

Finding Solutions for Children and Families

Longtime Physical Therapist Lynn Rupert Looks Back on Career

If you've never been treated by a physical therapist, you may not realize just how much they can help improve your mobility, function and overall health.

Nearly all of the patients of Lynn Rupert have never been treated by a physical therapist before, because they are little ones, children from birth to three years old. So their first experience of that healing, helping field is at Lynn's capable hands.

So many little ones, over so many years. So many families, looking for answers to the challenges their children are facing. So many questions that Lynn has

answered, exercises that she has developed, sessions that she has overseen. So many muscles strengthened and hopes raised.

Lynn has been a pediatric physical therapist for 44 years, 20 years as an employee of Mercer DD, working as part of the Early Intervention staff. She retired on September 28.

She knows that many of her patients will not remember her. And if they could, "there would be quite a few who wouldn't say they enjoyed their experience with me, and I'm okay with that," she said. "It's not that the sessions are painful—but it can be frustrating when you're trying to learn new things, things that are difficult."

But the results speak for themselves. Lynn has always enjoyed her work because, she said, "I like problem-solving. I like studying why a child is having problems with their development, and then using the best methods we have to address that. I like dealing with families and helping parents help their kids become more successful



Lynn Rupert, center, with her coworkers in the EI Department. Lynn retires this fall after decades with Mercer DD.

and reach their potential."

People outside of the program may not realize that many young children improve quickly, Lynn said. "We have kids who are with us short-term, and we have kids who we know are going to be in the system for a while," she said. "For parents who think Mercer DD is only for kids with long-term issues, that's not true."

Either way, she said, "you have to be able to deal with the emotions." Families are coming to terms with their children's issues and struggling to find the path forward. They may be experiencing grief that their child isn't "perfect," and worried about the child's future.

"You have to start with where
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Mercer DD has a 1.94-mill levy renewal on the ballot on November 7. This levy will not increase with higher home valuations. See page 2 for details.

Levy Renewal to Generate 25% of Budget

Mercer County has always been a great place to work, play and live. For me, this summer reinforced those feelings as opportunities for community involvement only seem to increase. Mercer County Special Olympics had over 40 people participate in unified golf. Mercer County Challenger Baseball had a very full schedule with many participants and games throughout the county. As always—the summers in Ohio

seem to pass us by much too quickly.

As we look to prepare for the Fall of 2023, one item of importance for Mercer DD is our need to renew a 1.94-mill levy in November.



**Mercer DD
Superintendent
Shawn Thieman**

The levy will continue to generate about \$1.38 million per year—representing 25 percent of our annual budget. The levy would cost taxpayers \$36 per \$100,000 of home valuation and will not increase with higher home valuations.

Mercer DD serves individuals from birth and throughout their lives. Currently, we serve about 525 individuals with developmental disabilities or delays per year—200 of these individuals are under three years old and are served by a combination of our Help Me Grow and Early Intervention staff—125 are school aged children and are served by SSA's and other transition support staff—200 are adults and receive in-home supports, day services, employment services and transportation. These individuals are mostly served by 14 provider agencies and 20 independent providers that work within the county.

The bulk of Mercer DD's bud-

get goes directly to services for the individuals and families we serve. We use local levy funds to pay 40 percent of all Medicaid services and we constantly strive to stretch our dollars while maximizing the choices available to individuals. We currently serve over 160 individuals using Medicaid dollars and due to our success at increasing wages for local DSPs, our local contribution is going to increase to almost \$2 million per year.

We hear great comments from our families and the public all the time. Some say that while they never imagined they would need us, they are grateful that we are there. We are so thankful to the citizens of Mercer County who support our efforts to promote a better community for all residents. Everyone deserves to have the opportunity to work, play and ultimately live in their community—regardless of their abilities.

Finding Solutions for Children and Families

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the parent is at, and let them know that no matter where they're at, there is always hope," she said. "There are things that we can't explain. Why some kids who doctors predict will never do certain things, do them."

Lynn has seen many advances in her field over the years, and changes in her work. Families once brought their young children to the Mercer DD facility on Mud Pike outside of Celina, but now Lynn visits them in their homes. Through the years, she has diligently kept up with best practices, taking coursework to learn new methods. Lynn, who grew up in Wapakoneta, fell in love with physical therapy when, as a sophomore at Ohio State Uni-

versity, she volunteered at St. Rita's Medical Center in Lima. "I saw the improvements (the patients) made, and I was hooked. I never, ever regretted being a PT—I have always loved it."

Lynn still lives in Wapakoneta with her husband, Ted, and a growing family nearby: two daughters and two stepdaughters, and 6 grandchildren (including triplets and a new granddaughter born September 14). She looks forward to spending more time with them.

While she is stepping away, she appreciates her history at Mercer DD. She admires Mercer DD's forward-looking approach to providing PT for the people it serves. "PT came here (to Mercer DD) way before it came to other places," she

said. "The board is very supportive of us here. I don't think I've ever asked the board for anything and was refused, if it was going to have long-term benefit to families. That included continuing ed, equipment, having time as a team to meet and share ideas and concerns."

That support, in turn, allowed her to offer parents hope—if there is no known solution today, there might be one tomorrow. "Physical therapy is always changing. The things I did 40 years ago, I'm not doing now," Lynn said. "There's more information and a greater variety of treatment approaches. It's always changing, always evolving."

And for her entire working life, Lynn has evolved right along with it.

Giving Students the Tools They Need

Karen Leugers Reflects On 30-Year Career In Education

Karen Leugers tried a lot of different things when she was a young adult, starting out. She moved from her hometown of Celina to Florida, where she tried different jobs before enrolling in a graphics design program.

Then came a disastrous day. She was all alone in a room with a large machine that made metal plates for a printer. It opened like a copy machine, but when Karen lifted the top cover, the glass plate beneath shattered in a million pieces. She said, "I called my mom, and I was crying, 'I just broke this machine, and I don't know how I'm going to pay for it. I can't work with things because I break them.'"

That was okay because it turns out she was not meant to work with machines. She was meant to work with people.

Karen, the transition specialist at Mercer DD, will retire on November 1 after a 30-year career in education, the last seven of which were spent in her current position. She earned a degree from the University of South Florida and worked with children who were emotionally disturbed. When she moved back to the area, she taught at Celina Schools for three years, then decided to stay home when her older son, Matt, was born.

Then came a fateful call from Mike Overman, longtime superintendent of Mercer DD. "Mike asked me to sub at Cheryl Ann School and my initial response was no. Then I called him back and told him I'd try it for one day," Karen said. "That day turned into years of a very fulfilling career."

After 30 years in the class-

room, where "I was always learning from the students," Karen stepped away. In 2016, she came to work for Mercer DD, to help older students and their families dream about and plan for a future of their own design.

There are a lot of decisions and options to consider between when a student high school and when they become an adult, Karen said. She helps students and families think about that transition, what it might look like and what they might like to do next.

This is different for everyone, she said. "Individual's needs are unique, there is no cookie-cutter approach," she said.

Karen founded the School to Adult Life Transition (SALT) program for Mercer DD. Throughout the school year, Karen recruits speakers to present at SALT meetings who can help families navigate the transitional years. Sessions for young people run concurrently.

"I always tried to let the parents dictate what they wanted or needed to learn about each year," she said.

That led to her work on the team that established QUEST, (mercercountyquest.com), which provides individuals and families with a one-stop shop for information to support all transition-age students with disabilities, ages 14-22, and their families. "This is one of the projects I am most proud of, and I hope it supports many Mercer County families in the years to come," she said.

She also runs a summer transition program that helps younger



Karen Leugers in the Mercer DD tool shed, one of the many places she has taken students on adventures in learning.

high school students experience community-based activities. "We focus on social skills, communications, exploration," she said.

Each summer, Karen starts off with a session in the wood shop at Mercer DD's Mud Pike facilities. "Working on a multi-step project that is often out of the kid's comfort zone is a great way to assess skills and build relationships and trust in a non-threatening environment," she said.

For older students, the summer program focuses on career opportunities and life choices.

"Trying to decide a path, when a child turns 18, it can be scary for some families. There are a lot of changes. I count myself as an expert on none of this. But I am a bridge person, and I can offer a bridge to people who have the expertise."

A bridge person. That's one way to describe Karen. But she likes the job description her older son, Matt, assigned to her years ago. "I never really thought of myself as a teacher," she said. "So Matt said to me, 'What are you then, a life coach?' And I loved it. Yes. That's what I am."

FALL FUN FOR ALL



Everybody was welcome at a fall crafting event at Mercer DD earlier in October. Folks of all ages put a smile on a pumpkin's face or made a fall suncatcher. It was a boo-blast!



SALT
Meeting
Oct. 24

St. John Lutheran Church,
Celina, 6-7:30 p.m.
"Charting the Life Course" with
guest speaker Beth Guggenbiller
from Mercer County ESC.
Students and families welcome.

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