



BATAVIA—Where The Blind Learn To Lead

By LEE COPOLLA

CLOSE your eyes for a second. Dark, wasn't it? That's the kind of darkness Civil Service Employees Assn. members try to combat each day at a small, university-looking school in Batavia, New York.

At the school, the Batavia State School for the Blind, sightless children faced with spending all their seconds in that darkness work without vision to learn the ways of a seeing world.

Besides the education and training the school accomplishes each year, it stands unique in two other

ways. From the standpoint of State citizens, it is the only State-funded of three schools for the blind in New York.

From the CSEA standpoint, it employs nearly 129 workers to teach and care for the children and the school. All belong to the CSEA.

"We figure anything worth doing is worth doing 100 percent," explains Anthony L. Cimino about the CSEA role at the school.

Cimino, guidance counselor, and, incidentally, blind, says the CSEA "seems like the logical way to promote the welfare of the staff."

He also tells a spell-binding tale

of the school's work with the sightless youngster, a job that begins when a child reaches five and must end when he reaches 21, or anywhere along the way the school feels the student knows enough to fend for himself in the outside world.

Stress Daily Living

"In every phase of our school program, we stress daily living," Cimino relates. "The skills of daily living, taking care of themselves and the places they live," earns, along with classroom work, the passing grades at the school, he says.

Students at the Batavia school, he added, must be taught the skills their sighted counterparts learn at early ages through observation.

"Each meal becomes a lesson in daily living skill," explains Cimino, while noting the students also learn the basic rudiments of dressing, personal grooming and self-care.

But mobility and vocational or college preparatory instruction form the nucleus of the school, especially mobility.

"We have a regular and complete course in mobility," Cimino explains. It starts when the child first arrives and is taught how to find dropped objects and travel among the complex of buildings that form the campus.

Learn To Navigate

Next, the student learns how to navigate in the vicinity of the campus, in the world of sight. He's taught traffic patterns, curbing, how to cross streets in straight lines by positioning his feet on the curb, how to use the cane properly, how to ask for directions and how to use public transportation.

"It's very important that every sense is used in teaching travel," Cimino notes. "You must use your smell to know a restaurant is near, or your hearing to listen for traffic."

"Some kids don't get off campus," Cimino notes, "but some crackerjacks are downtown in two months."

The school, accredited by the State to award both elementary and high school diplomas, also plays a major part in determining the work future of the students.



Frank Eberle, 13, of Buffalo, is blind, but he does have light perception. The camera catches him in a candid moment as he jumps to touch a hallway dome light at the Batavia State School for the Blind. "I always go around jumping for the lights, that's all I can see," Frank says.

Various vocational courses, from the traditional piano technology to secretarial and machine-shop work all dot the school's curriculum.

The school has 175 students. Cimino figures about 110 will make it to the end of high school, where 18, the most in the school's history, were graduated last year.

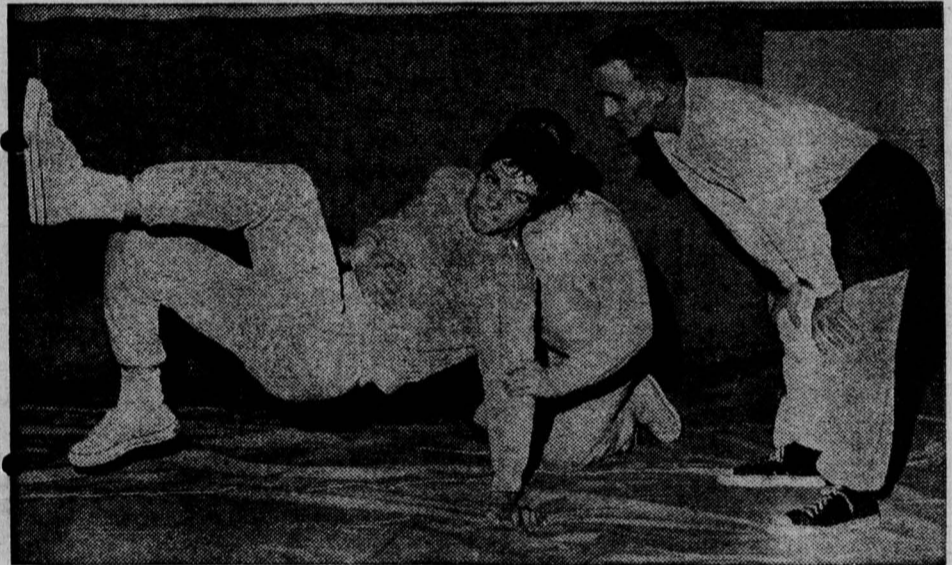
Of the 18, ten went on to college. The others went into stand concessions, office work and further in piano technology.

Unique Problems

The school offers problems, but it offers unique statistics about young persons.

"We have no discipline problems. Our kids have never caused any vandalism and we've never, never had a case of drug involvement," Cimino brags.

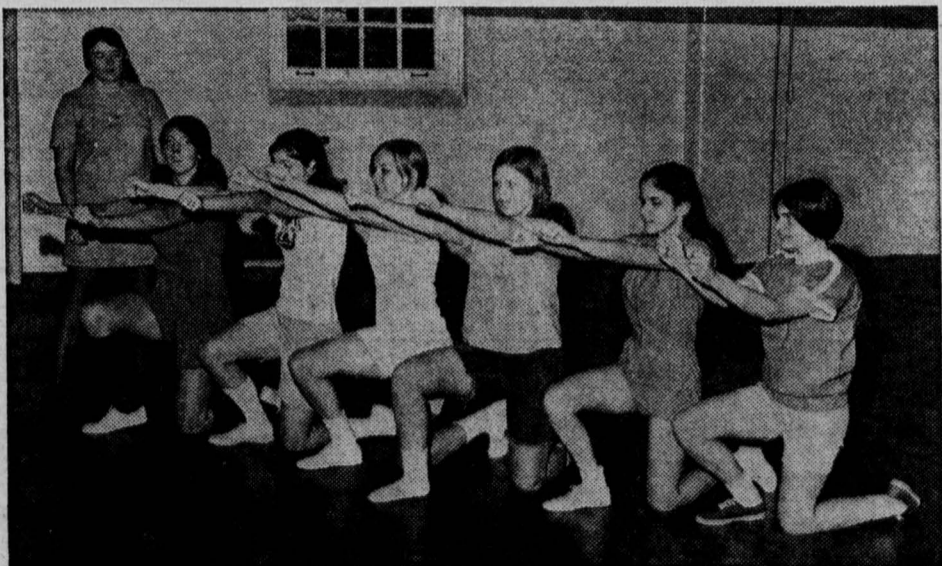
(Continued on Page 12)



Robert Kennedy, 16, of Lockport, practices a wrestling sit-out while working out with Milt Dimon, 20, of Philadelphia, N. Y., in preparation for a wrestling match between their school, the Batavia State School for the Blind, and a neighboring high school. Coach Donald C. Gugel, a physical education teacher and one of 40 faculty members belonging to the CSEA chapter at the school, watches.



Kevin McCarthy, right, in his fourth year as president of the CSEA chapter at the Batavia State School for the Blind, helps lower the flag at the end of the day with Julius Miklinski, a fellow member of the custodial staff at the school. "I don't know exactly how many employees we have at the school, but I know they all belong to CSEA," boasts McCarthy about the school staff's 100 percent CSEA membership.



The girls of Margaret Spittler's physical education class at the Batavia State School for the Blind, practice a cheer for a wrestling match the school faces against a neighboring high school. That's Miss Spittler, a CSEA member, watching at left.

Sightless? Yes; Blind? No!

(Continued from Page 11)

"We have a tremendous recreational program," he adds, explaining it provides swimming, skating, sledding, Scouting, music, dancing, dramatics, wrestling and cheer-leading.

The students return home once each month, when the school closes on a Friday for a long week end. The students also spend all holidays and Spring and Summer vacations at their homes.

"Their communication contacts are much greater than they ever have been," explains Cimino.

"It's difficult to describe," he adds, the surge of self-confidence the students feel when they realize they can move about freely and with assurance."

"It's all helps," he thinks, to wipe out the "someone-selling-pencils-on-a-street-corner" stereotype that tended to restrict the sightless to a separate day-to-day world.



Anthony L. Cimino, left, blind guidance counselor at the Batavia State School for the Blind, and Richard I. Lowenthal, a teacher of the multiply impaired, chuckle during a tete-a-tete about an upcoming social function. Both men, part of a faculty of 40 at the school, belong to the Civil Service Employees Assn.