

People

Doctor makes speech center reality

Basil Manly overcame dyslexia as a child and wants to help other children who face challenges

By Abe Hardesty

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The mission at the John I. Smith Center for Childhood Language Disorders is speech therapy. The results tend to be life-changing.

Janis Giordanelli, the lead speech language pathologist at the John I. Smith Center, talks about a recent client who came to the Cleveland Street facility as a "shy, withdrawn" 3-year-old — and left the program two years later "talking to everyone."

"That's pretty typical of a lot of children we see," says Giordanelli, now in her fifth year at the Smith Center. "When speech problems are present, communication breaks down, and the child might throw a temper tantrum or start to withdraw. As a result, the child doesn't learn as much."

Thanks to funding by the Scottish Rite Masons, the Smith Center helps children solve language problems and, in the process, develop learning skills. In its first 100 months, the center has treated 540 children at no cost to the families involved.

The center is a reality largely through the efforts of Dr. Basil Manly, who overcame dyslexia as a child to enjoy a long career in medicine. The Greenville native and Furman University graduate was founding chairman of the Scottish Rite Foundation committee that raised \$1.1 million to make the Smith Center a reality.

In 1998, encouraged by the interest in the Scottish Rite's national organization to provide speech therapy for children, Manly believed the time was right for building a facility in the Upstate. By connecting the unit to the existing Scottish Rite Center, he knew the speech therapy work could begin with an initial investment of \$1 million.

Manly's committee raised the money in 14 months, which enabled the facility to open in January 2001. He served on the organization's board for another five years.

About three dozen children a month are being treated at the 5,000-square-foot facility, which includes four rooms for speech ther-

apy along with a library and administrative offices.

"It is an exciting thing," says Manly, a World War II veteran who turns 85 on Sept. 1. "We see a lot of children come through here and start in school at regular schools who might have had lifelong problems had their speech disorders not been diagnosed and addressed."

"The only frustration," says Manly, "is that we can serve only a small group."

Like most nonprofit organizations, the Smith Center has been forced to address funding issues in the past year. The staff of part-time pathologists has been reduced from six to three, as Director Martha McDade makes an annual operating budget of \$140,000 stretch to as many children as possible. The reduction in staff has forced the organization to reduce its enrollment from 50 to 35.

"The program is as lean as we can make it," says McDade, who serves as director for the Greenville, Columbia and Charleston facilities.

The vast majority of the budget is used to pay therapists and operating expenses; things like copy paper and paper towels are solicited through donations. The result is a program that is free to families whose children under the age of 6 need speech therapy. Manly believes the benefits to the community at large are immeasurable.

"We've learned in recent years that a large segment of the prison population has language and communication problems," Manly says. "Those people often become outcasts because they can't communicate with other people or their superiors. If that could be averted, we might be able to reduce the prison population."

"Most of these children are of average to above-average intelligence, but, because they don't speak well, it goes unrecognized," Manly says of the children with speech disorders.

Manly was an outstanding student at Greenville High and Furman. In between the education and the medical career, he was a military leader who saw



OWEN RILEY JR. / STAFF / Staff

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extensive combat as a machine-gun squad leader during World War II.

Manly attended Furman for two years, then served in the U.S. Army. He saw combat in France, serving as infantry platoon sergeant in the Battle of the Bulge, before returning home to finish school.

Manly, 84, worked eight years as a general practitioner, then returned to school to become an ophthalmologist. He came back to Greenville in 1963 and worked in that field until retiring in 1996.

In his medical practice, Manly noticed a condition that was undetected in his early childhood: dyslexia. A "very poor reader" in his first few years of school, Manly recalls seeing the

word "was" as s-a-w.

His personal history, combined with the Scottish Rite initiatives, has made Manly a longtime supporter of those with learning disabilities. Manly is an emeritus member of the board of governors for the Greenville Shriners Hospital.

"If we can get them into treatment by age 3 or 4, they can still go into first grade just as if (they had) no handicap," says Manly, who occasionally dealt with learning disabilities as they related to vision problems. "When these children are not treated, they go through hardship for many years. They get teased, ridiculed, shunned, and the result is adverse behavior."

Speech centers have

been a goal of the national organization since the 1950s. The organization operates 170 facilities across the country.

To build the one here, Manly approached the administrators of the John I. Smith charities, whose gift provided half of the \$1 million. Smith was a Greenville resident who died in 1986 after 25 years as Grand Minister of South Carolina's Scottish Rite Masons.

Manly calls the speech center "the most exciting project" in which he's been involved. On a smaller scale, he compares it to the medical treatment given to children by the Shrine organization, through its hospitals.