

The Gates Mills Environmental Education Center

The Mayfield School System's "Gates Mills Environmental Education Center" vocational school was a ground-breaking facility in the State of Ohio. In the 1960's the Mayfield School Board under the leadership of Board President, William K. McClung initiated legislation in the State of Ohio to allow school districts to collaborate on behalf of unique education programs. The catalyst for this change stemmed from Mr. McClung's desire to set up a hearing-impaired program at Mayfield's Millridge School. Up until that time, schools had limited resources to support special programs for individual students. Once the laws were changed, it opened up opportunities for these individual districts to pool their resources, and hire dedicated teachers. This approach to multi-district efforts created the outgrowth of vocational programs which changed special and vocational education in the State of Ohio.

In 1971, Dr. Robert G. Stabile was hired by the Mayfield School Board as Superintendent of the Mayfield School System. Dr. Stabile had received monthly newsletters from the State of Ohio with surplus land being made available to the public, and the former Coast Guard Station site at 390 County Line Road in Gates Mills was on the list. The Federal Government had a stipulation that the 30-acre property would be used for educational purposes for a minimum of 30 years.

With the support of William K. McClung, School Board President and the rest of the Board including Carl Brown, Irene Kay, Ted Moses, and Dr. Peter Jones, Dr. Stabile submitted an application for the land with a plan to create an educational horticultural center. Mayfield Schools won the award and on August 14, 1972 the Federal Government deeded the land to the School System for free. They built a facility on the site called the "Mayfield Horticultural Center".

"At the beginning", Dr. Stabile said, "we struggled to find uses for the land. We created community gardens with 10'x10' sites, but there was no water at the site and people didn't want to carry in their own water. We had a program with the elementary children at Center School to plant pine tree seedlings, and when they became seniors, they could cut their tree down for Christmas. Today, many of the evergreen trees on the property were from this program. Then, Gates Mills resident Bobby Griesinger gave the school \$30,000 to hire an environmentalist on staff. That person was Bob Faber."

Today, the Center's Excel TECC program is a consortium which includes ten area school districts. There are over a dozen programs including CAD sciences, cosmetology, culinary arts, digital art, floral design, landscaping, marketing, medical assistant, nursing, performing arts, automotive, welding and construction trades. Becky Gardner, Excel TECC Department Chair said, "We created the "Women in Horticulture" group to help women get into the field; we support students with math, english and biology in our virtual learning lab; we do community service with local food banks; and we teach basic skills including public speaking, etiquette, and we visit colleges. There are over 70 students in our program and many throughout the district on a waiting list to get in." According to George Hughes, long-time Mayfield School Board Member, "80% of these students go on to college, and because they come out of the program with certification, many can work at their trade while furthering their education."

(With thanks to the contributions of Dr. Robert Stabile, George Hughes, Becky Gardner and David Husat)