

# COMING HOME

Alumni weekend offers chance for students, staff to return to Center

The Anne Carlsen Center hosted an alumni weekend from June 27–29, giving former students and staff the opportunity to reconnect and reminisce. Alumni toured the campus and attended banquets and receptions, as well as business meetings and a memorial service for students and staff who have passed away. In speaking with some of the attending alumni, we were privileged to hear many of their stories. We laughed a little, maybe even cried a little, but mostly we just remembered together.

Much was different when **Norman Nelson** entered the Anne Carlsen Center 55 years after he had last seen it.

The brick walls had been replaced, the girls' dorm was now offices, and where the boys' dorm had been located, classrooms now stood.

And then Norman saw her. That face. The one that had been at the center of his life and had helped steer him in the right direction.

Hardly able to contain his excitement, Norman gestured wildly and spoke quickly, exclaiming that he needed a picture of Dr. Anne Carlsen. The Center's namesake had a special way of connecting with students and encouraged them to live life to its fullest.



Anne Carlsen Center Alumni were given the chance to tour the ACC Campus and see what has changed from when they attended school there. The nature trail proved one of the highlights of the tour with its easy access and peaceful environment.

A world-renowned disabilities advocate, she touched many lives during her 60-year career at the Anne Carlsen Center.

“She could walk,” said Norman, eyeing the photo of an older Dr. Anne Carlsen in a power wheelchair.

Norman, who lives in Forman, N.D., was the oldest returning alumni during the Center's school reunion at the end of June. His tour of the Center held many surprises.

When Norman was a student at the Anne Carlsen Center, a total of eight boys or girls slept in one room. Now there are just one or two to a room.

When he approached the area that had been the boys' dorms, the place where young Norman had slept each night, he did not recognize the space. The area that once held beds now contained tables or desks, serving as a classroom. Still, some clues to the rooms' past remained.

The closets in one classroom were original from when the room was the dormitory. In the Sensory Motor area, formerly the Center's gymnasium, the windows are still original, offering moments of recognition.

**Robert Echleberger** laughed when he was asked what had changed since he'd last seen the Anne Carlsen Center.

“Well, I was at the Center when the river went behind it,” he said.

Robert came from Iowa, joining the industrial arts program from 1958 to 1964 and helping to build or adapt numerous items for the school, its staff, the children and the community.



While on his tour of the Anne Carlsen Center, Norman Nelson spent some time in Todd Kollman's workshop learning about some of the projects the engineer is adapting for current students and residents.

“It was a hands-on type of thing that started in the fourth grade,” explained Robert. “We did all sorts of things. When they were publicizing the Buffalo, we made some molds for plastic buffalo cookie cutters and packaged them. One grain elevator needed little plastic packages for small samples of their grain, and we had the kids doing that. We had a lot of fun up there.”



Robert Echleberger, who worked at the Anne Carlsen Center in the 1950s and 1960s, points out details in a photo to his wife, Sadie. Echleberger worked with the ACC's industrial arts program.

It wasn't all work for Robert, who helped build the Center's first pontoon, welding barrels onto a platform that was then taken out on the lake. Time was also spent making sure Center students could utilize tools in the industrial arts program.

“We had one kid who had brittle bones, so we built a platform on wheels for him,” said Robert. “Another kid had hands that were balled up, so we rigged up a device so he could use the band saw.”

Thinking back to his time spent with the Center, Robert said one memory always stood out about Anne Carlsen. “She had the most beautiful handwriting,” he said.

Robert would go on to teach for another three decades, but still held a special place in his heart for the Anne Carlsen Center.

“It just sort of worked out,” he said. “I taught school for 35 years and those were the best six of those 35.”

**Mike Himnan** has fond memories of his high school years at the Anne Carlsen Center.

“I think it made me a better person,” he said. “I'm stronger emotionally and can deal with more life issues.”

Spending time in Jamestown from 1984 until 1988, while Mike didn't get to know Dr. Anne Carlsen as well as others did, he still enjoyed the time he spent with her.

“I knew she was a very nice lady,” said Mike. “For me, that is what the weekend is all about. It is a chance to see everybody again and to make some reconnections.”

As a day student with the Center, **Jim Christ** was one of 50 that would come to the ACC during the day and attend classes, before going home at night. On one occasion when Jim's parents were gone, he stayed at the Center overnight.

“I didn't want to go home, I was having so much fun,” said Jim, who graduated from ACC in 1969. “When my parents came to get me, I cried.”

Jim, who currently lives in Jamestown, still relishes every chance to see his alma mater.

“Since I graduated they have built a swimming pool for the handicapped,” he said. “It is always a joy to go back. It always brings back memories.”

Those memories vary in topic, ranging from kissing a girl in the auditorium, to one student accidentally sending his own powered wheelchair into the pool.



Former ACC student Jim Christ rounds a turn just outside the Center's solarium.

He also remembered, and held a special place in his heart for, the Center's namesake.

“I had the unbelievable privilege to have lunch with her, and that was the first time I had really visited with her,” said Jim. “She had no arms, so you figure, how does she eat? It makes you be very glad you can do what you can do with hands.”

“She had no legs, no feet, but she still drove a car. She appeared on The Today Show and won all sorts of awards.”

**If you made the journey to Jamestown this June, thank you for joining in the celebration of Dr. Anne and the wonderful opportunities she has helped create for individuals with disabilities, both through her life and through the Center.**

**If you were not able to join us, we would love for you to consider coming for a visit during the next alumni reunion, if not sooner.**

**For more information on alumni events, contact Richard or Susan Ovind, the alumni president and vice president, at (701) 252-7102.**