

FORMER WAREHOUSE NOW SERVES NEEDS OF HANDICAPPED YOUNGSTERS**Union County Educational Services Commission Shows Off New Facility at Their Grand Opening**By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Just two years ago, the Union County Educational Services Commission was informed by the Berkeley Heights Board of Education that the latter was ending its lease of the Hamilton Terrace Elementary School due to increased enrollment in the district.

Thus, a frantic search began by the commission to find a new home for the Westlake School — one of two facilities which go by that name — that had been located in the building since 1980. The other Westlake School is in Mountainside.

In January 1997, the commission officially took ownership of the former Commerce Clearinghouse Building on Lamberts Mill Road in Westfield, located just past the Westfield Center, Genesis ElderCare Network nursing home.

In just eight months, three quarters of the 60,000 square-foot building was converted into the new Westlake home, with Beadleston High School also moving into the spacious site this past February.

Both schools serve the needs of severely physically handicapped students in the county. In addition, Beadleston addresses student behavioral problems.

The commission's other schools are Centennial High School, housed in the former Lincoln School in Westfield, which serves emotionally disturbed teenagers, and Westlake School in Mountainside, formerly the Beechwood School.

The Mountainside School enrolls multi-handicapped students, many of whom have orthopedic conditions. Consulting expertise is provided by Children's Specialized Hospital staff.

The commission also operates Hillcrest Academy in Scotch Plains. The Academy offers an alternative education program for youths who have had difficulty in the traditional high school setting. The commission additionally offers an autoshop course at Union High School for its students.

The Westlake School located in Westfield serves children with neurological, emotional and multiple handicaps, while Beadleston houses a program which offers both staff assistance and therapeutic support by specialists from the Elizabeth General Medical Center.

The building includes space for occupational and physical therapy, a suite for therapeutic support staff, an Interactive Television (ITV) lab, reading and weight rooms, a health occupations classroom, two gymnasiums, two nurses suites, industrial arts and

home economics classrooms, a cafeteria and kitchen.

"This is a facility which reflects state-of-the-art developments in technology which will enable staff to meet the needs of Union County's special needs students," said Edward M. Hartnett, Superintendent of the Union County Educational Services Commission, during last Friday's dedication ceremony.

The project was financed through the issuance of \$5.2 million in bonds from the Union County Improvement Authority — bonds which were secured by the county Board of Chosen Freeholders.

Daniel P. Sullivan, Chairman of the Freeholder board, noted that the board "moved rather quickly" in 1996, to ensure that the commission would have funding to take ownership of the warehouse site as soon as possible. The extreme time constraints required swift action by the Freeholders, he added.

"This new building will allow us to enter the new millennium on the threshold of new and ever changing technology," said Frank Cicarell, speaking on behalf of the commission's Representative Assembly and Board of Directors.

He said the new school building will be wired for voice, video, and data transmission.

As the first educational services commission in the state, Union County Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Frances Lobman, noted that the county's commission provides "a

continuum of educational programs that would be beyond the financial means of any single district."

All 22 districts in the county currently send students to the commission's schools.

"The facility we are dedicating today belongs to every school district in the county. Among the student population here are our most disabled and at-risk young citizens," Dr. Lobman told listeners.

Westlake, the commission's first school, opened with three classrooms in The Presbyterian Church in Westfield some 30 years ago, with a curriculum which included swimming at the Westfield "Y" and ice skating at Mindowaskin Pond.

The school moved to the First Baptist Church and later to the now-defunct Columbus Elementary School, both in Westfield. Six years later, the school moved to Berkeley Heights.

Now in his 12th year with Westlake, Principal Ronald Beford noted that the new building owned by the commission gives Westlake a "permanent identity."

"This is our place. We now pay the bills instead of signing rent checks," he said, noting that the building houses the majority of the commission's vocational programs and includes food services, allied health and a comprehensive pre-vocational work center.

Expansion of the ITV lab will include on-site accommodation of Westfield High School staff and continued

instruction for other commission staff as well, officials said.

Beadleston began 15 years ago in the former St. Michael's School and Convent in Elizabeth. The high school was later moved to the former Brewer Elementary School in Clark in 1986.

Originally part of Elizabeth General Hospital's clinical program, the school took on its present name in 1985 in honor of Alfred Beadleston, a former State Senator "who was instrumental in initiating legislation which assured an appropriate education for all handicapped students in our state," according to Daniel McMullen, Principal of the high school.

"Its purpose has been to provide an academic program which fulfills high school graduation requirements while affording therapeutic support to students at risk," said Mr. McMullen.

The new home of the two schools in the first building ever owned by the commission "signifies increased opportunities for pupils," said Dr. Theodore Kozlik, President of the Union County Directors of Special Education, who is also the Director of Special Services for the Westfield Public Schools.

He noted that students will now receive community-based instruction, extended school year services, therapeutic services including speech and nursing, a "more inclusive vocational offering," and Child Study Team services.

"Westlake School and Beadleston High School will afford our children with an unending succession of opportunities in meeting their life pursuits," he said.

Dr. Jane Padalino, Founding Principal at Westlake, said the new building will prepare disabled students for the technical world of the future.

Final Special Waste Collection June 13 In Union Township

Union County Utilities Authority (UCUA) Chairman James J. Kennedy announced that the Township of Union will host the final Spring Household Special Waste Day at the Union Township Department of Public Works Yard on Swanstrom Place Saturday, June 13, from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Information regarding cancellation of the event due to severe inclement weather will be available by calling the Authority after 3 p.m. on the Friday before the event.

There is no cost to participate, however, pre-registration with the UCUA is mandatory. The disposal of household special waste is open to Union County residents only and proof of residency is required.

Acceptable household special waste includes oil-based paint and varnishes, pool chemicals, corrosives and cleaners, pesticides and herbicides, caustics, solvents, thinners, aerosol cans, asphalt sealers, fire extinguishers, flammable liquids and solids, motor oil, gasoline, motor oil filters, automotive products, batteries, propane tanks,

unbroken fluorescent bulbs, thermostats and mercury switches.

Only materials in their original or labeled containers will be accepted. No containers larger than five gallons or empty containers will be accepted. In addition, unidentified materials, explosives, radioactive materials, gas cylinders or materials containing PCB's will not be accepted.

Latex paint will not be collected at the Household Special Waste Day.

All Union County schools will be able to dispose of their laboratory chemical waste at Household Special Waste Days for a nominal charge. In order to participate, schools must contact the UCUA at least two weeks before the event, to register.

For more information or to register, call the UCUA at (732) 382-9400.

People are trapped in history and history is trapped in them.

— James Baldwin



Paul Peyton for The Westfield Leader and The Times
FROM WAREHOUSE TO SCHOOLS...Attending the dedication ceremony for two Union County Educational Services commission schools, left to right, are kneeling, Beadleston High School Principal Daniel McMullen and Westlake School Principal Ronald Beford; standing, Union County Freeholder Chairman Daniel P. Sullivan, Commission Superintendent Edward M. Hartnett and Union County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Frances Lobman.