

Meet Cover Director Rita Boatman YMCA Child Care Services Fargo, North Dakota

"I was a fish," said the painter.

In 1960, long before Head Start had opened its doors, long before KinderCare had built its first center, the Fargo YMCA launched Kinder Kamp Preschool. Children attending this program were divided into groups — butterflies, turtles, and fish. Over the years, this small preschool has expanded into a multi-faceted child care service, but the group names live on.

One day last summer, Rita Boatman was relaxing at home wearing a Kinder Kamp T-shirt with the group logos. The man painting her house saw the shirt and informed her that 30 years before he had been a fish at Kinder Kamp. Rita was amazed at the deep roots her program had in the community.

Today, YMCA Child Care Services provides a wide range of services to meet the needs of over 1,800 families. In addition to Kinder Kamp, the Y now operates Wise World, a full day child care program for three to five year olds; MASH (Magnificent After School Hours), a before and after school program; Playroom, a drop-in program; Busy Beaver, a summer camp for preschoolers; and a host of craft and play activity events for children and families.

In the mid '80s, when Rita was pursuing her education degree at Valley City State University, she worked summers in Fargo as a Busy Beaver

coordinator. Upon graduating, she bought a small nursery school in Moorhead, Minnesota (Fargo's twin city). Three years later, the Fargo YMCA enticed her to come back and take charge of the entire child care services division.

Although Rita loved the close personal connections she developed with children and families in her own nursery school, she now derives great pleasure from creating new services to reach out to ever more families.

Her current challenges are many:

- She is in charge of a new "international division" of the Fargo Y. This program coordinates home stays for foreign teenagers. In addition, a partnership has been formed between a YMCA in rural Costa Rica and a number of the YMCAs in the Dakotas. Through communication, staff exchanges, and program sharing, both the program in Costa Rica and its US partners have been enriched.
- To accommodate the increasing demand for its child care services, the Fargo Y is currently planning a new facility, to be opened in September 1997, with a capacity of 138 children, ages 3 through 13. A second phase of this project involves adding classrooms for infants and toddlers. A most exciting feature of the center is that it will be housed in a converted barn.



- Recognizing Rita's skill as a staff developer, the national office has selected her as a member of the USA Child Care Certification faculty. In this role, she travels across the United States training YMCA trainers and child care staff.

For a change of pace, Rita enjoys teaching quilt making and craft classes at local colleges, training centers, craft shops, and conferences.

In addition to the opportunity for relaxation and the sense of accomplishment of a finished product, Rita enjoys these activities most because of the satisfaction participants get from creating something — a task so common to childhood but so easily left behind as one gets older.