the James L. Maher Regional Center in Newport. Special assistance this year is volunteered by Michael Worthen, a '74 Salve graduate and president of Looking Upwards, Inc. Michael's organization is a residential living and educational experience for special adults, some of whom are enrolled in Salve's program.

A unique opportunity -- that of going to college -- has been created by Salve Regina for exceptional adults who need special services. Kitty says she's "thrilled" everytime she enters the tutorial room in O'Hare Academic Center and sees "so many good things happening." This program, she believes, says to exceptional individuals, 'We know you can learn. You are worth being taught.'

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