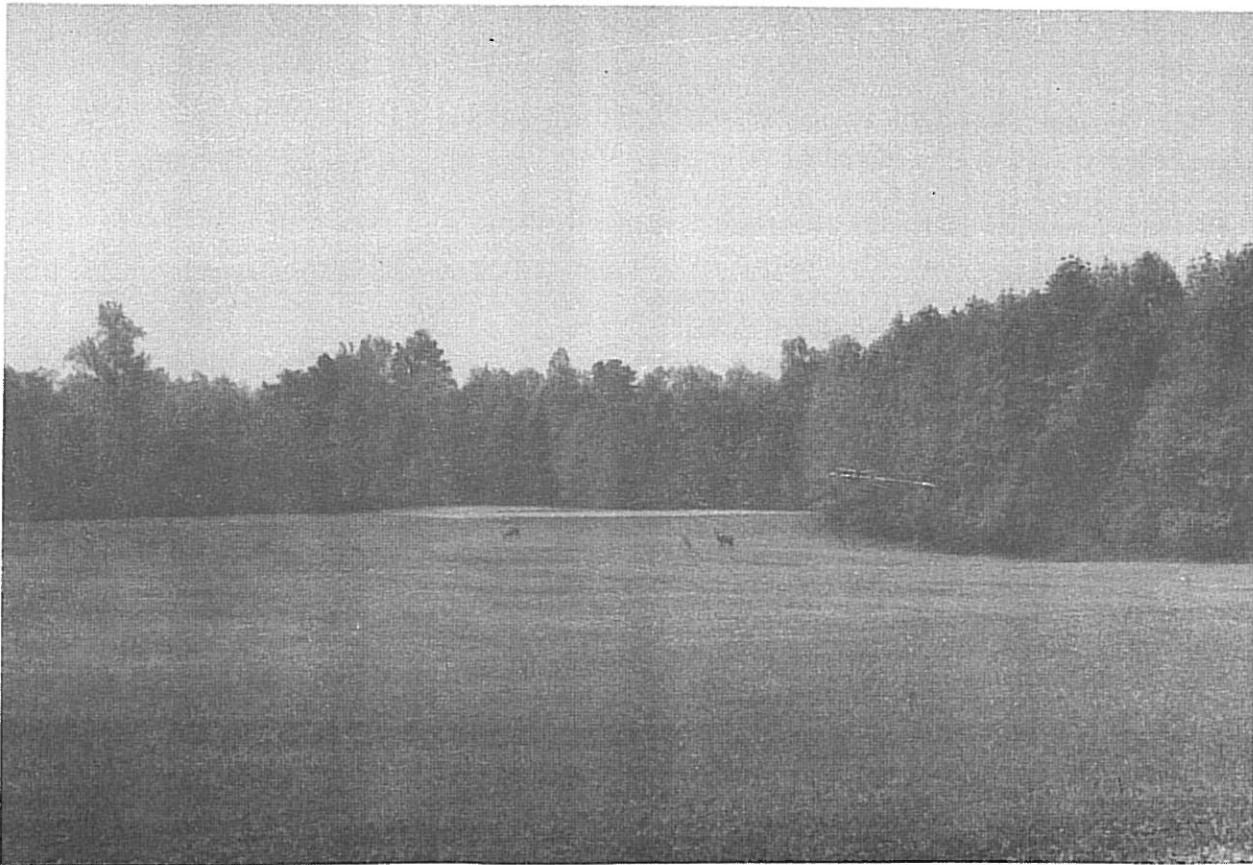


Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center

A Ten Year History

Esther Shenk Buckwalter



In the beginning, everything one does is significant. Not because it takes a lot of time and money, but because it has no precedent. There is no history or tradition to serve as a guide. This makes each event and decision full of promise and disaster. It also makes it exciting.

—Ken Hartzler

One Sunday afternoon Sam and Geneva Brunk drove to the newly purchased retreat property to explore a part of the woods where they had not been before. Sam says, "Geneva and I walked from where the maintenance building is now, over to the farthest corner of the property. There were briars in there, the thickest briars with the longest thorns I'd ever seen, and higher than your head. You get in there and you could hardly go ... [we] struggled through that thing.... After we got out of there and went back to the car, Geneva looked

at herself and said, 'What's this that I've got all over me, [these] little teeny specks?' and I said, 'It's just grass seed from walking through the field.' She said, 'But the specks are moving.' ... we drove straight home, stripped off our clothes and showered, but we still each had at least a hundred tick bites." Perhaps that's why Geneva said, after seeing the property, the trees, the bean field and the underbrush, "I knew it would take someone with more vision than I had to see a campground coming out of that woods."

Now in its tenth year the Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center has holdings of approximately three-hundred acres. This piece of rolling property with a winding stream and a marsh also has open fields and wooded land. Trails wind through the woods to a tree house-lookout in a mighty beech. The retreat center now includes a large swimming pool, a softball field, basketball, volleyball and tennis courts, a children's playground, and a camping and RV area with electricity and running water near a large bath house. The facilities also feature an outdoor sanctuary on a hillside, equipped for handicapped seating. A pavilion with a fireplace is nearby for games, meetings, or dining outdoors under roof.

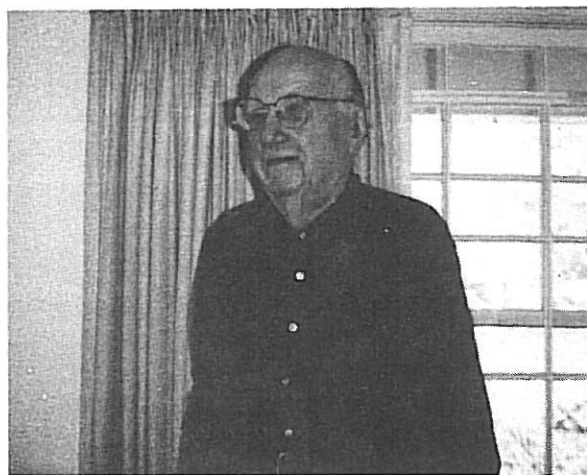
Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center also offers gracious, spacious buildings. Magnolia Center, with the kitchen and office, is the place for registering, dining, or reception-like gatherings. Holly Cottage, Laurel Cottage, and Oakwood Lodge are housing facilities, each with its own personality for different kinds of groups. A beautiful, winding gravel road leads from Route 601, Barnes Road, into the center of the grounds.

Huge undertakings such as developing a retreat center do not come about overnight. Usually a long incubation period occurs before the hatching. The needs of Mennonite youth were a subject of concern for church leaders and parents as traditional patterns of church and home life changed. This history tells why the Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center was conceived and how it grew.

TMF — Tidewater Mennonite Fellowship

The Tidewater Mennonite Fellowship is a confederation of several southeastern Virginia congregations. Included are the Warwick District, the Norfolk District, and several other Mennonite churches in the area from different conferences.

TMF Planning Committee members in 1982 were Harold Buckwalter, Jonathan Kanagy, Robert Mast, and Lloyd Weaver Jr.



Brother Truman Brunk, aged 91, bishop emeritus.

1970-1980

A Vision is Born

In 1970 Bishop Truman Brunk Sr. mentioned to Lloyd Weaver Jr. his desire for the young people to have a place and a purpose in the church. Youth groups were smaller than in former years, and high school exacted time-consuming after-school commitments. Church related Literary Societies, which had for generations been at the center of the social scene, were crowded out.

Bob Mast, pastor of the Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church in Chesapeake, continued to mull over the same concern that had been plaguing Brother Truman and other Mennonite pastors for some time. He says, "...[in 1974] when I was serving as secretary of Home Missions for Virginia Mission Board, and Lloyd was the president of the Virginia Mission Board, something had happened at Highland Retreat (north of Broadway, Virginia) that was distinctively a blessing to the church and to ... Virginia Conference, and I mentioned to Lloyd that some day, Lord willing, we are going to have a "Highland Retreat" in southeastern Virginia. I think that was the first mention [of a camp]."

Lloyd continues, "Bob and I were talking about how people come to faith in Christ. When we were young, we used to have revival meetings [where] ...many of us... made our decision for the Lord. Since we no longer have many revival meetings,

where are our young people making their decisions? So Bob and I did some asking around and found out a good many of them are doing it in campgrounds. And we said, 'WOW! if that's the way the Holy Spirit is working, then we need to make a place for the Holy Spirit to work.'" Bob and Lloyd continued to talk about a camp in southeastern Virginia and discussed it with others.

1982

Getting Started

Some eight years later, in July 1982, at one of its regular meetings, the Planning Committee of the Tidewater Mennonite Fellowship had listed among the items on the agenda a church campground. The minutes record, "The dream of someday having a church campground for southeast Virginia was discussed at some length."

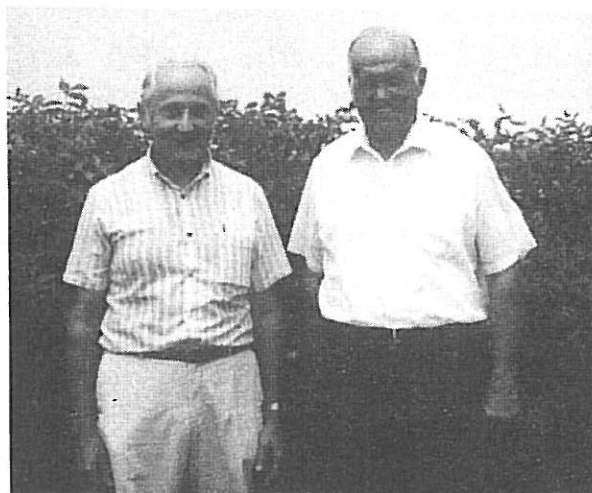
By the October 15 meeting of the TMF Planning Committee, Lloyd Weaver Jr. had sent a questionnaire to eleven Mennonite campgrounds across the United States, and had received replies. Some of his questions were, "How did you get started? Who owns your campground? What about land? What other comments or advice do you have?" His compilation of responses (on page 4) proved to be a valuable outline of how to do a church camp.

1983

Interest Builds

Although Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center Association dates its birth to the day that it was formed, January 25, 1984, the work and the planning that was done in 1983 laid the very foundation for the retreat center and set the tone for enthusiasm and cooperation in the church and the community.

On February 7, 1983, a meeting was held at Huntington Mennonite Church. Lloyd must have been nervous before the meeting. He said to his



Robert Mast, commissioned as Overseer for the Norfolk District in 1990, and Lloyd Weaver Jr., Overseer for the Warwick District 1975-1993, were the first to campaign for a Mennonite campground in southeastern Virginia.

wife, Sarah, "We've invited all these people—suppose nobody comes." Sarah replied, "Then we will know and we'll go home." Thirty people, representing seven congregations, were in attendance. The response was good and people came whom no one thought would be remotely interested. Action was taken by the group "to direct the TMF Planning Committee to compose an ad hoc committee to do further research on the possibility of a camp." (The Planning Committee was the entity that directed the congregations. Here, in an unusual move, thirty people from the TMF congregations recommended that the Planning Committee take action.) This campground committee was to:

- Locate possible sites and determine cost of same;
- Determine any restrictions or other liabilities of sites;
- Outline benefits and advantages of sites;
- Propose tentative outline of objectives of a campground; and
- Report findings to another meeting of interested persons on or before May 23, 1983.

The campground committee members were Ray Bergey, Charles Brenneman, John Henry Brenneman, Sam Brunk Jr., Merlin R. Miller, Eldon Swartzendruber, and Glen Stoltzfus. These men each represented one of the seven congregations.

The Search for a Site

In surveying the possible sites for the future retreat center, Glen Stoltzfus says, "...we looked at land all over the eastern part of Virginia, from Richmond-Petersburg area over to the other side of the York River, the Gloucester area and Mathews County." They were not ready by May, but brought to a meeting in July, 1983, a report listing seven parcels of land they had looked at or asked about.

One site was in Dismal Swamp. Merlin R. Miller remembers that the seller said to come in the afternoon so the mosquitoes wouldn't be so bad. Merlin immediately said, "There's one place we won't need to go."

Another place, along Route 60 near Lee Hall, was approximately 60-70 acres of prime land, owned by Mr. Carleton. Price \$6,000 to \$8000 per acre.

A parcel in James City County was described as "About 2 1/2 miles off Int. 64 on Rt. 522. Owned by Hazelwood & Clayton Real Estate Co. 123.02

acres. Surrounded by Chesapeake Corp. Has approx. 75 acres of wooded area which was timbered about 6 years ago. Remainder of acreage is being farmed. Price \$125,000. (would come down a bit)"

One of the criterion the committee had set for themselves was waterfront property, a lake or a river. This James City County property had only a little stream, so Glen had the Department of Soil Conservation come out to see if it would be possible to dam the stream and make a lake. Glen says, "They said that it was not a good thing to do because of the amount of sand that was in the soil. We called other retreat centers to find out just how essential water was to the program. We found out [that] not only was it not essential to the program, it was really more of a liability than asset, so we decided to put a contract on the parcel. Another criteria was that land adjoining be owned by a corporation because that limited the possibility of anyone building next to us and possibly we could buy more acreage."

How to Do a Church Campground

1. Begin discussions with a core group

- Meet with all interested persons
- Involve the congregations
- Good relationships are most important

2. The owner should be an independent, non-profit corporation composed of an association of members which is not under a congregation's organization.

3. Land should be more isolated—not urban

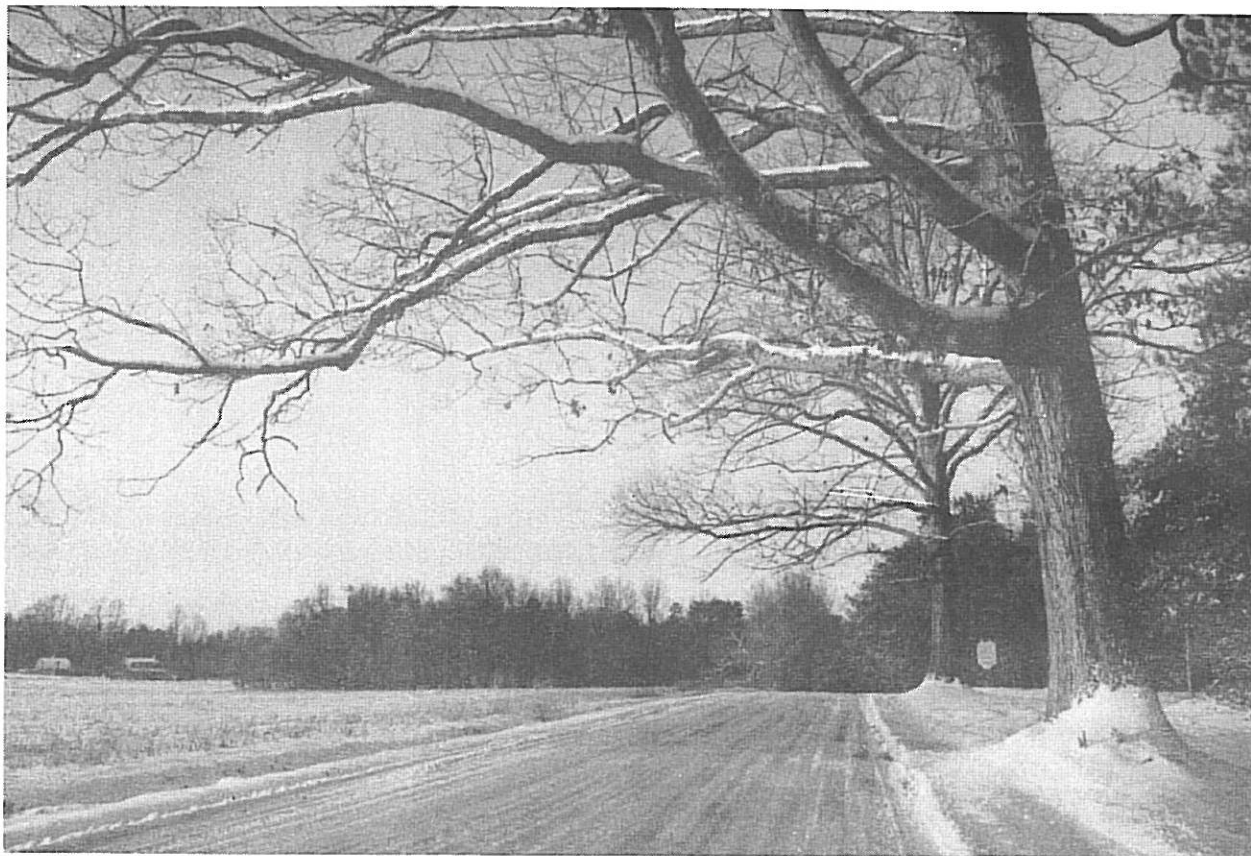
- Have 1 acre per person served
- Some physical attraction such as lake, mountain, beach, etc.
- As big as you can afford
- Water is important - lake, pool, etc.
- Have trails through woods, etc.
- Must be central to congregations served.

4. Campgrounds are expensive and take lots of work

- Before buying, visit campgrounds
- Talk with camp directors
- Plan what you want to do, tents, cabins, trailers, condos, retreat center
- Make a feasibility study
- Before construction, a master plan
- Are there enough Mennonites to support it?
- Go plush—Mennonites don't like to rough it
- There is a real demand for campground facilities for church groups
- Use a congregational questionnaire to get ideas, interest and support

Lloyd Weaver Jr. was asked to prepare a bulletin for all Tidewater churches inviting all interested persons to come and explore the possibility of a church campground in the Tidewater area.

— October 15, 1982



Barnes Road, near the Retreat Center entrance.

Five months after the campground committee was appointed, the president, Glen Stoltzfus, sent a letter to its members urging that a decision be made on the 123 acre parcel in James City County.

A Site is Selected

By December 14, Glen had signed an agreement of sale with Hazelwood and Clayton Real Estate Company, "contingent on approval of a retreat center at this location by local government, one part of the approval being the development of approximately 20 acres into lots for resale to persons of the Mennonite church." Glen had offered the idea that a piece of the land could be sliced off for a housing development to fund the property.

All of a sudden, several things had to happen almost simultaneously. The Williamsburg Retreat Center Association had to be formed and incorporated, a master plan had to be submitted to the county authorities before they would issue

permits, and money had to be forthcoming to buy the property. Since local authorities had already rejected a traditional campground because they said the area already had its quota, the Campground Committee had to adjust their thinking and they suddenly became a Retreat/Campground Committee. Campgrounds were associated with low budget, low quality and transitory campers, while a retreat center with permanent buildings would cater to people who would bring more money and a better quality tourist to the Williamsburg trade.

At this point the Committee realized that they really didn't know what they wanted in the way of an actual layout. They hired an architect experienced in planning church retreat centers. Mr. George Kemp, from Pennsylvania, came to the site, walked over the grounds, and met with the Committee. Mr. Kemp's Proposed Land Use Plan included an administration and control center, an adult conference center, a youth activity center, a

recreation center, a church family camping area, a Colonial shopping Village, a lake, a staff community and an area for maintenance, and included large tracts surrounding the original land that did not yet belong to the group. Merlin R. Miller remembers, "We were astonished at the projected price (\$15-20 million dollars) for developing the retreat center as Mr. Kemp had drawn it up. I remember walking around with Sam [Brunk Jr.] and saying that I didn't know if we could handle this." That was one way of feeling;

on the other hand, the group determined that they couldn't do this project on their own. They had already seen the hand of God overcoming obstacles and details were miraculously falling into place. They were filled with faith and trust.

Bob Mast says that although the original perceived need was to have a church camp, subsequent research indicated that they would need to build a retreat center that included camping facilities to ensure financial success. Church camps were in financial trouble and had to be subsidized. Lloyd says they found that parents wanted to send their kids to summer camp and let them sleep in tents, and didn't want to pay much for the privilege. However, when the parents went to a retreat, they wanted things nice and were willing to pay the money. A retreat center would produce income and could possibly support other programs. So the project began to take on a different shape and purpose, which incorporated the original idea of a campground but provided broader services. The county and zoning laws were pointing the committee in the direction that was also best for the retreat center.



Ten years later, the original board members were reunited on the deck steps at Magnolia Center. Shown are (l-r) Merlin R. Miller, vice-president; Gerald Showalter, secretary; George F. Brunk Jr., Lloyd Weaver Jr., John Henry Brenneman, Glen Stoltzfus, president; Samuel Brunk Jr., treasurer; Joseph Longacher Jr., and Dale Keffer.

1984

The Retreat Center Organizes

The new Retreat Center Association was formed on January 26, 1984. Charter members of the Association were the four members of Tidewater Mennonite Fellowship Planning Committee: Jonathan Kanagy, Robert Mast, Phil Miller, Lloyd Weaver Jr., and the members of the partnership that would develop the Racefield Subdivision: Charles Brenneman, John H. Brenneman, Sam Brunk Jr., Robert Mast, Merlin R. Miller, Glen Stoltzfus, Stan Treleaven, and Lloyd Weaver Jr. All pastors of Tidewater Mennonite Fellowship without representatives in the above groups were also invited to become charter members. The TMF Planning Committee recommended the name, *Williamsburg Christian Retreat Association* and suggested possible logos to give it graphic identity. Glen Stoltzfus sketched a logo that incorporated all the facets the retreat center hoped to encourage, such as servanthood, family, nature, and spiritual refreshment, and Lois Guntz



The entrance road under construction in 1984.

Blosser refined it. For ten years Glen's design marked the entrance to the Retreat on an attractive blue and white sign, and was used on stationary, brochures, and flyers.

In February, Articles of Incorporation and Thirteen Articles of Bylaws were drawn up. The Bylaws called for six members to be elected (with staggered terms) by the Association for a Board of Directors. The initial Board included Glen D. Stoltzfus, Joseph W. Longacher Jr., Samuel H. Brunk Jr., Merlin R. Miller, Dale M. Keffer, and Gerald W. Showalter. At their second meeting, the Board took action to add M. Lloyd Weaver Jr. to their number, based on his insights and his intense interest in the Retreat. His membership also satisfied the Bylaws' requirement that one board member should be an officer of Virginia Conference or a member of the Executive Board of Virginia Conference. By July, John H. Brenneman and George F. Brunk Jr. had been appointed to the Board of Directors for a one year term. Each man on the Board had a specific gift that was essential in establishing and developing the retreat center.

A New Entrance

Armed with George Kemp's Land Use Proposal, Gerald Showalter and Glen Stoltzfus went back to the County fathers to show them what the Mennonites wanted to do with the land.

Glen tells the story: "They said we couldn't put a retreat there because our only entrance was on Racefield Drive and they didn't want that much

traffic coming back through the Racefield subdivision...." One of the county officials suggested the men explore an entrance onto Barnes Road. "We decided to go to Chesapeake Corporation and see if we could buy a strip of land out to Barnes Road. I went over and talked with Dick Brake, one of the vice-presidents at the time. I showed him our master plan and told him what we wanted to do over there and told him the connections it had with the church, and he sat back in his big old leather chair and put his hands behind his head and said, 'Glen, do you all have a lot of money?' And I said, 'Actually,

we'll have to borrow every last cent, but the county won't let us [put our road through the subdivision] and so our only option is to see what other possibilities [there] are on buying some more land,' and I remember he said, 'If you buy more land, you're going to have to pay more money out and there will be more real estate taxes and that sort of thing.' He said, 'I'll tell you what we'll do. If you survey it and put the road in there to state standards, we'll give you a non-exclusive easement back there and it won't cost you anything.'"

In return, the Retreat Association would need to grant Chesapeake Corporation use of the road and flood rights to an elevation of 75 feet.

There was an old logging road part way through the woods off of Barnes Road where local people dumped their trash, "But the rest was underbrush so thick," says Charlie Brenneman, "you couldn't see through." Gerald Showalter surveyed the area for a new entrance with the Brennemans' help. Charlie continues, "... so we had one person start at one end and the other person start at the other end and we yelled at each other and made our way through the woods that way, tying ribbons as we went. The underbrush was so thick that you about had to crawl on your hands and knees." John Brenneman adds that they cut through the brush a little at a time until they could see through, and then they could get their lines where they wanted them. The Brennemans hauled away ton after ton of trash and junk from the logging road. With their heavy equipment they cleared brush, graded and graveled the new road and

seeded the shoulders.

Glen believes the County's refusal for the first entrance road was of the Lord. Says Glen, "As it turns out, we had a much nicer entrance than we would have [had] through the Racefield subdivision."

With the new entrance onto Barnes Road, Mr. Kemp redesigned the master plan, drawing an elaborate layout that was much more detailed than the first one.

1985

A Conference Related Ministry

On March 14, 1985, Tidewater Mennonite Fellowship relinquished any parental responsibility it had heretofore exercised. Williamsburg Christian Retreat Association was now an autonomous organization directly responsible to its membership. In 1985 WCRA also was accepted as a "[Virginia] Conference Related Ministry."

In March, Lloyd Weaver Jr. reported on his trip to Mt. Pleasant, PA, where he toured the Retreat at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center. In May, Glen and Malinda, Lloyd and Sarah, and Sam and Geneva traveled together in a van over a long weekend, visiting three other Retreat Centers in Pennsylvania. At the next Board meeting, enthusiasm was high and so was the urge to accelerate the development of WCRC. Lloyd felt that a fulltime administrator would help to keep things moving as Board members were only able to contribute marginal time.

Funds

The Retreat Association was formed, the master plan had been accepted by the County officials, and now the Association needed to raise money to purchase land. In the first ten years money would continue to be a major concern for development and building and operational costs.

Creative thinking came up with possibilities to raise funds immediately. First, borrow a lot of money. In June 1984, two members of the Retreat Committee, Merlin R. Miller, who was on the Board



The donated trailer was the first structure on the Retreat Center grounds.

Of Directors of Virginia Mennonite Property Aid (VMPA), and Glen Stoltzfus went to Harrisonburg and negotiated a loan with Henry Hawkins of VMPA for \$125,000, the full amount needed for the land. Although loans were not usually made on raw land, VMPA had money that they needed to loan and so made this exception. Since the James City County property was purchased before the Williamsburg Retreat Center Association was formed, it was bought in the name of the Williamsburg Mennonite Church and Assigns. Glen persisted in asking the real estate company to come down on the price. They finally lowered it to \$120,000, in effect, making a gift to the Retreat Center of \$5,000.

The core of interested men who served on the first campground committee, along with several other families, subsequently formed two business entities separate from the Retreat, designed to create cash flow. Although the same group was involved, they exchanged offices as each different corporation emerged.

On January 13, 1984, the Partners To Develop Racefield was established—later to become Tidewater Land Trust. Eight people, Charles Brenneman, John Brenneman, Sam Brunk Jr., Robert Mast, Merlin R. Miller, Glen Stoltzfus, Stan Treleven, and Lloyd Weaver Jr., made up the partnership which bought the 28.74-acre tract from the Retreat Center and prepared to sell the thirty-four lots for which J.J. Alfonso had drawn plans. Money was lent by *Brunk Mechanical*

Founding Officers of Menno Development Corporation.

Leroy C. Blosser — President
 S.H. Brunk Jr. — Vice President
 Betty Y. Oberholtzer — Secretary
 George F. Brunk Jr. — Treasurer
 Isaac H. Oberholtzer — Additional Director

Corporation Employees' Profit-Sharing Trust to develop the land.

In February, Menno Development, Incorporated, was organized to construct houses on the lots in the subdivision or elsewhere. Present were the initial directors, George F. Brunk Jr., Sam Brunk Jr., and Glen Stoltzfus. Officers of the corporation were elected and a certificate of common stock was adopted. Any net profits of the corporation were to be used for charitable purposes. Sixteen people each bought 2500 shares of stock at \$2,500 to provide seed money for building houses in the subdivision. Profits from the Land Trust and Menno Development subsequently paid off the loan for the original 123 acres.

The Virginia Conference consented to donate money to the Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center as it did to Highland Retreat. The Board members contributed money, and flyers were sent

to the churches to tell about the project and ask for donations. A mobile home and other large items were given.

As the WCRA continued to create interest, others in the Tidewater area accepted responsibilities to help in developing the Retreat Center. Many, many donations and gifts in kind were and continue to be given.

The Board had Cargill Associates, a Christian fund-raising company from Texas, come in 1988, and give them an assessment of what could be done to raise money in the Tidewater area. After much discussion and research into Cargill's previous successes, the Board decided to have them do a pre-survey to find how many people would be willing to contribute heavily to the Retreat Center. The Board pledged themselves to contribute the initial fee of \$12,000 for Cargill's pre-survey. Not until 1989, after Ken Hartzler was in place, did the Board finally decide to go with the Cargill program and hire them as consultants. Other funds were raised through membership fees and telethons and through presenting the vision and asking people with money to contribute again and again.

1986 - 1987

The First Director

In 1986 the Williamsburg Christian Retreat Association was granted a tax exempt status, the Articles of Incorporation and the Bylaws were updated, and the search was on for an architect to begin designing buildings. The new Bylaws stated that the Board of Directors shall be increased to twelve members: Six shall be appointed by the membership of the Association, two more shall be members of the Executive Board of Virginia Mennonite Conference, and four shall be appointed by the Board of Directors. New members Philip E. Miller and Philip V. Miller had already joined the nine men sitting on the Board in 1985 before the Bylaws were officially revised. Later, in 1989, after Virginia Conference had changed its structure, the Bylaws were once again up-dated to reflect that change, and read that two members of the Board shall "be members of the Virginia Conference Council." Again in 1992 the language in the Bylaws changed to read "be members of the Virginia



John Henry Brenneman



The bath house, built in 1987, includes the "found" skylights on its roof. At right, Sarah (Alderfer) Weaver and Sarah (Yoder) Weaver lend a hand inspecting proposed construction plans.

Conference Council or one of its Commissions."

In May, Howie Shiedel was hired to be part-time Executive Director to administer the retreat center. His job description: establish adequate policies and plans for the operation of the center, look into hiring staff, prepare agendas for the Board, prepare an annual budget, be responsible for promotion and fund raising, help carry out board decisions on capital improvements, educate himself on operation and development of retreat centers, attend board meetings, and represent the Retreat Center to the Mennonite Church and Mennonite congregations, other denominations, community organizations, businesses and city and county governments.

Howie worked at all these objectives. He helped to construct the 22 RV sites with running water and electrical and sewage hook-ups. He helped negotiate with Chesapeake Corporation for parcels of land and applied for permits of one kind or another. Howie suggested putting up the chain-link fence between the Retreat Center and the housing project, and he organized the planting of 1000 white pines as a green buffer between them; he suggested and helped build the water slide, arranged for the promotional video and many more things.

As a part-time employee of Menno Development, he, along with Sam Brunk Jr., built the pavilion and the bathhouse. After several months, Menno Development asked to hire Howie

A Role for Women

The Development Committee now (1986) asked to have a woman on their committee, but there is no documentation of that having happened. Up to this point, the minutes of the Board meetings reflect only the activities of the men, but behind the on-site activity, spouses of the men on the Board played an active role in the WCRA. Geneva Brunk abhorred tangling with briars and ticks, and none of the women possessed the training for dealing with heavy machinery, well digging or construction work, but they supported their husbands with enthusiasm for the undertaking and in sacrificial commitment of finances and time. They were called on to submit ideas, give suggestions and opinions—and prepare food. As the Retreat Center progressed, women were involved to an even greater extent.

In March 1988, Carolyn Reed was elected to the Board, followed by Marie Hertzler in April 1989. In November 1992, Erma Lehman was the third woman listed as a Board member in the eight-year life of WCRA. The fourth woman to hold an official spot in the Association was Margaret Trivett, hired in January 1994 to be Interim Director of the Retreat Center for one year.



A volunteer helps lay forms for a foundation (left). The thousand white pines (right) were planted in early 1987 to buffer the boundary between the Retreat Center grounds and the Racefield subdivision.

full time to work with Sam on the construction of new houses in Racefield subdivision so they would be able to move ahead as fast as possible. Howie's former duties were left in limbo, and the Board again began to search for an Executive Director.

Clint Good of Lincoln, Virginia, was the architect hired to draw up plans for the bathhouse. Although they had not been mentioned before in the minutes, a notation here indicates just how much the spouses were involved in decisions for the Retreat when the Board discussed the women's preference of bathhouse plans and chose the plan the women preferred.

Also, during this year, a gift was made to the Association of the house and lot at the right of the Retreat entrance on Barnes Road. The Board decided to rent it for the income, and later it became the home of Ken and Betty Hartzler.

Glen Negotiates

Southwest of the original 124 acres of land on which the Retreat Center was being built was a tract of forest with large trees. The land ran down to a stream which meandered through a ravine and ran under the new entrance road. This property also belonged to the Chesapeake Corporation. In early 1986, the Board of Directors decided it was time to buy this land. After contacting Chesapeake and getting permission, Gerald Showalter and his son Jonathan surveyed the tract. Gerald estimated that about 13 of the 55 acres would be above the 75 foot elevation line, a line below which Chesapeake was

holding impounding rights to a possible lakefield. Based on this information, the Board drew up a proposal to buy the 55 acres for \$13,000.

Glen Stoltzfus met with three men: Mr. Brake, the president of Delmarva (the real estate arm of Chesapeake); the president of Woodlands, Inc. (which took care of the timber); and a vice-president of Chesapeake Corporation, in a solemn conference room with a big walnut conference table and big leather chairs. No one said anything. Glen felt keenly his country-boy status. Mr. Brake asked if he had a proposal and Glen gave each of the men a copy. After a few minutes the President of the Woodlands Corporation began to laugh. He said that he knew the property and that the trees alone were worth about \$800 per acre. Glen said he felt like crawling under the table. He explained why the Board had proposed \$13,000 and they said they would meet with their Board of Directors and get back to him.

Mr. Brake told him privately not to be discouraged, that if the Lord wanted them to have the land they would get it.

Three weeks later, Mr. Brake called Glen at 10:30 p.m., saying that he had just come from their Board meeting and he had good news and bad news;



Glen Stoltzfus

the good news was that the Corporation would sell the tract. The bad news was that they had rejected the offer of \$13,000, but they would sell for \$15,000. Fifteen thousand! Glen was elated, but he controlled himself and said it was more than they wanted to pay. He said that he would take it to the WCRA Board and see what they said. He knew that the Board would have gone higher if necessary, because they needed that land. Glen was ecstatic. He told Malinda the good news and then called Joe Longacher Jr. and Lloyd Weaver Jr.

After his first excitement, Glen began to wonder if he had heard correctly. Why would they up the ante only two thousand? Maybe Mr. Brake had said *fifty* thousand. Glen spent a miserable night, tossing and turning. Finally he slept fitfully, but his elation had turned into a nightmare.

Early the next morning a wretched Glen called Mr. Brake and asked him if he had said *fifty* thousand or *fifteen* thousand. Mr. Brake told him he wouldn't have called him at 10:30 at night to tell him fifty thousand. Mr. Brake and Glen have had many a laugh about it since.

No one ever found out just when Chesapeake transferred a deed to another 12.7 acres to the Association, asking nothing in payment. It was a piece that was landlocked on the north side of the original tract. With the 55 acres, plus the 12.7 acres, on total, Chesapeake gave the Retreat Center about 67 acres for \$15,000. God's miraculous hand had touched Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center once again.

Membership and Annual Meetings

At its first meeting on the retreat grounds in the mobile home that had been installed on the property, the Board decided to push publicity. They invited members of the Mennonite Churches to join the Association by paying an initial fee of \$300 and a yearly fee of \$75. The first two families to sign up for Association membership were Charles and

Norma Brenneman and Isaac and Betty Oberholtzer. This was the beginning of a trickle of membership applications that became a steady flow.

The Annual Association Meetings were held early in the year to elect officers and re-elect Board members whose current terms had expired. Because of the loyal dedication of the Board Members who had seen the vision and believed in its fulfillment, there was very little turnover. However, others were ready and willing to serve with enthusiasm. In 1987 Bob Mast became a member of the Board.

The first three years, Annual Meetings of the Association were attended by the Board of Directors and some of the charter members of the Association, and were held in turn at the churches represented. After the initial drive to

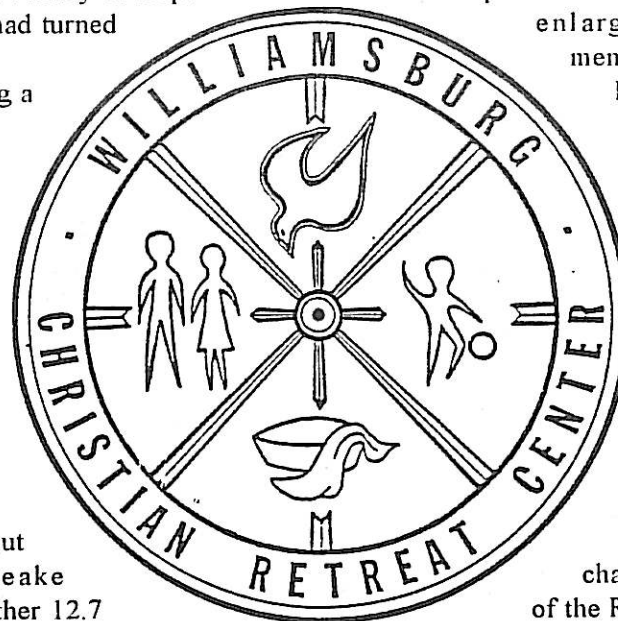
enlarge the Association membership, the Fourth Annual Meeting was held February 1988, at Sammy and Nick's Family Steak House in Williamsburg.

Sixteen families now belonged to the Association.

At this meeting Sam Weaver was elected to the Board, and Glen Stoltzfus, who had been president of WCRA since its organization, yielded the chair, saying that at this stage of the Retreat Center development, his gifts were better used in other capacities.

He was immediately elected treasurer. Joe Longacher Jr., was elected president of the Board and served until 1993 when he had been a Board member for nine consecutive years, the limit according to the Bylaws; Bob Mast was elected and served as president for a year. In 1994, Joe was re-elected to the Board as president.

As each Annual Meeting rolled around, the membership list doubled and then tripled until in early 1994, ten years after the Association was formed, one hundred households had been accepted as members.





A large crane swings the pressure tank into position, guided by Howie. The two wells and the tank provide water both for the Retreat Center and the houses in the adjoining Racefield subdivision.

A Gift

In 1987 the Virginia Conference offered to give the retreat center a large motor home that Orval and Dorothy Shank had used for Stewardship Ministries. It needed some repairs, but the Retreat Center Board thought they could use it for a camper on the grounds. Glen went to Harrisonburg to get it. He says, "I was traveling along in the 'Rhino' on Rt. 295 around Richmond, and saw I was coming up on this huge box in the middle of the road. I thought if it was an empty box it would flutter away, so I drove as close as I could. In fact, I even speeded up and swished by it. It stayed put, right where it was." Glen stopped to check it out and found two brand new skylights in the unmarked box. He loaded it into the Rhino and hurried back to the retreat.

Glen says, "The bathhouse was just at the stage of framing up the roof, so [Howie and Sam] just framed them in, one on each side. There were no windows [in the building], so the skylights could provide natural light. We took it as a gift."

Howie and Sam

If you had driven through the Racefield subdivision in 1987, and had chanced on the construction crew, you would have seen a version of the comic strip characters, Mutt and Jeff. Howie Schiedel, in his early 20's, six feet six, 275 pounds, and Sam Brunk, retirement age, five feet six, 155 pounds, worked together with skills and strengths that mixed and matched so well that there wasn't a job that together they couldn't do.

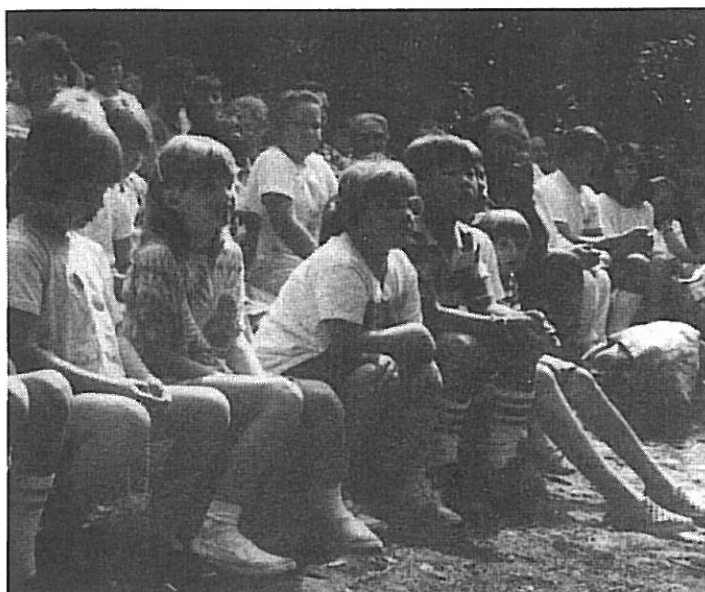
Howie says, "Sam and I were putting in the water system for Racefield and the Retreat Center, and after it was installed, we disinfected it with chlorine. The process left chlorine sediment on the sides of the tank. It's a big tank, 40 feet long and 10 feet wide, and holds 20,000 gallons. We put a ladder down inside and went down and cleaned it out, but this left the pressure tank to be done. It was 6 feet by 20 feet, but the manhole into it was pretty small. Sam looked at me and he looked at the manhole, and he said he would go in and clean the tank. I looked at Sam and I thought since I was so much younger,

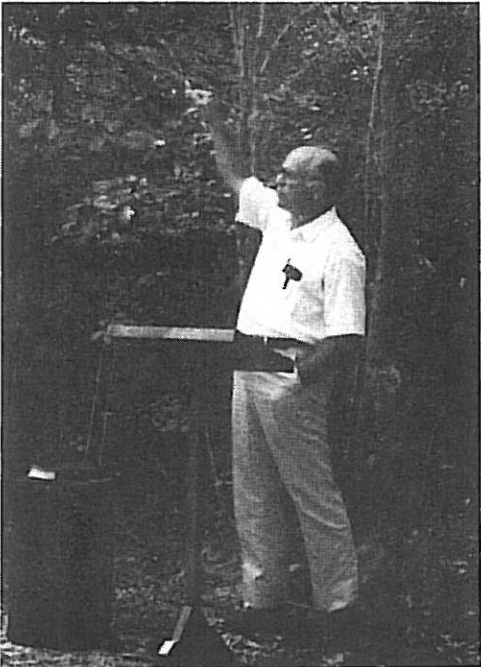


A Retreat Center Activity Scrapbook

Clockwise from top left: campsites are well-buffered with trees; Lloyd Weaver is exuberant after a trip down the water slide; youthful campers enjoy the outdoor Worship Center; the water slide in action.

Facing page, clockwise from top left: a men's quartet adds to the worship experience in the Pavilion; church in the woods brings a smile; dish washing goes quickly when everyone helps; the Pavilion surrounded by pines; Lloyd tells of his vision; tetherball for tots.





I ought to go in. The hole was oval, about 16 inches by 9 inches, and there were pipes in front of it that you had to thread through. So I put my arms over my head and started to crawl through, but I found I was stuck. I tried to back out but my skin just rolled up but didn't move. The chlorine smell was pretty bad and I nearly choked.

The only thing to do was to go on through. The only problem was that my belt caught, so I called, 'Sam, take my belt off!' [That] allowed me to wriggle into the tank. I cleaned the chlorine off of the sides and squeezed out again."

Howie says, "Sam has contributed more to the Retreat Center than any other one person. He has put wheels on a lot of other people's ideas."

1988-1989

Construction and Growth

New questions and concerns surfaced at each phase of the retreat development. Vandals found the new roads into the grounds inviting, and with the RV sites nearly ready to use and building materials and machinery on the property, there was much for them to enjoy and destroy. Lewis and Louise Kraus, living in a new house in Racefield, agreed to drive through the camp daily, to rent out and take care of the RV sites and the bathhouse, and be the keepers of the gates which were installed at the entrances, one at Racefield Drive and one at Barnes Road. The Krauses continued as care-takers for several years.

Three items that produced a lot of angst for the Board during the years from 1986 to 1989 were mentioned many times in the minutes: (1) The need to acquire more land, (2) the search for a full time professional director, and (3) whether to hire Cargill Associates as consultants on how to generate large sums of money for building and to pay off loans already incurred. 1989 was the year when two of these concerns were resolved.

The Board intensified their search for an Executive Director, advertising in the *Mennonite Camping Association Newsletter*, *Mennonite Weekly Review*, *Gospel Herald* and other periodicals. A number of likely candidates were considered and interviewed. Maturity and experience were high on the list of must haves.

Ken Hartzler's name surfaced as a person with all the qualifications. He met with the Board on October 13, 1988, at a dinner meeting at Sammy and Nick's Restaurant. Shortly afterward, *Mennonite Weekly Review* reported that Ken had been hired as Executive Director of Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center, effective January 1, 1989, part time. Ken and Betty moved from Newton, Kansas, for Ken to begin full-time service July 1, 1989. The



The Annual Labor Day softball tourney began in 1989, and the Huntington Mennonite Church came out on top. Team members in 1992 were: (back row) Charlie Brenneman, Wayne Miller, Joe Bennett, Leroy Blosser; (middle row) Jeff Deel, Clayton Blosser, Jeff Hanbury, John Evans, Bill Wallace, Steve Forbes; (front row) Max Blosser, Danni Clark, Billy Reed, Jim Thornton.



A group of campers from Belleville, Pa., enjoyed the footbridge built by Sam Brunk Jr.

MWR says, "Hartzler will oversee the construction of additional buildings, fund-raising activities and the development of programs and resources." And he did.

Ken's report to the Association of happenings in 1989 was a long list of things accomplished. One of these was the major decision made by the Board on May 23, 1989, "to proceed with a fund raising program and employ Cargill and associates as consultant." The fund raiser was titled, the "Fulfill the Vision" campaign.

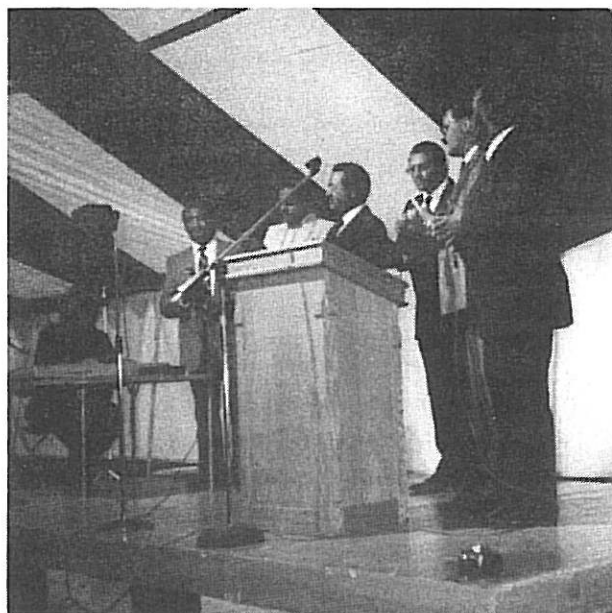
Cargill's assessment of the area was that \$1,400,000 could be given by Mennonites in the Tidewater area and Richmond and Harrisonburg, over a three-year period. In order to inspire the giving, plans for a lodge/conference center were drawn up by Clint Good as the first priority, with family/group lodges, recreational facilities, and youth buildings as the challenge.

Along with the fund raising, the summer activities and other development continued. For a number of months the Board had been looking for a suitable maintenance building to erect; they were delighted to accept as a gift a steel building 30 feet by 40 feet. The minutes of March 1989 state that

"John Henry is ready to work on the road and the building site as soon as the Lord dries up the land..." and in answer to a question about factors that determined the location of the building, "Glen reported that three Board members looked at the lay of the land, considered expansion needs, etc., to decide location." Trees and brush had to be removed from the site and a concrete slab poured. The Board had begun their own adaptation of the Kemp master plan which continues to serve as a guide.

On a Friday evening, several men, Ken Hartzler included, worked until dark putting up the main frame. Twenty-one volunteers showed up on Saturday morning, some of them from Harrisonburg. Ken reports, "After completing the building by sunset, Glen, in spite of a broken arm, provided us with a meal."

Yes, Glen provided, besides the evening meal, another story. He had hurried home from a family vacation to take photographs of the building and also to get a head count of the workers. He climbed to the roof of the fork-lift to speak to volunteers who were working on the side of the building. Unexpectedly the lift lurched. He was thrown off, and his arm broken. Since his plans were to buy



Dedication of the Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center — October 8, 1989

The Virginia Conference tent sheltered celebrants who gathered for the program and fish fry (top) Joe Longacher Jr. (below, left) was President of the WCRC Board of Directors. Calvary Choir, from Calvary Community Church (Hampton), provided several musical selections. Shown are (l-r) Mrs. Natalie Francisco, Minister Steve Francisco, Brother Edward James, Elder Elmer Cobb, Bishop Leslie Francisco III, Deacon David Hill, and Deacon Marvin Deloatch.

supper for the crew, he intended to do so. He drove to Pierce's Barbecue, waited in a long line and brought the food back to the workers. Only then did he go to the hospital for treatment.

It was Marie Hertzler's idea that a softball tournament would be a good activity for Labor Day. Eight teams came all the way from churches in the Shenandoah Valley to Virginia Beach. Around 200 people attended the ball games and enjoyed a water slide and other fun activities.

Another high point of 1989 was the long-planned-for ground breaking and dedication program and ceremony on October 8. James Lapp, General Secretary of the Mennonite Church, was the featured speaker. Without pomp but with a great deal of ceremony, twelve people, representing every facet of the church community, took part in the breaking of ground at a spot far out in the field against the woods. A milestone had been reached.

Ken and Betty—A Team

Ken Hartzler was director of the Retreat Center from January, 1989 until December, 1993. He and Betty worked so closely together that unofficially they were considered co-directors for much of that time.

During the five years that they managed the Retreat Center, it had moved from barren fields and RV and camping facilities that were useful mostly in the summer, to a flourishing compound of four major buildings fully furnished and in operation, a swimming pool, playground, trails, and tree house. Ken and Betty coordinated, inspired and hosted hundreds of volunteers, many of them youth groups, who came from Pennsylvania, Delaware, Idaho, and all over Virginia to help. Volunteers picked up trash, cleared trails, built the tree house, and helped construct the four buildings.

The Hartzlers' versatility was legendary. You might see Betty operating a tractor, taking garbage to the dump, or spending long hours on the computer working on record keeping, financial accounts, and other office work. She did much of the housekeeping management, and many times was cook and hostess for visitors and volunteers. A number of her recipes are on file in the Retreat kitchen, one of them being her famous iced-tea which is an on-going favorite. Betty also contributed her decorating skills, both inside the new buildings and outside with the landscaping.

Ken could be found ... everywhere. He could set the table, serve a meal, do the dishes, do computer work, lay out trails, and work on construction. From the time he arrived, he continued to design and put out attractive, eye-catching, attention getting public relations newsletters, brochures and announcements, drawing from the deep well of his own creativity.

Ken and Betty were a team that pulled together. They attended all committee meetings, *ex officio*, with Betty usually serving as recording secretary. They both had an unending supply of ideas and energy, and worked tirelessly at each project that was initiated. They saw what needed to be done and did it well.

Ken and Betty set the standard for hospitality at Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center. They endeared themselves to Association members and the church community; the quality of their friendship was personal and special. When the Hartzlers shared their plans to go back to Kansas at the end of Ken's fifth year as Executive Director, the reaction was disappointment and grief. Friends crowded into Magnolia Center to bid them good-bye at a special Farewell Open House on December 12, 1993. For WCRC, Ken and Betty were the right people at the right time.

1990

The Retreat Center buzzed with youth gatherings; work days; weekend Summer Bible School; churches using the RV, camping, and worship areas; and the second annual Labor Day softball tournament. All these and more, coordinated by Ken and Betty, made the year 1990 one of the busiest on record for the WCRC.

Ken and the Retreat Board continued to wrestle with details involved in planning the Main Lodge. An ambitious undertaking, the plan called for an extraordinarily nice two-story building with a central meeting area and two large wings for motel rooms, but permits for so large a building were taking months to obtain. The "Fulfill the Vision" campaign was not living up entirely to funding expectations fostered by Cargill. Nearly \$700,000 had been given and pledged, but it was not enough.

To compound the money problem, Menno Development was not generating the large amounts



Jerry and Letha Gingerich (seated, above) with Ken and Betty Hartzler. The Gingeriches came from Idaho as volunteer workers for six weeks. Betty (below) has a golf cart load of willing helpers.



of money it had been able to donate in prior years: the Racefield subdivision was nearly complete and there was a recession in the building trades. Also, land adjacent to the retreat entrance road became available and it was imperative that the Board buy it or put out an option to buy it. Operating costs were more than income and \$40,000 was needed to finish out the year. These factors might have induced an attitude of discouragement in the minds of the Board of Directors. They spent time in fasting and prayer, seeking the will of God, and, as in the beginning years, when one way was blocked, they moved in the direction of opportunity.

Since there was not enough money for the conference/lodge to be built as planned, it had to be modified. Meanwhile, Ken and Betty suggested that the family/group cottage be built first, an idea also proposed by Lloyd Weaver Jr. in 1988. A cottage would not cost so much, volunteers could build much of it "barn-raising" style, it could begin to generate income, and would keep the momentum going while plans and permits for the larger structure proceeded.

The Retreat Board held a ground-breaking ceremony at their September meeting, and John Henry Brenneman began digging the basement for the cottage on October 8, 1990. Early in January 1991 it was complete with curtains, quilts, and furnishings. This cottage sold itself, and before it was finished, was booked for guests. An Annual Meeting was so well attended, there was hardly room to serve the meal. Named Holly Cottage, it provided a lift to the spirits of Association members, and especially to the Board. A series of hospitality weekends were also held at the cottage to help spread the idea that WCRC was a delightful place to relax and spend some time.

1991

Laurel Cottage Evolves

Plans for the conference/lodge continued to be in process. Lloyd Weaver Jr., however, thought it was time to prepare a place specifically for youth groups. The first idea was to clear a simple area in the woods for young people to camp, then it was suggested that they build a platform for tents so the kids don't have to sleep on the ground, then

Buildings and Who Created Them.

Holly Cottage — 1990

- Architect: Clint Good
- Construction Manager: Glen Stoltzfus

Laurel Cottage — 1991

- Architect: Ed Pease
- Builders: Sam Brunk Jr., and Ken Hartzler

Oakwood Lodge — 1992

- Architect: Clint Good
- Builder: Harman Construction Company
- Project Manager: Glen Stoltzfus

Magnolia Center — 1993

- Architect: Ed Pease
- Builder: Harman Construction Company
- Project Manager: Glen Stoltzfus

Many, many volunteers helped construct all of the buildings.

someone thought it would be nice to have an overhead canvas shelter in case of rain. Next they thought they would build four platform/shelters close together and have an open space between for a breezeway. That progressed to "Let's close the ends in. Well, if we do that we ought to make it year 'round, and they shouldn't have to walk the whole way across the ravine to the bath house, so let's put some toilets in it, and it kept getting bigger and bigger, but still a rustic bunk bed sort of place without plumbing or lights." Sam Brunk Jr. made a small model of the simple building that was visualized.

The Board came back to reality when James City County vetoed all rustic buildings. The Cottage has four bedrooms that each sleep nine, two baths, kitchen/meeting/dining room, A/C and heat, as well as a wood-burning stove, with a lovely patio-picnic area outside the south-facing glass doors. Decorating the wall in Laurel is the small model of the rustic building made by Sam Brunk Jr.

Sam tells how Laurel was built to the specifications approved by the county, but when the final inspection was done, a different inspector came and would not pass it until either a

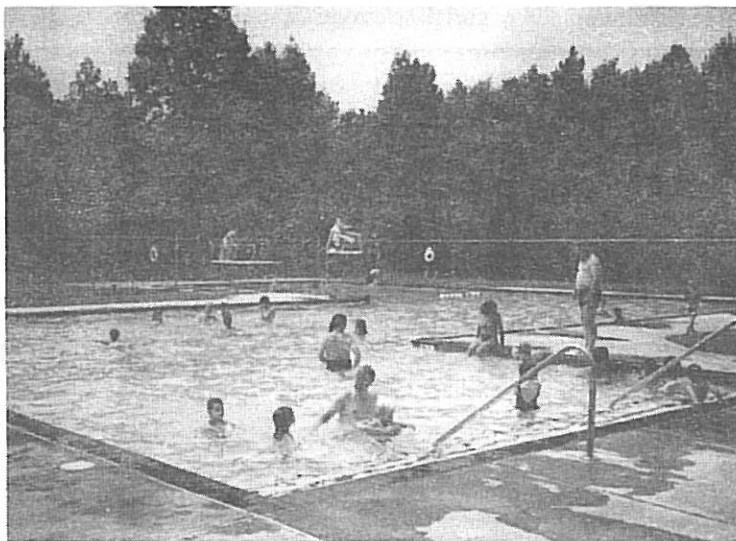
sprinkler system was put into the finished ceiling or four emergency exit doors were cut into the beautifully crafted brick walls. The doors were installed and Laurel Cottage was finished and ready for guests in November, 1991.

Summertime, Summertime, Summertime, Summertime

Voices of adults laughing, singing, talking; voices of children laughing, screaming, as they splashed down the water slide or played on the swings and jungle gym; sounds of enjoyment were heard echoing through the woods in the summer of 1991. Smoke from campfires signaled supper to the trail hikers, and the sound of basketballs slapping the court called the young and the restless to compete in a friendly game. The scheduled events of families, churches, and other groups kept the facilities busy as, weekend after weekend, people came to experience retreat.

Plans, counter plans and adaptations of plans for a wing of the main lodge, another building for a welcome center, and the swimming pool, pool house and parking lots, swirled and crisscrossed the table as the Development Committee worked on three projects at once. Excitement was high across the board when an anonymous donation of \$100,000 was given to build the pool.

The Finance Committee wrestled with the continuous need for more money to fund projects such as building the main lodge. The "Fulfill the Vision" funds were all allocated, but more money was needed to continue transforming the vision into



reality. The Board used the facilities at Brunk Mechanical to conduct a Telethon which helped raise funds. Then a sizable loan from Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities put smiles on the faces of all concerned.

Meanwhile, a corporation called Glo-Don was interested in helping the Retreat. Glo-Don owned property elsewhere that they were able to trade for 138 acres of land that included the entrance road to the Retreat. Glo-Don holds the land, assuring that it will not be sold to an undesirable neighbor while the Retreat Center raises funds for the purchase. The land is needed for expansion of facilities and also to protect the beautiful woodsy character of the entrance road.



The board surveys plans for the Holly Cottage. Shown are (l-r) Glen Stoltzfus, John Henry Brenneman, Bob Mast, architect Clint Good, and Carolyn Reed.

1992

Temporary Blocks to Progress

Unexpected opposition to the Retreat Center came in 1992, in the form of a beaver family. Originally, John Henry Brenneman had put a board across the bottom fourth of the 48 inch pipe that carried the stream under the entrance road. This allowed a small pool of water to form for use in sprinkling the road in dry weather. Suddenly there was a lot of water in the pool. John Henry investigated and found that beavers had built a dam, closing off the pipe. This created a pond that threatened to damage the road. Some young volunteers from Harrisonburg spent the better part of one day cleaning out the pipe, but the beavers came back and filled it up.

Sam Brunk Jr. says, "We would clean it out in the morning and they would fill it up every night... they were working harder than we did." John Henry took his backhoe and dug out below where the beavers wanted to dam and that discouraged them. "They went back to where they belonged," says Merlin, "maybe to the marsh on the other side of the Learning Tree." Sam says he never realized how big beavers were until this encounter with them. Geneva adds that every time Sam tells the story the

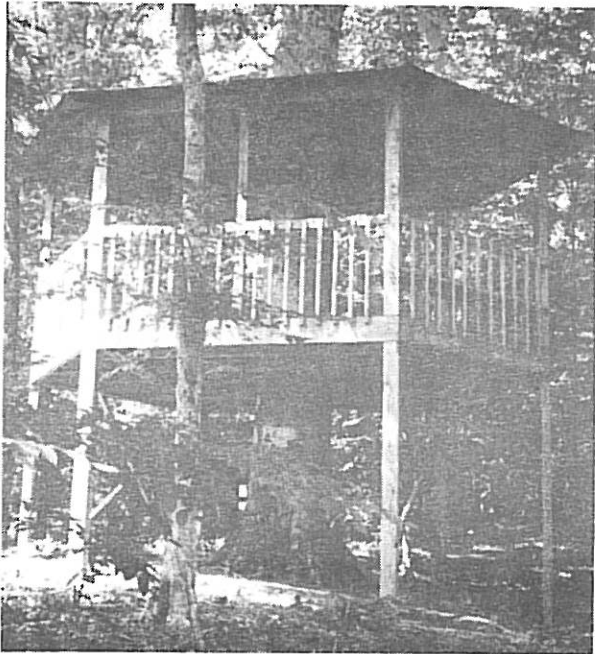
beavers get bigger.

Major projects besides the beavers made the year 1992 one to remember. The swimming pool was ready for use May 23, Family Camping weekend; the Glo-Don land deal was in progress; the Lodge wing was begun in May and finished in December; the decision was made to build a reception/dining center, and it was in the framing stage by November; and the ancient Rhino was sold for \$250, the amount paid for its transfer to the Retreat Center.

A Place For Solitude

The Board had on its collective mind for some time the desire to build a solitary place where a person could go to meditate or study. Sam Brunk Jr. and a group of volunteers worked hard to build a wonderful lookout in an ancient beech. Called the Learning Tree, it is found by following a trail deep into the woods, crossing a small bridge, stepping on stones through a stream, going past the stands of pine, holly, and oak, and walking on the soft layers of leaf mulch. It overlooks deep pools of water and a vast marsh that was dry land before the beavers moved in.

Sitting in the Lookout, one can hear the different bird calls and see hawks wheeling over the opening in the trees. A frog concert is usually in progress accompanied by the wind through the leaves. The sounds of nature and the stillness of the woods produce a peaceful place for solitary thought



The Learning Tree

or a private chat with God. High in the lookout, a small plaque dedicates the tree house to Sam Brunk Jr. who has worked at the Retreat Center on a daily basis for the ten years of its existence.

1993

Led by the Spirit, the Board experienced excitement as the Center unfolded, and between 1990 and 1993, four major buildings were constructed: Holly and Laurel Cottages, Oakwood Lodge and Magnolia Center. As the buildings were being planned, the Board began to talk about what to name them. The Public Relations Committee suggested that trails and roads be named for nature, cottages be given English names, and major buildings receive Bible names. "Bethany Center" was suggested for the new Conference/Lodge Building.

Never cut-and-dried in its operations, the Board sometimes worked on spontaneous guidance. After testing English names for the first cottage for some time, they looked out the window, saw the lovely natural setting and someone suggested "Holly Cottage." It was adopted by unanimous approval.

Laurel Cottage and Oakwood Lodge were named in the same thoughtful manner.

The fourth building was not named so easily. Some friendly rivalry was present. One person wanted it to be called The Welcome Center—the other, Magnolia Center. These two men shook hands on an agreement that if the Board chose Magnolia, the winner would donate two magnolia trees and the loser would fully support the name. One afternoon as the Board arrived on the grounds for their monthly meeting, they were confronted with a large WELCOME sign displayed on the front of the unfinished building; however, Magnolia won the vote.

As the beautiful Magnolia Center neared completion, the Interior Decorating Committee began looking at colors—hoping to carry out the Magnolia theme. In the apex of the southwest end of the dining room, the cathedral ceiling formed the perfect spot for a circular stained glass window (designed by David Weaver) depicting a green and white magnolia against a blue background. The magnolia motif was also used in a special rug (designed by Lewis Brunk) made for the lobby area. Both of these art works and other decorations were donated. A magnolia design was also drawn by David Weaver for the new WCRC logo.

In May 1993, a special service was held for the dedication of both Oakwood Lodge and Magnolia Center. It was a celebration that included an address by Laban Peachey, Moderator of Virginia Conference. Joe Longacher Jr. was honored for his nine years of service to the Retreat Board, five of them as president, and special entertainment was provided.

In Oakwood Lodge a special suite was set aside for a volunteer host and hostess. Each weekend someone is there to help the staff with food service or laundry and bed-making or any other details and they are on call for night-time emergencies. A donated telephone system links the four buildings and the Manager's house.

That summer, three camps were planned for children of differing ages. Director Maria Olsen, the counselors, who were young adults, and the children were all enthusiastic about the experience. "Cabins" were the rooms in Laurel Cottage, but many of the activities took place in the woods, the swimming pool, and the fields.



Holly Cottage (above)



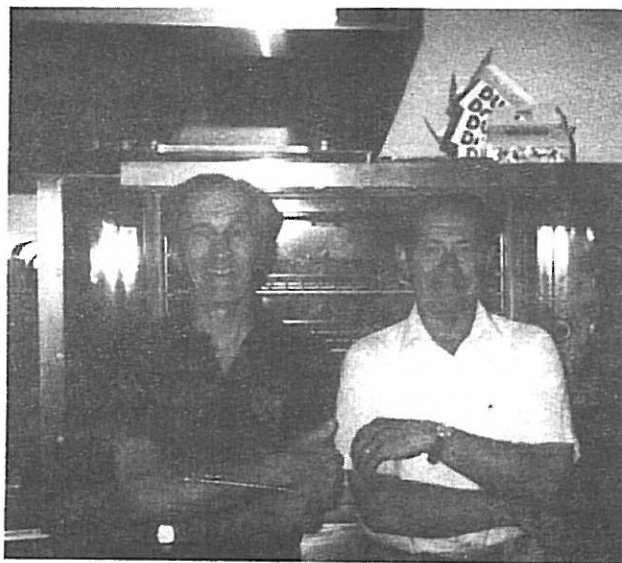
Laurel Cottage (left)

Oakwood Lodge
(facing page, bottom right)

Magnolia Center (below)

Magnolia Center's stained
glass window (facing page,
below left)





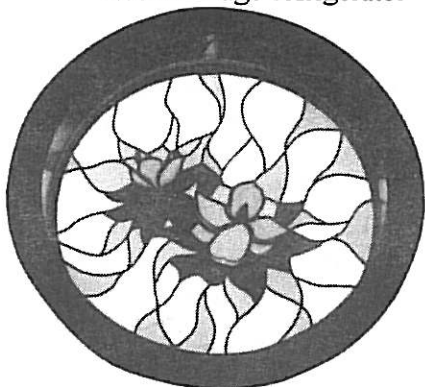
Gretchen Christopher (left) in the Magnolia Center kitchen. Merlin Miller and Sam Brunk Jr. (above) stand in front of the oven they repaired.

Cooking

Prior to having Magnolia Center with its lovely big kitchen facility, cooking a meal or catering one for a large gathering was an exercise in gymnastics for the cooks. Tammy Shenk and Gretchen Christopher alternated catering food for weekend groups. Some food would be prepared in the trailer, some in Laurel and some in Holly Cottage, each of which had a regular household range, then it would be transported by golf cart and served wherever the people were gathered.

Magnolia has appliances that are restaurant quality and size, although they are second hand. Gretchen recalls a time when Murphy's law took effect: Everything that could break down did break down. One day it was the huge refrigerator

that took a vacation. All food from it had to be distributed to refrigerators in the other buildings. Another day Gretchen had a meal to serve at 5:30 p.m. At 4:30 p.m. there was a loud bang from the large convection oven which was full of food. Ken Hartzler said that the fan was not working and she must turn off the oven. She protested that she had only an hour to have the meal ready, but Ken was adamant. She was in despair and turned away to hide her tears, but in looking out the window she saw Sam and Merlin running at top speed across the field toward the kitchen. The three men got the fan repaired and she served her meal on time, not even a minute late. Gretchen says she never found out



Board Members — 1984-1994

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| ◦ John Henry Brenneman * | ◦ Robert Mast |
| ◦ Kenton Brubaker | ◦ Howard Miller |
| ◦ George F. Brunk Jr.* | ◦ Merlin R. Miller* |
| ◦ Samuel Brunk Jr.* | ◦ Philip E. Miller |
| ◦ James D. Brunk | ◦ Philip V. Miller |
| ◦ Leslie Francisco III | ◦ Carolyn Reed |
| ◦ Marie Hertzler | ◦ Gerald Showalter* |
| ◦ Dale Keffer* | ◦ Glen Stoltzfus* |
| ◦ Erma Lehman | ◦ M. Lloyd Weaver Jr.* |
| ◦ Joseph Longacher Jr.* | ◦ Samuel Weaver |

*Original Board Members

how Ken got the attention of Sam and Merlin so quickly.

Serving on the Board

Being on the Retreat Center board was like belonging to a special Christian club in which all the members had one interest—one goal. Only the details had to be worked out. Joe Longacher Jr. said the Board was unusual for its harmony and its diversity. He said that he had never experienced this kind of cooperation and good relationships before on any board or committee. Others said there was high value in working with and learning to know people from other Mennonite churches and conferences. Without the common goal of building a retreat center for the glory of God, they would not have had the opportunity to know and fellowship with specific people from both sides of the river and other areas of Virginia. The vision was clear. As entrepreneurs, each person had an area of skill that fit hand-in-glove with the next one. There was no competition; there was cooperation. Malinda Stoltzfus said that Glen would come home from a Board meeting all charged up and excited about what was happening.

Original Board members had on their minds that most of them would have served their nine years in 1993 and would not be eligible to continue. They made several attempts to devise a plan whereby there would be continuity at this point. One or two resigned early so that new members could be oriented before the great exodus, but in 1993, four members' terms were up. These former members continued to serve on committees and do volunteer

The Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center

Our Purpose

The purpose of the Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center is to provide opportunities for personal growth, Christian fellowship and wholesome recreation.

Our Ministry

The ministry of the Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center is to:

1. Present Jesus as Savior and Lord and foster a spirit of acceptance of all persons as children of God.
2. Provide programs and resources that nurture one's relationship to Christ, build family unity, strengthen congregations and equip persons for Christian service.
3. Provide resources and facilities for congregational, district and conference ministries.
4. Encourage patterns of living that are positive and uplifting: a respect for others, a healthful lifestyle, creativity, and a spirit of joy and thanksgiving for God's love.
5. Provide opportunities for persons to encounter God as Creator and to gain a personal sense of environmental responsibility.

work, and after a year they were eligible to serve on the Board again. However, it was a good chance to get new blood excited about the vision.

There was a vacant spot on the Board in 1990 and always conscious of wanting a good balance of abilities, they began looking for someone with talents in the area of fiscal management. In September 1990, James D. Brunk was invited to fill the place left vacant by Dale Keffer in January, 1989. Late in 1992, Kenton Brubaker joined the Board; in May 1993, Merlin R. Miller came back, followed by new members Ken Stevanous and Leslie Francisco III in July, and Howard Miller in August. There was a facetious saying in the Board that to be a member you had to satisfy one of the three "W's": Wealth, Work, or Wisdom. At least yearly, the Board would self-examine: "Who are we serving?" "Are we on track?" "Are we being true to the vision?"

1994

Margaret Trivett, a member of the Williamsburg Mennonite Church, had a secret desire to go into full-time Christian service. She thought about this after her job was eliminated when the company she worked for was sold. One evening out of the blue, Bob Mast, then WCRC Board president, called and said she had been recommended for the job of Interim Manager at the Retreat Center. He asked if she would be interested in an interview. Margaret had been director of a large recreation center for 17 years in Selma, Alabama, and much of the experience she had was parallel to what was needed at the Retreat Center. And so, after what seemed like a series of miracles, Margaret accepted the job as Interim Manager for a year. She began working December 1, 1993, and she *plunged* into her job—one of her initiation rites happened to be unstopping a major sewer problem that took from midnight to about 4 a.m. and included sanitizing the bathroom area three or four times. She was equal to the emergency.

The Retreat Center facilities were in high demand on the weekends. Margaret reported at the February 1994 Board Meeting that all except one or two holiday weekends were booked for the coming year and she had already turned down enough requests to have had 500 more guests. Margaret worked on getting more visitors to use the Center during the week. The results have been gratifying with midweek activity continuing to increase. Margaret gives high praise to her staff for the efficiency and quality of their work.

The Board treasurer, Jim Brunk, says, "Substantial debt was incurred to build Oakwood Lodge and Magnolia Center. It was also necessary to borrow money to acquire additional land for future expansion. In a relatively short period of time, with the new buildings, operational income had exceeded operational expenses, allowing some monies to be used for debt reduction. The increased use of the facilities is moving us toward our goal of paying the debt service out of operational income. (The Glo-Don land transaction is still in progress.)

The Development Committee announced to the Association at the Annual Meeting in February 1994, that a new Capital Campaign on the Cargill



Margaret Trivett

model is being planned to raise \$1,000,000 by the year 2000, both to reduce debt and to fund new capital projects.

One of the many activities on the agenda for Margaret Trivett's immediate attention was to prepare the Retreat Center for the Virginia Mennonite Conference to hold its Assembly there in June 1994. The whole Board was involved in various committees to work toward this occasion. They all felt it was the real test of whether they had come of age. The big questions were, "Can we be ready by that time, and can we accommodate up to a thousand people for four days?"

Planning was the key to everything: providing more tent sites and R.V. sites, where to put the eating tent and the meeting tent, and how to prepare and serve that much food.

All the lodging on the grounds was already reserved before the Conference flyers went out. Parking, extra lodging, a snack shack, portable rest rooms, all these and more had to be made available and maintained.

Conference time came, bringing a thousand or more guests. Eight hundred were registered and several hundred more came and went to meetings without registering. WCRC (and Margaret) passed the test with flying colors. Even the weather cooperated, showing its teeth with a terrible lightning and thunder display and a heavy, drenching rain, and then offering its smile of southern hospitality with warm temperatures and a constant cooling breeze.

Just in time for Virginia Conference Assembly,



WCRC Board — Spring 1994 — (Back row) Merlin R Miller, Ken Stevanus, Sam Weaver, Howard Miller; (middle row) Erma Lehman, Marie Hertzler, Carolyn Reed, Margaret Trivett (WCRC manager); (front row) Jim Brunk, Leslie Francisco III, Joe Longacher Jr., Lloyd Weaver Jr. Not pictured is Robert Mast.

a new brick sign with neat black letters replaced the blue-and-white logo at the entrance to Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center.

In 1994 funds were donated for a double tennis court which is now being built. Another major donation was a new computer and software for the office.

Looking Ahead

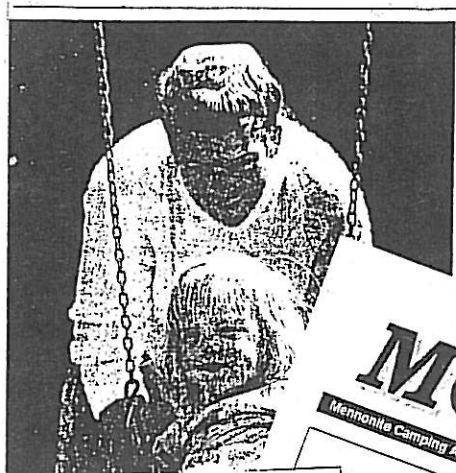
What comes next for Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center? The first ten have been years of excitement, of suspense, of climbing out on a limb and trusting God for the safety net. They have been years of productivity and progress, of hope and of hope fulfilled.

There is still a long way to go to meet the long-range goals of the Association. WCRC continues to look forward to becoming all that a well-planned retreat center can be. Joe Longacher Jr., president of the Board, comments, "We do not know what the future holds, but along with unexpected challenges there will surely be unexpected opportunities.

The true mark of the Retreat Center will be more than buildings and programs. It will be the life-enriching experiences of many users, who, with the help of the buildings, the program, and the support of dedicated staff persons, will find inspiration, refreshment, and meaning not possible elsewhere."

Joe goes on to say that having come this far, there will continue to be needs. The Retreat Center will need the continued involvement of faithful supporters, and it will need new supporters. It will need strong leadership with long-range vision; it will need significant financial help.

Joe says, "Amid all the activities, the special programs, the publicity, the decisions by Boards and committees, we cannot lose sight of our reason to exist. Our goal is to serve God, and, as our Statement of Purpose says, '...to provide opportunities for personal growth, Christian fellowship and wholesome recreation.' We need to keep our vision clear."

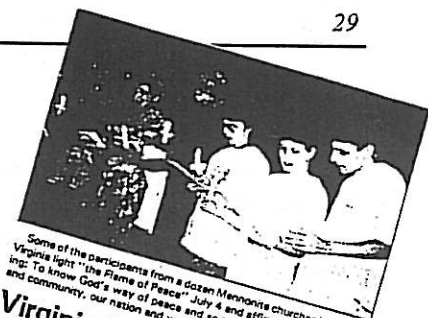


Outdoors and closer to God

Retreat center helps church members be spiritually renewed

RELIGION

God has a sense of humor. That's what Michael Warkie tries to demonstrate by bringing a little levity to the Lord's word. See CA. ■ SKJ the clown is concerned about Halloween. He thinks we're all getting too serious about the holiday, and he wants to replace it with humor. On Hallow-



Some of the participants from a dozen Mennonite churches in eastern Virginia light "the Flame of Peace" July 4 and affirm, "This is our calling: To know God's way of peace and so to make peace in our family and community, our nation and world."

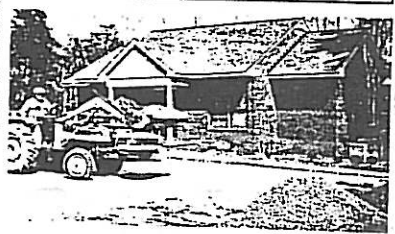
Virginia Peace Celebration Gives a July 4 Alternative

By Carolyn Schrock-Hartzler

RICHMOND, VA.—"My fond hope for you all is that you begin to experience the mystery and the joy of peacemaking," said the

who did not own land, and who had a...

RELIGION



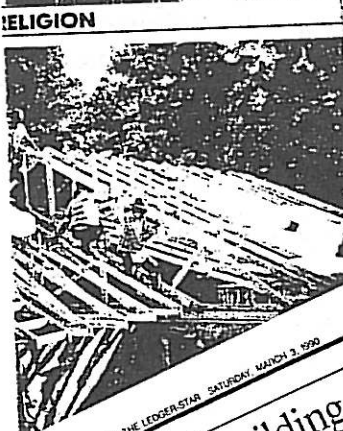
A worker fills in the driveway in front of Holly Cottage.

Mennonites open first retreat house

By Nathaniel Axtell

JAMES CITY—A Tidewater Mennonite group has completed the 16-acre Croaker retreat the

October, seven years after local Mennonites first conceived of the retreat. It's already booked by groups through next October, Hartzler said. The cottage has a meeting room for 50 and a kitchen.



ES THE VIRG. PHOTO AND THE LEDGER-STAR SATURDAY, MARCH 3, 1990

Williamsburg Christian Retreat New Facility Challenge

by Ken Hartzler

One thing is clear: "no thing is clear been in this 'ring," says of never is now Will Center. Bor

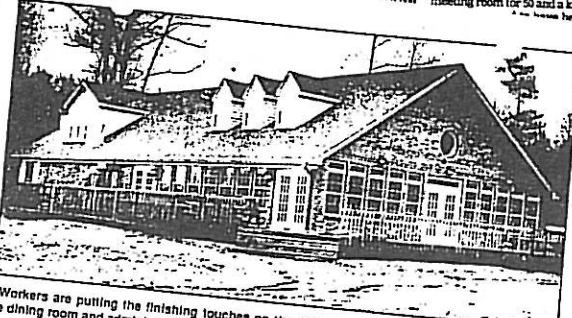
RELIGION

Mennonites building Christian retreat center

All facilities at the retreat will be available in any time. The Rev. Robert... the Rev. Robert... the Rev. Robert...



Workers are putting the finishing touches on the newest building at the retreat. It will house the dining room and administrative offices.



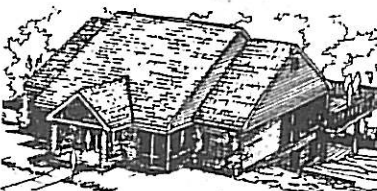
Workers are putting the finishing touches on the newest building at the retreat. It will house the dining room and administrative offices.

Mennonites break ground for retreat center to Christian self-renewal

By Laura Frink

JAMES CITY—Construction finally begins Oct. 1 on a 160-acre Mennonite retreat house and recreation area that has undergone seven years of planning and alterations. Groundbreaking is scheduled for the first of five group cottages planned for the site, located on Barnes Road just north of Toano. The cottages are part of the Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center, a project of a Tidewater Mennonite group.

"We are in the process of obtaining necessary permits from the county," said Glen Stoltzfus, treasurer for the Williamsburg Christian Retreat Association,



The first phase of construction includes five group cottages.

which has been working on the project since 1983. "We already have commitments for labor and money from businesses and individuals,"

said Ken Hartzler, center executive director. "A lot of it will be put up by volunteer labor." The cottages, which will eventually surround a main retreat

building, will accommodate about 24 people each, with a meeting room for 50 people and a kitchen. Each cottage will cost about \$100,000, Stoltzfus said. The group hopes to complete the first cottage by December.

The next building to go up will depend on available finances, Stoltzfus said. The Mennonites would like it to be the group meeting center, which has been estimated to cost about \$1.5 million.

"We may end up delaying construction of the main building for a year, depending on how much money is raised," Stoltzfus said. If that happens, a second group cottage will be built instead. The Mennonites' first fund drive

to get away from it all. The Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center is a different all-night parties — just good, clean fun. The brochure prohibits smoking, alcohol, pets, inappropiate clothing and no bothering the other guests after 11 p.m. But you can take a walk in the woods in the middle of the night.

Run by the Mennonite Churches of Virginia, the center draws Christian groups and families, relying on the serene setting to promote spiritualism and self-renewal. "There's a great need for facilities such as this," said director Ken Hartzler. "With the stress of daily life, we've really retained

See Review page 6A

removal: ■ A Vacation Second Home Village with 10 lots for condominiums or timesharing. ■ A shopping village. ■ A horse camp with a stable, training ring and trails. "These were dreams of the master planner, but it was not part of our goal," Hartzler said.

use for two years is a family camping area. It includes 21 recreational vehicle sites and a nearby softball field, basketball courts and a playground. Three facilities will in the wings. A recreation center, a youth activity center and an environmental center are in the plans.

start... said Ken Hartzler... retreat... everyone

To page 6A

I Wish

I wish I could have named every one of the hundreds of people who donated their time to the WCRC. They are the people who mowed the grass, helped build the buildings, cleared the trails, picked up trash, cleaned new buildings for occupancy, served on committees, cleaned occupied buildings, coaxed the old computer to run, carried the garbage, assisted in the kitchen, cooked food, brought food, did laundry, said prayers, laid bricks, hammered nails, sawed lumber, dug wells, did landscaping, planned events, etc., etc., etc.

I wish I could have named every one who donated big objects and little objects: trailers, R.V.'s, golf cart, maintenance building, shrubbery, swimming pool, tennis courts, building materials, vacuum cleaners, kitchen ranges, microwave ovens, quilts, room furnishings, paintings, and so forth.

I wish I could name all the people who gave money, money, and more money: those who gave of their overflow and those who gave sacrificially.

I wish I could name everything each of the Board members has done, but I can't—much of it is not recorded anywhere. I do know that they are being encouraged to put WCRC in their wills, so that living or dead, their contributions will be on-going.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to members and former members of the WCRC Board of Directors who read and critiqued the manuscript: Joe Longacher Jr., Robert Mast, Merlin Miller, Gerald Showalter and Glen Stoltzfus.

Thank you for the many phone conversations relative to details in the book: Lloyd Weaver Jr., Sam Brunk Jr., Margaret Trivett, J.H. Brenneman, Jim Brunk, Howie Schiedel, Ken Hartzler, Bob Mast.

Thank you to Lloyd Weaver Jr. for arranging meetings with the people who helped establish the Retreat Center.

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Thank you to those who supplied photographs: Sam Brunk Jr., Ken Hartzler, Esther S. Buckwalter, Glen Stoltzfus, and unknown photographers. And thanks to Curtis R. Holsopple for editing, design, layout, typesetting, and miscellaneous help.

About the Author

Esther Shenk Buckwalter's love of literature is rooted in her father's prodigious Bible and English Literature memorization, the cultural nurture of both her mother and step-mother, and her enthusiastic involvement in the Warwick River Mennonite Church literary society during her youth. Later, with the responsibilities of marriage and motherhood, Esther still made time for reading and writing. Her Nativity poem "One Small Child" was published in the 1964 collection *The Light of Christmas* and at least four other books. The three children of Esther and Erlis Buckwalter brim with a love for reciting bits of poetry or quotations from literature, especially that which is slightly off-beat in topic or meter. A wry smile appears often on Esther's face, and it is infectious.

In 1975 she began editing the *Warwick River Tide*, the vehicle of news and creative writing for Mennonite churches from Newport News to Richmond. For three years she co-edited the Tidewater edition of *Together Magazine*, distributed by the Mennonite Churches of Newport News to the surrounding community. She composed annual Christmas programs for her kindergarten classes at Warwick River during her 23 years of service to the school. As Sunday school superintendent, she blessed Warwick River Mennonite Church with thoughtfully prepared opening meditations.

Esther traveled the length of America with her husband on his BMW motorcycle, and her title for the 1976 trip to the West Coast echoed the biblical Esther who said "If I Perish, I Perish."

She is *not* known for sitting quietly in the corner. Whether gardening, singing, playing volleyball, serving on the church council, photographing, reading or writing, Esther Shenk Buckwalter is intensely involved in what she does. — C.R.H.

