

History of Sunny Ridge Family Center

Sunny Ridge began in 1926, under the name of *Klingberg Children's Home of Chicago*. **Reverend John Klingberg** had already created a home for children in New Britain, Connecticut, and had plans for a similar home in Chicago. In the early fall Klingberg sent his daughter, Mabel, to Chicago to start a home for children. The original house Mabel found was situated on 627 W. 63rd Place. On October 17, 1926, the **Klingberg Children's Home of Chicago** was dedicated. At the time, one girl resided in the Home—a large, dingy, ungainly house adjacent to a sooty coal yard. These early days were marked by faith and trust in God. By the end of 1927, 17 children lived in the Home. Gradually this number increased, until July of 1932, when 28 children were receiving care.



emphasized the need for a loving, Christian home for children in need.

As Wayne and Leah Swenson served—Miss Anna stayed on, assisting in any way she could. Her final position was that of seamstress, mending clothes and healing the hearts of many boys and girls.

In 1953, the 36.4 acre **Sunny Ridge Farm** in Wheaton, Illinois, was purchased. The name was changed to **Sunny Ridge Home for Children**. This new “Home” was large enough to care for 33 girls and boys, four to 18 years old. Sunny Ridge provided



love and nurturing to a house full of dependent, neglected, and troubled children. The Swensons committed themselves to helping each individual boy and girl enjoy the fun of being a child, while learning the importance of assuming personal responsibility. The smallest child could make his bed and help set the table. Teens helped clean the house and care for the grounds. A garden provided needed vegetables. Days were filled with rollerskating in the barn, birthday parties, evening study halls, church on Sunday, cooking lessons, and playing on the grounds of Sunny



Ridge—in the snow, or under the warm sunshine. The Swensons served until their retirement in 1968.

During the late 60's to early 70's, Sunny Ridge underwent great transitions and was led by a number of caring individuals. In 1971, a cottage house was added to the property, and served as a residential home for boys. By the mid 70's, changes in state policy resulted in the referral of teenage boys and girls who had more serious problems, requiring more specialized services. In 1974, Sunny Ridge provided a group home for boys in Wheaton and a group home for girls in Naperville. However, financial needs multiplied while resources diminished, and it became impossible to provide care at a satisfactory level. Soon the Board of Directors made the difficult decision to suspend all agency services while they sought God's guidance for the future.

In 1976, the Board of Directors reopened Sunny Ridge under the leadership of **Larry and Arlene Betts**, who envisioned a multi-service child and family agency. A residential treatment program for teenage boys opened in early 1977 and continued until 1996.

It was in the spring of 1979 when Sunny Ridge placed its first child in the arms of loving adoptive parents. The **domestic adoption** program provided the foundation of the “new” Sunny Ridge, and the name was changed to **Sunny Ridge Family Center**, to reflect a greater range of services. In 1981, the first **international adoption** for Sunny Ridge took place. The 80's and 90's were filled with tremendous growth for both domestic and international adoptions, as the agency placed more and more children into loving homes through adoption. By 1986, the domestic adoption program was enormous, placing over 100 children per year. It was at this time that Sunny Ridge became licensed in Indiana, adding an office in Munster. The agency also assumed responsibility for the Illinois-Indiana chapter of the Healing the



Children program, which continued until 2004. By the early 1990's, the international adoption program was greatly expanding as well. In 1994, Sunny Ridge met with officials from the China Center for Adoption Affairs, and created a direct placement program for China adoptions. Since then the China program has placed over 750 children from the People's Republic of China. In 2002, Larry and Arlene Betts retired, after completing over 25 years of service and leadership.

By 2005, Sunny Ridge placed its 3,000th child in an adoptive family. In 2007, after over 50 years of service from our Wheaton location, Sunny Ridge moved its Illinois office to Bolingbrook, Illinois. Today, under the leadership of Mr. **Gary L. Longman**, Sunny Ridge continues in its mission by serving children and building families around the world.



After Mabel Klingberg retired in 1936, **Miss Anna Gothberg** became the matron. In January of 1938, the Home and 24 children moved to a new location at 6522 Harvard Avenue. During the 1940's Miss Anna lovingly cared for the young residents. In April 1949, the Board of Directors appointed Mr. Wayne Swenson as the new superintendent of the Home. **Wayne and Leah Swenson** assumed responsibility for leadership of the Home in Chicago. It was a time of great service to children and families. As years went by, the role of the Home had changed. In earlier years, the greatest need was caring for orphans. At this time the greatest need was for the Home to serve as a bridge to support little children until they were old enough to realize that although they may have mothers and fathers, they could not live with them. Growing numbers of broken marriages and neglected children

