

THE SKY'S THE LIMIT



One thing can be said with absolute certainty about Sister Maxine Kraemer '72 (M.A.): She

gets things done. Over the course of a teaching career that spanned four decades, Sister Kraemer educated hundreds of students, founded a flourishing school and created hope and opportunity for developmentally disabled children and adults. Although she often ventured into unfamiliar territory, Sister Kraemer never felt alone when she faced the unknown.

"When God asks you to do something, He shows you the way," says Sister Kraemer, who became a member of the Religious of the Sacred Heart after graduating from the order's Lone Mountain (San Francisco) College in 1945. "I had no experience to prepare me for much of the work I did, but when you see something is needed you find a way to make it happen."

Sister Kraemer spent most of her career making things happen for St. Madeleine Sophie's Center in El Cajon, Calif., a school for developmentally disabled children and, later, adults that was established in 1966. By the time she retired 26 years later, the school had grown from one makeshift classroom for preschool-age students into a multibuilding facility serving more than 200 adults ages 22 to 66. The school weathered many challenges and changes, but the philosophy Sister Kraemer brought to the center never wavered.

"People can do so much if you only give them a chance," says Sister Kraemer, who was honored with the Bishop Charles Francis Buddy Award at the Alumni Mass in December. The award is presented annually to an alumna or alumnus in recognition of their extraordinary contribution to humanitarian causes. "Our motto was always the same: The sky's the limit."

If the school motto needed a living example, Sister Kraemer fit the bill. After college, she spent 13 years as a teacher at Sacred Heart schools in San Francisco and Menlo Park, Calif., and earned a master's degree in music from Stanford University. When she arrived in El Cajon, she was asked to help with religious education



Sister Maxine Kraemer '72 (M.A.)

classes for developmentally disabled youngsters, and the idea for St. Madeleine Sophie's Center began to form.

"The parents of these students saw that our classes really made a difference in the lives of their children," Kraemer recalls. "They started asking about a school."

St. Madeleine Sophie's — named for the founder of the Society of the Sacred Heart, St. Madeleine Sophie Barat — was conceived as a preschool, but the need for quality education for older children quickly became apparent.

"I knew from the start that the school was too small," she says. "When I asked for another building, I was told to raise \$100,000 for construction costs. I became a fundraiser right there."

It was not the last time Sister Kraemer ventured outside the classroom. When a task had to be done — planning new facilities, filing construction permits, speaking to community groups, dealing with state regulations, even driving the bus — Sister Kraemer put on another hat. She also found time to earn a master's degree in special education from USD. But her biggest challenge was yet to come.

"In 1975, a state law was passed making free public education accessible to developmentally disabled children for the first time," she says. "Since our students now could go to public school, the board of trustees decided to make the transition to an adult program."

The decision required Sister Kraemer to essentially reinvent the center, but it didn't change her strong belief in the potential of the students. She created a solid curriculum of continuing education, vocational training, arts programs and independent living skills.

Today, hundreds of people realize a better life through St. Madeleine Sophie's, and a bit of Sister Kraemer's heart and spirit is in the success each person achieves. For a nun who says she simply ended up where God wanted her to be, the success of her students affirms that she did God's work well.

— MICHAEL R. HASKINS