

Idaho's First Private Developmental Center Celebrates 30 Years of Service

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Thirty years ago, Martin Landholm founded the first privately-owned developmental disabilities agency in the state.

Now, at age 75, Landholm says he doesn't see himself quitting any time soon.

His wife, Rosalie, 74, also works full-time at Gem State Developmental Center, which has two Meridian and two Nampa locations.

"We're not ready to sit at home and try to determine what television program we want to watch," Martin Landholm said. "We like what we do here." What they and about 45 other staff members do is offer day programs to help adults and children reach goals and build daily living skills.

Landholm got his start in the industry in 1964 at the Idaho state hospital in Nampa, which had about 1,000 patients at the time.

"I see and remember so many individuals that were institutionalized who should have never, ever been placed in an institution to begin with, but there were no other services available," Landholm said. " ... There was a time when this population was not received very well outside of the institution. There was an attitude by a lot of people that these 'funny' people, that's where they belong, was in state institutions."

But Landholm wanted to provide another option for these individuals — many of whom were children — and their families. He helped the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare create developmental centers in seven regions, but wanted to go beyond that.

When he founded Gem State in 1983, Landholm pioneered the private industry in Idaho that offered services to the developmentally disabled. Now, Idaho has about 75 other agencies like it. It's hard work that doesn't come with a big paycheck, Landholm said, but it is so rewarding and meaningful he doesn't want to stop.

"I have seen those kids leave the institution, come into the community, be involved in these kinds of community-based services and become a citizen in the community just like you and I," he said. "And realizing they still have their developmental disability, but leading a life that is enjoyable and with things that they have to look forward to just like the rest of us. ... And fortunately now the community for the most part is very accepting and understanding of people who have mental retardation or some type of a developmental disability." Being a part of those success stories is what keeps the Landholms going.

"(People) have asked us why we haven't retired," Martin Landholm said. "And we said, 'Because we like the things that we're doing, the services that we're providing.' ... We like seeing the positive changes that happen with the people we serve."



Martin Landholm founded Gem State Developmental Center in 1983, Idaho's first private agency of its kind. At age 75, Landholm said he's not looking to retire anytime soon. "We like seeing the positive changes that happen with the people we serve," he said.



Brenda Ward, 22, works on a yarn project at the center. Ward has been a participant in the center's day programs for about three years.