

Billings Fairchild Center

First Bank's Community Partner Road Trip hit the pavement again to help share the stories of area businesses. This time, the road crew went north and visited The Billings Fairchild Center. Most folks in this area have heard of the facility, but few actually know its story. Kelly Hardin was gracious enough to not only answer all of our questions, but to give us the grand tour as well.



The facility was founded by Kelly's father, Al Hardin, as a 40 bed nursing home in 1963. Subsequent to receiving legislative assistance from then U.S. Senator Henry Bellmon, the facility was converted from a traditional nursing home, into a Habilitative Training Facility. If you're like we were, you're probably wondering, "what's the difference?" Kelly explained that BFC's residents are screened and diagnosed as developmentally displaced by age 21, whereas residents of a traditional nursing home are characterized by having a medical need. He continued by sharing that nursing home residents have an average stay of about five months, while BFC has an average length of residency of approximately 25 years.

We also learned that the facility has received multiple expansions and/or modernizations over the years. BFC presently houses approximately 140 residents in a facility that now totals about 40,000 square feet.

With that many residents and a facility that large, you're probably curious about BFC's staff. The facility presently employs about 110 highly trained individuals. The personnel range from medical staff to certified trainers to administrative personnel to a maintenance staff that is capable and qualified to do just about any type of maintenance or construction project that the facility might need. We discovered that the longevity of the residents is matched by the longevity of the staff.



We were lucky enough to run into Bennie Smith during our tour. Bennie celebrated 45 years of continuous employment on February 1, 2012. In case you're doing the math, BFC and Bennie were both very young when he started.

As we mentioned earlier, each resident receives an intense screening prior to admittance into the BFC community. The certified training staff conducts daily classes to help each individual attain the highest level of functional independence for everyday life. They in turn meticulously document each resident's development for the duration of their residency.

The daily classes are tailored to the individual level of development and include subjects such as community living skills, social skills, money management, self-administration of medication and life skills. Activities integrated into the training process include excursions on one of two buses named by the residents, The Get-A-Round and The Get-A-Bout. Residents are transported to the bank, the bowling alley, Special Olympics events, county fairs, or any number of other community events. Additionally, the residents are routinely treated to church services, dances and picnics.



Many of the residents at BFC have jobs. Management of the facility contracts as many jobs to the residents as possible. This contributes to the residents' development and puts some money in their pockets for their excursions. Jobs include daily laundry and our favorite, the crafts room. And yes, all of the crafts made at the facility are for sale, with proceeds being split between the residents and the acquisition of additional supplies.



Having this facility in Billings turns out to be a benefit to all involved. Not only is BFC the largest single employer in Billings, but its residents are known by first name around town, making them right at home in the community.

Well, it's time we quit rambling about our trip to The Billings Fairchild Center. We're sure that everyone can tell how much we enjoyed ourselves. We wish we had more time to tell some other interesting tidbits, like when a very young Kelly Hardin mixed mud for over two years while helping his dad and uncle brick the entire facility, or tell how the maintenance staff designed and built some of the best picnic furniture we've ever seen. But then again, maybe we did have enough time.

For more information on Billings Fairchild Center, visit www.billingsfairchild.com.

Stayed tuned for our next road trip, and please contact y.dow@bankfbt.com if you'd like for us to visit your business.