

# Black Mtn. Center Marks Anniversary, Name Change

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BLACK MOUNTAIN – Staff, friends, residents and retirees of the Black Mountain Center gathered Thursday to celebrate 70 years of service, and to rededicate and rename the center.

The new name, Black Mountain Neuro-Medical Treatment Center, reflects the focus on treatment of people with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, and of adults with developmental disabilities who also have other medical conditions.

"All of us who are privileged to work here today stand in awe of the many dedicated people who came before us," said Genny Pugh, director of the center.

The center opened in 1937 as a treatment center for tuberculosis. In 1982, it became what was known as a mental retardation center, one of five in the state. Planning began for the Alzheimer's unit in 1988, and in 2004, the center began accepting aging people with developmental disabilities and other medical needs.

"It is our hope and our plan to add at least two more residential treatment components to this center: one for geopsychiatry and one for treatment of people with (traumatic brain injury)," Pugh said.

The state has had a short supply of beds for traumatic brain injuries for years, said Mike Moseley, director of the N.C. Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services.

Lib Harper worked at the center during the 1960s, when African-Americans were in a segregated wing.

"Before that opened, African-Americans had to go to the eastern end of the state, hundreds of miles from their families and loved ones, for months of treatment," she said.

Dr. Ozmer Henry started work at the center in 1954 and went on to become its director.

"They were going to close this place in the late 1970s," he said. "We got out into the community with petitions and letter-writing campaigns, and we saved it."

Henry still works at the center one or two days a month, checking records.

"In the late 1930s and early 1940s, it would not have been possible to see what would transpire here," Pugh said. "... I'm not sure that Dr. Henry and his colleagues would have believed that people at this facility would ride horses and go swimming, that they would hold dogs on their laps."

But, Pugh added, some things haven't changed: "People still take walks in the fresh air here," she said. "Families still gather on the porch or on the lawns to share good food from home."