

Canaday Center fall exhibit to examine disability history in region

“From Institutions to Independence: A History of People With Disabilities in Northwest Ohio,” an exhibition, will open Tuesday, Sept. 23, at 4 p.m. in the Ward M. Canaday Center for Special Collections in the William S. Carlson Library on Main Campus.

Dr. Jim Ferris, the new director of UT’s Disability Studies Program, will be the opening speaker.

The exhibit features archival materials collected by the Canaday Center over the past five years that document disability history in the Toledo area.

“The history of people with disabilities is largely unknown,” said Barbara Floyd, director of the Canaday Center. “This exhibit is an opportunity for our community to learn about the lives of people who have, for much of our nation’s history, been invisible because they were locked away in institutions or kept hidden by their families who felt shamed by them.”

Floyd said that like other under-represented groups such as women and minorities, the history of disabled people is only beginning to be discovered. Yet northwest Ohio has played a significant role in disability history.

For example, she said, the Toledo State Hospital was the first publicly supported mental health facility in the country to be built using the cottage system, where patients were housed in small, family-like settings rather than in large wards. Josina Lott began the first sheltered workshop for developmentally disabled people that was not a part of a residential institution. The Toledo Rotary Club was one of the first philanthropic organizations in the nation to take on the cause of disabled children and helped to found the Feilbach School for Crippled Children in Toledo in 1918 and the Opportunity Home for disabled children requiring long-term care in 1930.

“Parts of this story are known to some in our community, but this exhibit is unique in that it looks at our disability history overall and attempts to place the experience of those in northwest Ohio within the larger context of what was happening in the state and nation,” Floyd said.

She said the exhibit shows how in the 20th century disabled people moved out of large residential institutions as ideas about treatments changed, and they returned to their communities to live independently. Society slowly changed its views of disabled people, and with the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act in 1990, their civil rights were finally recognized and protected.

The exhibit looks at the lives of those with mental illness, vision and hearing impairment, and physical and developmental disabilities. It also focuses on the impact of the polio epidemics of the 1940s and 1950s on Toledo, and how local organizations sought to provide vocational rehabilitation and employment to the disabled. It includes an

examination of the impact of the eugenics movement on the disabled. And the exhibit analyzes the disability rights movement, and how organizations and services changed to provide more independence for the disabled.

The exhibit will be on display Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., through Feb. 27. Evening and weekend tours are available by appointment. The exhibit and associated events are free and open to the public, and a free exhibition catalog will be available. The exhibit and events have been funded through a grant from the Office of the Provost's Academic Excellence Program.

In addition to Ferris' opening talk, a series of public events have been planned to coincide with the exhibit. Listed by date, these are:

- Wednesday, Oct. 8 — “Deaf Hearing Boy: A Life in Northwest Ohio,” a book signing and talk by author Robert H. Miller, professor emeritus at the University of Louisville, at 3 p.m. in the Canaday Center. The talk will concern Miller's experience growing up as the hearing child of two deaf parents in Toledo and Defiance.
- Thursday, Oct. 23 — “Humanitarianism Through Institutionalization: The Medical Treatment of Ohio's Insane in the 19th Century,” a talk by Dr. Deborah Marinski, Ohio University Southern, at 3 p.m. in the Canaday Center. This lecture is based upon Marinski's dissertation for her degree from UT's Department of History.
- Saturday, Nov. 8 — The premiere of “My Black Bird Has Flown Away: The Life of Hugh Gregory Gallagher,” an original one-man play by playwright Carlton Spitzer, starring Broadway actor Jeremy Lawrence, at 7:30 p.m. in the UT Center for Performing Arts Studio Theatre on Main Campus. The play is about the life of disability scholar and activist Hugh Gallagher, who wrote the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 and the book *FDR's Splendid Deception*. Gallagher was a nationally known figure in the disability rights movement, and the Canaday Center preserves his personal papers in its collections.
- Thursday, Nov. 20 — “Warm Springs: Traces of a Childhood at FDR's Polio Haven,” a book signing and talk by Toledo native and author Susan Richards Shreve, Department of English, George Mason University, at 1 p.m. in the Canaday Center. This talk, which is co-sponsored by the President's Lecture Series on Diversity, will focus on Shreve's life with polio and her “coming of age” at the polio treatment facility in Georgia in the 1950s.

For more information on events or to schedule a special showing of the exhibit, contact the Canaday Center at 419.530.4480.