

Schoenbohms committed to helping people with disabilities

May 1, 2020 at 12:11 am0



It was the end of an era earlier this spring when Virginia Hymans Schoenbohm Clymer died. She was 96 and at the time of her death in March lived in St. Louis Park.

She was married from 1954 to 1998 to Rev. Wilko Schoenbohm, founder of Courage Center. She was his partner in many ways, including actively supporting his work for people with disabilities.

Virginia Schoenbohm not only had a 32- year career in special education in Iowa and Minnesota, she also was a longtime volunteer and committee member at Courage Center, now Courage Kenny Rehabilitation Center. She served on the Courage Center Foundation's board of directors.

Many people might not remember the Schoenbohms today or Rev. Wilko Schoenbohm's long and remarkable career serving people in disabilities. His legacy is in two states.

The Lutheran pastor was instrumental in shaping what is now the Anne Carlsen Center, which provides an array of opportunities to people with disabilities throughout North Dakota.

In 1922, the Evangelical Good Samaritan Society home was opened in Arthur, N.D. with 13 residents. The home grew to offer employment training for people with disabilities and in 1932 moved to the former Fargo College campus in Fargo. Wilko Schoenbohm joined Good Samaritan during the post-Great Depression era. He led fundraising efforts to create the Crippled Children's School and was its superintendent until 1948, leading the school through a move from Fargo to Jamestown, N.D. The school provided occupational training for people with disabilities. The social service agency which grew out of the school is named for Anne Carlsen, a quadruple congenital amputee, who taught at the school for many years and was a coworker of Wilko Schoenbohm's.

In 1952 he took over what was the Minnesota Society for Crippled Children and Adults and in two decades developed it into the nationally renowned Courage Center.

One highlight of Wilko Schoenbohm's long and storied tenure was the founding of Camp Courage, located west of Maple Lake, in 1955. The camp welcomed 300 children with disabilities during its first year.

The concept for Camp Courage originated in 1953 when Schoenbohm launched a committee to seek out and build a camp for children and adults with disabilities. The committee began the search for land, hoping to find something on a lake within 50 miles of the Twin Cities. Histories indicate that the 40-acre site was purchased for \$8,500. That drained the society's development fund, so more fundraising took place.

But what to call the camp? The original name "Camp Courageous" later was shortened to Camp Courage, a name which wound up replacing the society's name.

At the camp's 50-year anniversary in 2005, the Camp Courage Honeymoon Cabin History Center was dedicated. The cabin was originally the Schoenbohms' cabin. They had wed during planning and construction for the camp. The camp is now part of True Friends.

Camp Courage was just one part of the Schoenbohms' legacy to Courage Center, Camp Courage and the Minnesota disability community. Virginia

Schoenbohm Clymer's obituary appears elsewhere in this issue of *Access Press*.

The History Note is a monthly column sponsored by the [Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities](#).