

# SMALL STEPS CREATE GREAT STRIDES

Long before President John F. Kennedy committed the country to landing a man on the moon, he committed his administration to tackling the challenges of developmental disabilities. Kennedy's sister, Rosemary, was born with an intellectual disability, and her struggles inspired her brothers and sisters to do whatever they could to help other people who struggled, too.

The Kennedys' advocacy fostered legislation that enabled states to update their programs for people with disabilities and provided funding to support those programs. Following their lead, Congress passed laws through the 1960s and 1970s that would profoundly improve the lives of people affected by disabilities.

These changes in the wider world enabled growth at Cantalician. After ten successful years, Sister Raphael Marie Ochocinski succeeded Sister Mary Angela as director in 1966. Energetic and overflowing with big ideas, Sister Raphael Marie was the ideal person to take advantage of the new laws and funding.

Cantalician was supported only by the Diocese of Buffalo, donations, and small tuition fees until 1967, but an infusion of government funding could make more things possible and solve more problems. Ironically, the biggest problem facing the school now was a result of its success: what to do with the young adults who graduated?

In an earlier time, adults with developmental disabilities would have spent their lives in an institution or isolated at home, but the new policies and funding of the 1960s and 1970s enabled better options – and Sister Raphael Marie had the vision to make them a reality. Adults needed their help, too, she decided, so she changed the name from Cantalician Center for Children to Cantalician Center for Learning and went to work.

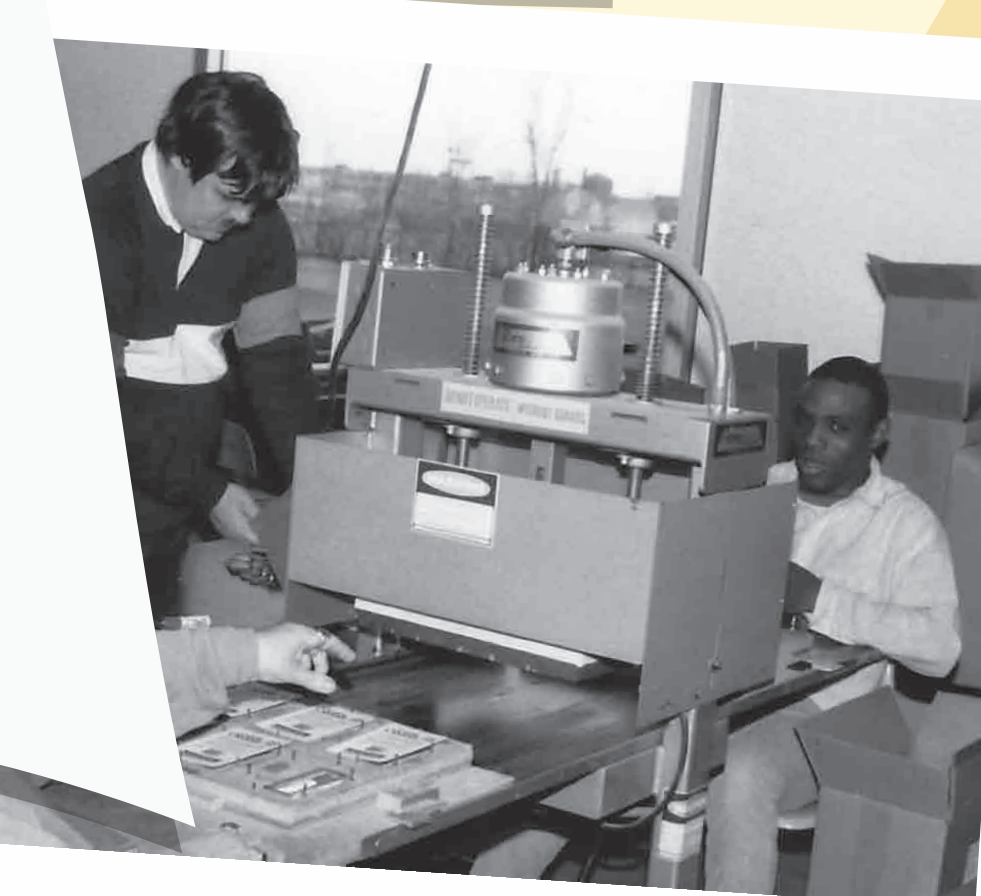
The first of many programs she created was a sheltered workshop in 1969. By offering employment in an encouraging environment, the workshop provided new opportunities for development and growth and helped instill a sense of dignity and self-esteem in the adults who worked there.



Like the classes for children at Cantalician school, activities and jobs offered at the workshop were matched to the abilities of each individual participant. For some, this meant a highly sheltered workshop environment with more time allotted to training and therapy than to production work. For others, it meant full-time off-site employment with minimal help from a Cantalician job coach.



Employees receiving vocational services learned an impressive array of skills, from assembling and packaging to spot welding and salvaging electrical components. They also learned self-advocacy thanks to a clever supervisor, David Bell, who created weekly gripe sessions to improve speech and vocabulary! Hiring Cantalician employees wasn't charity, it was good business, and companies such as Mentholatum and Westwood Pharmaceuticals hopped on board.



*"We are coming out of the dark ages in our handling of this serious national problem. Fatalism is no longer justified."*

— Eunice Kennedy Shriver

