

# Neighbor

**BORN LOSER** | SEE COMICS  
BY ART & CHIP SANSON | ON PAGE 3

SECTION 5



NL1

# 'It gives them a whole life'

*Lambs Farm is celebrating 50 years of serving adults with developmental disabilities and their families*

**By MELISSA SILVERBERG**  
*Daily Herald Correspondent*

Most parents worry about their children, but when Jim Zils' son was born with microcephaly, a birth defect that kept his brain from fully developing, Zils and his wife knew their concerns would be different.

"When you have a developmentally disabled child, you have to think about the future," Zils said about his son, Jon.

Jon Zils, now 35, lives and works at Lambs Farm in Libertyville, a nonprofit organization that serves adults with developmental disabilities. As Lambs Farm celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2011, Jim Zils said they are one of hundreds of families the organization has helped give peace of mind for the future.

Lambs Farm started in 1961 as a small pet store on State Street in downtown Chicago, giving adults with developmental disabilities a place to work, said Lambs' Executive Director Dianne Yaconetti.

In the early 1960s, there was a lot of confusion about people with developmental disabilities, which led to very dark lives for those who weren't accepted by society, Yaconetti said.

"The idea was not only to teach them skills and tasks, but also to give the general public the opportunity to interact and realize they are just people," she said. "The whole idea was to start the conversation and improve lives."



Lambs Farm participant Dale Palkoner sorts toffee at the Country Inn Restaurant. Lambs Farm in Libertyville celebrates its 50th anniversary in September.

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After a few years, the organization moved to its Libertyville location and continued expanding. In time, various arms were added to the organization, including the restaurant and residential living opportunities for participants.

Lambs Farm started building residences in 1975, and today 180 people live on campus and more are on a waiting list.

"This gives them a semblance of a life of their own," Yaconetti said. "They go to work, they have friends, they play sports, they go out in the community and they aren't completely dependent on their families."

Jim Zils said Lambs Farm has had a dramatic effect on his family, as his son has been involved in programs there for 20 years and lived there for nearly 15.

"He's more independent," Jim Zils said. "You visit the Lambs campus and you'll see individuals who really do have a sense of self worth and community."

Jon Zils works with the grounds and maintenance crew at Lambs Farm, keeping the grass neat in the summer and the paths clear of snow in the winter. His dad said he has been amazed to watch his son's verbal and social skills improve over the years.

"He loves the work he's doing and the people he's



Participant Jon Zils stretches during an exercise class at Lambs Farm in Libertyville, one of the many programs offered at the facility.

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working with," Jim Zils said. "They've taught him things that 10 years ago I wouldn't even have thought he could do."

Jon Zils has also been able to take advantage of special quest classes at Lambs Farm, which aim to teach participants fun and practical life skills, ranging from handling money and working with computers to horseback riding and photography.

The work at Lambs Farm has grown to be nationally recognized over the past half-

century, attracting families from across the country.

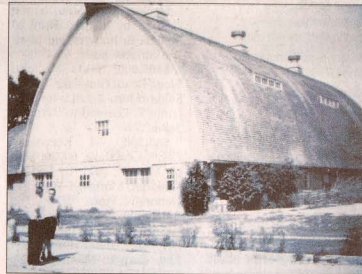
Although Bob Wallace lived in Florida with his family, during his work as a pilot for United Airlines he'd heard about the services offered at Lambs Farm. After his retirement and his wife's company relocated her to the Chicago area, the Wallaces immediately went to Lambs for more information for their daughter, Elizabeth.

After Elizabeth was born, her parents soon noticed she was significantly delayed in

her development. Doctors never pinpointed a cause for the delay but Elizabeth Wallace, now 28, is developmentally at the stage of a 5 year old.

Though Elizabeth Wallace lives at home, she works and participates in the programs at Lambs Farm, including playing eight sports through Special Olympics, her father said.

"It gives them a whole life," he said. "It's not just a facility or a day care. It's a social life, activities, weekends, jobs, friends."



COURTESY OF LAMBS FARM

Historic photo of where the current pet shop is located at Lambs Farm near Libertyville.

Bob Wallace said although they aren't ready to have their daughter leave home yet, she is on a list waiting for residential placement, which gives them comfort to know there will be a home for her there someday.

"When you have a baby and you realize you have this issue, you're just so afraid for the future," Bob Wallace said. "As you age as a parent, you get more worried about where she is going to go. You don't want to put that burden on the siblings. This is the first time in my life I've felt this comfort and relief to know that she has somewhere to go where they'll take care of her. And that's

everything."

As Lambs Farm celebrates its 50th year, Yaconetti said officials are looking to improve and add more services. They are working on writing a third book about its history to explain its importance in the community.

Yaconetti has been with Lambs Farm since the early 1990s and said she is thrilled to spend her life with the participants every day.

"The participants are such delightful human beings. They don't take anything for granted. Every good thing that happens to them is a gift," she said. "I never had any children of my own and now I have almost 200."



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Lambs Farm in Libertyville will be celebrating its 50th anniversary this September.

# Anniversary party features a '60s theme

*Lambs Farm submission*

Hearken back to this defining decade with Lambs Farm's 50th anniversary community celebration, "Celebrating the '60s: Peace, Love and Lambs."

Bring your blankets and chairs for a full day of music, activities, food and fun from 2 to 9:30 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 20, at Lambs Farm, 14245 W. Rockland Road, Libertyville.

What is a '60s celebration without groovy tunes? You'll be "All Shook Up" when Travis Morris takes the stage as the king himself, Elvis Presley.

And don't forget to "Twist and Shout" when the Beatles tribute band American English performs as the headline band at 7 p.m.

Additional bands and a DJ will also provide music

throughout the event.

Although children will not remember the '60s, they can get into the fun as well. There will be a giant inflatable and many activities. Ben the Bubble Guy will create giant bubbles during the day, and Harvey the Wonder Dog, star of books such as "Harvey's Hungry Adventure," will be on hand for book readings and to meet fans.

The farmyard, carousel and mini golf course will be open late, so don't miss this opportunity to visit with the llamas and sheep as the sun goes down. Food will also be available for purchase.

Tickets are \$10 at the gate, free for kids ages 12 and younger.

To purchase tickets call (847) 990-3775. For details, visit [lambsfarm.org](http://lambsfarm.org).