

The Donna Nigh Foundation: Working Together to Make a Difference

Every cause needs a champion. For the developmentally disabled citizens of Oklahoma, that champion is Donna Nigh.

For more than 40 years, Mrs. Nigh has worked tirelessly to improve the quality of life for the developmentally disabled. Her husband, former Oklahoma governor George Nigh, is her biggest advocate. In 1982, during her husband's second term, she used her status as the state's first lady to encourage the passage of legislation that provided funding for group homes. The legislation modified zoning laws in order to allow group homes in neighborhoods and to increase the number of shelter workshops such as the Dale Rogers Training Center. The center is the largest of its type in Oklahoma that provides training and employment for adults with developmental disabilities. The legislation is now part of the annual state budget and is known as the Donna Nigh Group Home Program. In 1997, President Bill Clinton appointed Mrs. Nigh to the President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities.

In 1985, a group of her friends created the Donna Nigh Foundation, the first statewide foundation for the benefit of the developmentally disabled. The Nighs transferred the assets of the private foundation to the Oklahoma City Community Foundation in 1997 and continue to remain very active in the distribution of grants. Organizations can apply for grants that support environmental and recreational adaptations, classroom equipment and shelter workshop equipment and activities. Individuals and families are eligible for assistance with purchasing aids for daily living, mobility seating and positioning, classroom equipment and environmental and recreational adaptations.

In Fiscal Year 2013, the Donna Nigh Foundation awarded a grant to the Dale Rogers Training Center to support the installation of a crosswalk to allow clients to safely cross Utah Street to access a new 11,000-square-foot training and skills development building. The type of sidewalk installed is considered the safest available. It features in-ground amber LED lights, pedestrian signage, audible sounds and automatic pedestrian detection.

"The crosswalk allows our clients with disabilities to go back and forth between programs on campus safely. It is high tech and expensive, but the board of directors decided if it kept even one of our clients or staff from being injured that it was worth the expenditure," says Connie Thrash McGoodwin, executive director. "We are so grateful for the Oklahoma City Community Foundation that allows donors like the Nighs to help us defray the cost of this essential piece of equipment."

The Dale Rogers Training Center is named for the singer, actor and author who was also married to the singing cowboy, Roy Rogers. When they married in 1947, both had children from previous marriages. Their own biological child, Robin, died before her second birthday from complications of Down Syndrome. Robin's short life inspired Mrs. Rogers to write the bestseller "Angel Unaware" that helped to begin to change the public's perceptions of special needs children. In 1953, the same year the book was published, parents of children with developmental disabilities formed the Oklahoma County Council for Mentally Retarded Children, a place that was safe and caring for their children. In honor of Mrs. Rogers and her book, the council was renamed the Dale Rogers Training Center. By 1975, the young children for whom the school was founded were beyond school age so the organization began a transition to a vocational training and employment center. The Dale Rogers Training Center celebrated its 60th anniversary in October 2013 with the public opening of a new gift shop. The shop also features "Robin's Corner," a museum display that includes items belonging to Robin Rogers.

Both native Oklahomans, the couple have spent most of their adult lives in public service. In 1950, Mr. Nigh was elected to his first term in the state House of Representatives while he was a senior attending East Central University in Ada. He would go on to serve eight years in the House, 16 years as our state's Lieutenant Governor and eight years as Governor. In addition to their commitment to improving the lives of developmentally disabled Oklahomans, both are longtime advocates of education for all Oklahomans. In 1999, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education established the George and Donna Nigh Scholarship for qualified students who are preparing for careers in public service. The award is open to any student attending a college or university in Oklahoma.

Donors

Special Donors	12
Family Affiliated Funds	18
Benefactors	24
Major Donors in Fiscal Year 2013	32
Endowment Donors	69



Above: Donna and George Nigh are joined at the crosswalk by Connie Thrash McGoodwin, executive director of Dale Rogers Training Center, and several clients of the center. The Dale Rogers Training Center celebrates its 60th anniversary in 2013. Left: Dale Rogers Training Center clients cross Utah Avenue utilizing one of the safest crosswalks in the country. A grant from the Donna Nigh Foundation helped to fund the construction of the crosswalk.

Photos by Brandon Snider

