

Clausen House – where independence starts at home

By Kathleen Callahan

The year was 1967 and Edwin and Shirley Clausen were house hunting. They already had a lovely home in Piedmont, but their daughter, who had been born with developmental disabilities, was nearing adulthood and would soon need a home of her own.

Like most young people, their daughter had the desire to live as independently as possible when she grew up, and like most parents the Clausens wanted the best for their daughter. They had dreamed that one day she might be able to grow and thrive as an adult, living in her own home in the community where she had grown up. However, because of her disability, the only place she would be able to live, other than her parents' house, was in an institution like Agnews State Hospital.

Together with the Pahlmeyer, Kelley, Betts, Young and Phelps families, the Clausens had already created an organization through which they hoped their developmentally disabled children could live independently, in a setting where they would have the support they needed to deal with the daily tasks of living. Most importantly, they would have their own home, *and* it would be in Oakland.

Now all they needed was a house. When the Henry J. Kaiser mansion on Haddon Hill came up for sale, the group realized it was the home they had been looking for. They bought it and staffed it with their own funds: Clausen House was born.

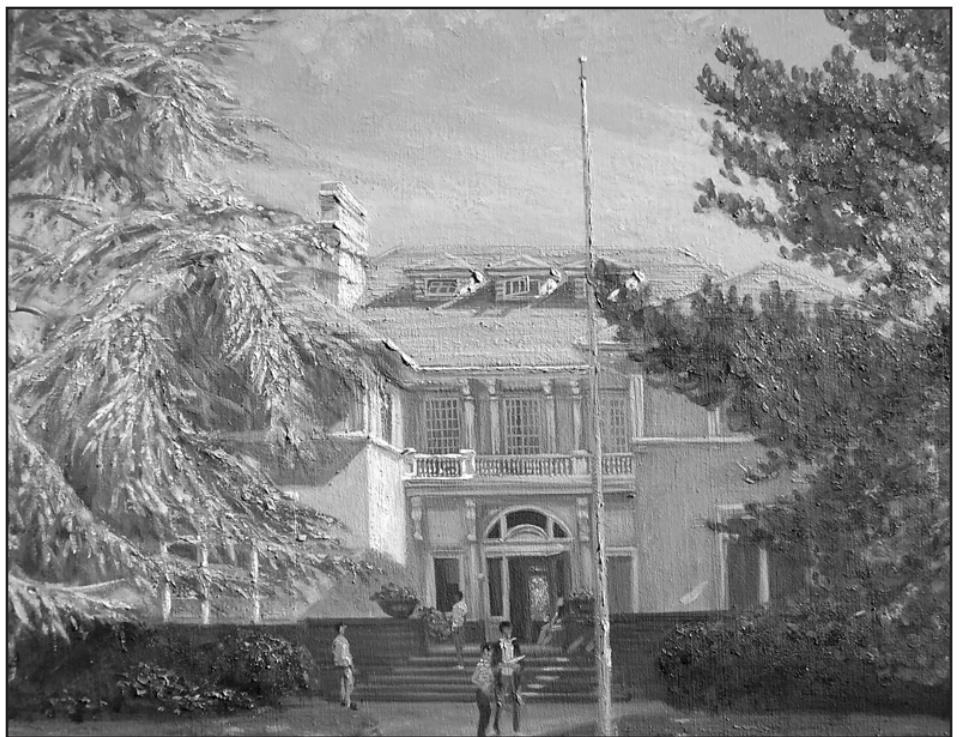
Growing the dream

Recently I stopped by the residence on Perkins Street to visit with Residential Administrator Barbara Lang, who started with Clausen House in 1972, and is the organization's longest-term employee. With her was Senior House Manager Mattie Abner, another Clausen House veteran who joined in 1979. I wanted to learn more about the history of this nonprofit organization, and how it has evolved from operating one residence on Haddon Hill to being the most comprehensive provider in Alameda County of services designed to allow adults with developmental disabilities to learn, work, grow and contribute as true members of the community.

Once the first house was established, it didn't take long for the organization to grow, they told me. Ten years later Clausen House owned and operated group homes on Haddon, Harrison, Euclid, Adams, Vernon, Belmont, Perkins and Montecito – all in Oakland.

During a period when many large old homes in Adams Point were being torn down to make way for apartment buildings, Clausen House was able to purchase several of them, helping to maintain the residential character of the neighborhood. Included among them, and still owned by Clausen House, are the historic Earl Warren mansion by famed architect Arthur Brown, as well as Brown's own home on the corner of Perkins and Vernon.

In 1976 the organization was able to purchase a 12-unit apartment building on Lenox Avenue to inaugurate what is now its Independent Living Services program, the first of its kind in Northern California, which enables adults with developmental disabilities to live in their own apartments. Today the program serves 40 individuals in apartments



In celebration of Clausen House's 30th anniversary in 1997, artist Anthony Holdsworth was commissioned to paint a portrait of the Clausen House residence and administrative offices at 88 Vernon Street, a registered historic landmark, and the former home of former Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren and his family.

and houses throughout the East Bay.

Living, working, contributing

At 10 a.m. on a recent weekday, the elegant old house on Perkins Street was quiet and serene, all its residents busy elsewhere with jobs, classes and volunteer work.

Jackie Caro, Clausen's most senior resident at 70, was busy helping take care of patients at Rounseville Rehabilitation Center, where she has volunteered for 30 years. Melissa Poe, another resident of Perkins, was at R.E.I. in Berkeley stocking racks of clothes. Other Clausen House residents were on the job at Safeway, Walgreen's and other local businesses. Almost all are clients of the Clausen House Supported Employment Program, which helps them obtain jobs and provides them with job training and the continuous coaching they need to succeed.

At the same time employers are being provided with dedicated and reliable employees.

Perkins resident Edward Kohl was attending the Adult Education Program at 650 Grand Avenue where he takes classes in Science, Vocational Preparation, Singing, Functional Academics, Relationships and Exercise. In his Work Skills/Environmental Action class, the students participate in civic beautification projects such as picking up litter around Lake Merritt. Edward is also an enthusiastic member of the Clausen House Board of Directors, lending a program participant's perspective to governance.

The Adult Education Program serves 65 students and the Community Center is also used for a host of other activities, including lively parties and dances.

The Art Show coming up on Friday, August 5 from 6-8 p.m., is open to the public and draws many avid collectors.

Kieran Cooper of Piedmont, another longtime Perkins resident, was out volunteering at the busy Clausen House Thrift Store on Telegraph Avenue. Other clients volunteer at the SPCA, the Alameda County Food Bank and St. Paul's Church.

The good life

After Mattie and Barbara filled me in on the beginnings of Clausen House, I asked them to describe what life is like at Perkins on a day-to-day basis, and what their duties are. They told me that a staff member is always on duty, and the job includes helping the residents with budgeting, developing appropriate social skills, self-advocacy, learning to choose and prepare healthy foods, and what to do during an emergency. They also help the many housemates to interact in a positive way.

Clausen House ensures that all residents are given excellent medical care through health care providers in the community, and that they are current on all recommended preventative health tests.

With assistance, the residents do light housekeeping chores, help with meals and wash and dry their own clothes. An all-important House Meeting is held once a week. It's a time when issues like handling disagreements and negative emotions are discussed. Living with 11 other people is never easy, however by remembering to respect others, these residents have proven it can be achieved.

Including the population at Perkins, Clausen House provides residential care for 37 people in its three group homes. It provides a number of services for adults living with developmental disabilities in the East Bay, and all programs have been directly impacted by the state budget crisis. As long as the budget shortfall continues, Clausen House and other human service agencies will experience deep and damaging cuts to their funding.

The mission of Clausen House is to create opportunities for adults with developmental disabilities to gain competency, develop relationships and join the community with increasing demand over their own lives. To find out more about how to support Clausen House, contact Jessica Derrick, Director of Development, at 839-1114 or e-mail jess@clausenhouse.org.