

Diagnostician Is A Assessor

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second in a series of six articles on the Birmingham School System's Department of Special Services. The following stories deal with the visiting teacher, speech correction and the physically handicapped, the adjusted study program and the mentally retarded.

By DENI SCANLON
Staff Writer

"Diagnostician" is not only hard to pronounce, it takes a while to figure out its meaning. "Figuring out" perhaps, is the answer. In the Birmingham School's Special Services Department, there are persons certified as diagnosticians—persons who "figure out" what a child's disability is and what should be done to help increase his academic achievement.

BERNARD MASLANIK, head of the department, explains the diagnostician is actually a school psychologist. In laymen's terms, the job is like that of a city assessor: noting the "foundation, the exterior, the interior of the home, the neighborhood—the whole neighborhood—and result being a total valuation not of property but of a human life. More specifically, the diagnostician looks at a child's intellect, personality, levels of achievement, weaknesses and strengths. Then, after he has interviewed and observed, he integrates his information with opinions from parents, teachers, physicians and others.

THE NEXT STEP is the calling of an Educational Planning Conference. It involves the most essential people: The child's parents, the

principal, the teacher, the doctor, the visiting teacher, the representatives of social agencies in the community—whomever is concerned. A discussion is opened and opinions are given on what can be done. If possible, an educational program would be set up. A decision is reached and the child is placed in the recommended situation.

HOW IS A CHILD referred to the diagnostician? Teachers often discover learning problems in their students. Visiting teachers, physicians and parents, too, seek the help of the school's psychological service. According to Maslanik, there is a great deal of "working together" in the Special Services Department.

THE VISITING TEACHER may help those children who have emotional or social problems. Child guidance clinics and hospital services are available for those who have more serious emotional disturbances. If the child is referred for another type of special education, the diagnostician often serves as a consultant and may work in cooperation with specialists such as the visiting teacher, the speech correctionist, and the instructor for the physically handicapped or the mentally retarded.

THE DIAGNOSTICIAN works very closely in the program for the mentally retarded. Each child must be re-evaluated every two years to determine if the program is working out. "A child's problem may be mostly emotional," Maslanik explained, and if he has overcome the trouble, it is sometimes possible to return the child to the regular classroom situation.

"THEN AGAIN," Maslanik

stated, "he may not be getting anything out of the special class. If there is nothing we can do, we may have to refer the parents to another program or institution. It's a matter of what we can do, but if there's nothing we can do, we must use that space for a child that could possibly be helped."

MASLANIK AND HIS staff work very closely with parents. "A school diagnosis is really a matter of what we can do, but if there's nothing we can do, we must use that space for a child that could possibly be helped."



Ashia Wald, school psychologist, demonstrates one of many tests used by diagnosticians to determine whether or not a child

needs specialized help to solve problems hampering academic progress.

NATURE NOW

By Lydia King Frehse
Special Writer for The Birmingham Eccentric

Reason for Feathers Is More Than Flight

With the coming of winter, every creature in the wild must have its own protective measures. Birds during their last molting period develop a warm coat of feathers. All animals with feathers are birds.

change in spring and autumn. Add these seasonal variations in plumage to the discrepancy in coloring between sexes and age variations and you have a problem in identification. In a feather, nature reaches her crescendo in delightful and indescribable colors. This is true in the tropics where birds outshine flowers in brilliance. These extraordinary colors are produced not only by the pigments present but by the reflection and

refraction of light due to the feather structure.

MOST SCIENTISTS agree that feathers evolved from the scales of reptiles. We have a few scattered imprints of the earliest of these in the rocks of a hundred million years ago. When discovered, these furnished a key to the reconstruction of the story of bird evolution.

Stating that more research is imperative, the American Foundation for the Blind, in the magazine **THE NEW OUTLOOK FOR THE BLIND**, calls for a more dynamic partnership between government, private agencies, universities and the considerable facilities of industry to make a break-through which could yield the basic information necessary to combat the problem of blindness.

DOWN TO EARTH

Holiday Season Revives Decorating Techniques

By ALICE WESSELS BURLINGAME
Special Writer for The Birmingham Eccentric

At this date many of you probably are groping for ideas for the exterior trimming of your home for the holidays. Recently, many of you have mentioned that you are planning to return to the fundamental, old-fashioned mode of decorating which in your memories mean Christmas. Let's review some of the ideas from past years in order to "prime" your ideas. If you trim your front door, remember that your overhead light on the ceiling of your doorway will kill the optimum effect you are striving to achieve. So plan on a spotlight (focus it a foot on the door and focus it on the artistic effect. You can protect the spotlight by grouping a few stones or bricks around it and nestling a few ever-

green boughs in the camouflage of the street side. Your exterior trimming should complement your home architecture. A good way to get inspired for a holiday trim is to stand across the street from your home. If an evergreen tree is called for, Mrs. Burlingame grows one in a hurry by buying one at the tree lot. When a home owner has an attractive flowering crabapple in the front yard, many are using strings of lantern lights in one color. This motif turns Northland into a fairyland at Christmas time. Many of our readers have rural mailboxes. Be sure and plan to trim them with boughs and bows, but don't forget that the substitute mail carriers have to see your number on the box. Your lampposts should also be trimmed to provide a daytime and nighttime interest as well. If you have children, you may wish to use the post as the vertical line for a composition of design using a single, etc., with packages on it. Some of our finest effects for holiday trimming have been achieved by placing an electric candle in each window. If the home has a colonial style, this simple decor, accompanied by a wreath tied with a large red bow and spotlighted at the front door, always stops traffic. Where there is a picture window in the front of the house, many have undertaken to provide an individual design for each glass section which will have indoor and outdoor appeal. Many of these doors have been removed so that the beauty of the design of the wood door can be emphasized by a design. Some people make a design on oil cloth or a similar surface and attach it to their door. On Fourteen Mile Road, one year, an owner had a covering over her front door which looked like shimmering diamonds with a spotlight on it, and used blue and green bulbs which, by the way, are a wonderful combination. You can go a long way using copper screening as a base and then developing an artistic design on it. The most important fact is to make your home a place of holiday beauty to share with others. There is a delightful new book which will especially interest those who are gardeners and good cooks. Often these attributes seem to set in one person. "Glowing Candlelight" by Virginia Murphy tells the story of Mrs. James E. Kierman as a famous restaurateur in New York and Fort Lauderdale. The writer tells of her goal to provide atmosphere with flowers and plants to accompany her superb food. We, who have visited her restaurant, know how much the public is invited to share her tropical garden. It is a showplace developed with a knowledge of rare and fine flowers. The book is divided into three parts. The first tells about her personal life, a little Irish girl who went to New York from Newfoundland, and her experiences building up a

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WEEKLY GIVE

You'll Find Him 'Down at the Station'

By IRMA N. DAVIS
Staff Writer

Some of the best housekeepers are firemen, man!

Take one of the two Birmingham fire stations—the one on Adams at Bowers. As a person could get right off the floor. The beds are made so snug and tight, one could as they say in the army, "drop a quarter on top and it would bounce. Both ends must be dusted twice a day. One of the two captains at this station, Donald Richardson, explains that there is good reason for this all-out emphasis on cleanliness.

"EQUIPMENT MUST be ready to roll at all times," he says, "and besides that, it's part of the discipline. If you don't have that, you don't have a safe crew." Richardson, except for a short period, was a clerk at Birmingham's P. J. Mulholland's and as an inspector at General Motors. Groves has been a member of the local fire department almost all his adult life. Both districts are also given. He moved to Birmingham in 1938, joined the department in 1943. His interest in lighting fires was reinforced, he says, as he listened to his uncle, Dean Groves, discuss "the business." Groves was a Birmingham fireman for years.

RICHARDSON SERVED at the "old station" now the headquarters of the police force in a municipal building—until the new station was completed in 1956. By that time he had moved up the ladder and had been a captain for eight years. His training, Richardson says, "was on the job and continuous. We're drilling all the time and trying to know all the latest techniques and information." The men are encouraged to take the periodic courses at state universities and "of course, the know-how they get is passed on to the next man." With the exception of the dispatcher, department men play a "work alternate 24-hour shift" from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. with "Kelly days" about once a week. A "Kelly day," the captain explains is an extra day off, provided

ing firemen with a three-day break at intervals.

One day on the job begins with roll call, conducted by the captain on duty. Following this, equipment is checked and "then the men follow the daily schedule" which involves a different set of tasks each day. Sitting near the dispatch board, Richardson whipped out a mimeographed sheet listing Monday's jobs which ranged from cleaning of all apparatus — including the underneath part of trucks used for dusting everything from window sills to apparatus. Many of these duties are repeated from day to day.

THE MEN BUY their own food and are assigned in rotation to



DONALD RICHARDSON

cook meals for about three weeks at a time. Most of them are good cooks, the captain says, and "if they have specialties, the others soon find out." Everyone but the cook and the man on watch cleans up. At least six hours a week are used for drills—pump, ladder and other types. If the weather is bad, the drills are held in the "classroom" where blackboard instruction and lectures are also given. Evenings are spent in the "rec room" or outdoors; all men are required to remain on the premises while on duty and also "sit watch" in turn. A minimum of five men go out on every fire. On HIS DAY OFF, Richardson

prefers staying at home with his wife and three daughters: twins Nancy and Sharon, 18, and Mary, 16. The family live on Henrietta Street in Birmingham.

Richardson and I have a lot of fun with our girls. He likes to do construction and woodworking and built the family cottage on Barnes Lake, near LaPlace, from scratch. Fishing and boating are other activities enjoyed by the slim fire captain.

Richardson says there "is no such thing as a grocery fireman. When you might have to wake from a sound sleep and be across town fighting a fire, say four minutes later, you don't have time to fool with another fireman. Someone may need us badly."

THE DEPARTMENT is proud of its ideal: from one to four minutes from a call to a fire, anywhere in the city. The only thing that holds them up, Richardson says, is the occasional person phoning in an alarm that gets out.

"Like the woman who said her house was on fire on Jack Street. We told her there was no such street and then we sounded off all the sirens in Birmingham with her name's names. We hit it with 'George Street.'"

"Sometimes they yell out, 'Our house is on fire,' and hang up. Then we just have to sit and wait till someone calls us again." **OFTEN THE FIREMEN** are called out in the middle of a meal but "no one ever leaves the stove on." Richardson notes with a grin. The department gets calls for help from residents with flooded basements, from pet-owners whose cats are marooned in trees, from others who have locked raccoons in the chimneys of their homes. Many of these calls are also forwarded to other city departments. "Automation," Richardson says, "has moved fire upstairs from the basement but the biggest cause is the fireman's carelessness or neglect." "A fire's a fine thing in a furnace but it's worse than what it's somewhere else—that's a different thing."

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