



**Rainbow Rowell**

## Naysayers Were Wrong

For years, GOARC — the Greater Omaha Association for Retarded Citizens — worked to support Omaha's mentally handicapped community.

But over the years, the program's name became hurtful to the very people it was supposed to help. The word "retarded" had been used against them too many times.

So the group took a new name — the Greater Omaha Association for People with Mental Retardation and Other Developmental Disabilities.

Nobody liked the name. It was too long. It wasn't a meaningful acronym (GOAPMRODD?). And the hurtful word was still buried in there.

This year, members of the program formerly known as GOARC decided to start over. And they did something very unusual for a support agency.

They threw out long, important-sounding words such as department, awareness and alliance. And they didn't name it after a big donor.

Instead, they decided to name their program after one of its most dedicated and successful members.

From here on out, the organization will be called the Ollie Webb Center.

## Who is Ollie Webb?

That's just what people at the Ollie Webb Center want you to ask.

Ollie Webb is an Omaha woman who shows how successful and happy a mentally handicapped person can be with determination and the help of a support group.



**Webb**

Ollie, her parents and her 12 brothers and sisters left Oklahoma when she was a little girl. They came to Nebraska to work sugar beets. A childhood illness had left Ollie, now 70, with some brain damage, but she was always working, taking care of her little brothers and sisters.

When she was 19, her life changed drastically. Someone from the state welfare office came and took Ollie to the state home in Beatrice.

She wasn't sure why she had to go there, and she hated it. After seven years, she left and went to work in nursing and private homes.

Sometimes, she worked for room and board. Sometimes, she made about \$5 a month.

"I took care of old people," she said, "night and day, fed them and took care of them, cooked for them."

## On Her Own

When Ollie was in her 40s, she moved into an apartment. She was working at the Field Club, her favorite job yet, making sandwiches and salads.

"Then I made the mistake of getting married," she said. She and her husband saved their money and had a small house built near the Crossroads. Nine years later, they divorced. "Now, I'm happy like a little bee," she says.

She took in boarders, other mentally handicapped people, and she helped take care of them.

"People say I can't be alone. I can't take care of myself, but ... I showed them. I took care of three people and myself."

She loved working. Once, when one of the cooks tried to move her out of her job, she fought to keep it.

He said she couldn't work there anymore because she couldn't read.

"It makes no difference whether you can read," she told him. "You can make salads and sandwiches."

"Well," she said, "he went bye-bye and I stayed."

She worked there for 17 years, until a heart attack forced her to retire. The people at the Field Club always supported her, she said. Once, when she wanted to travel to England to speak about her life at a conference, the golfers chipped in to pay for her airfare.

Ollie got used to talking to people about herself.

"I can't read," she said. "All that stuff is in my head. It comes out when I get in front of a big group of people."

She talks to people without mental disabilities to help them understand how to treat people like her.

"Don't put them in an institution," she tells them. "Take them home and love them, and you'll see a nice little gal come out."

And she talks to people who have disabilities to encourage them to keep working for a better life.

"Listen to what people say," she tells them. "Go down the road, and don't go back."

And don't listen to the mean words, the bad names.

"People put the names on us," she says. "I tell them, 'I got a name.'"

It's Ollie Webb.