

By HENRY BURY
Staff Reporter

Nancy Heinen and Tim Kelly have been classmates ever since kindergarten and now the grade 12 students will be joining the workforce when they graduate in June.

Both are students at Sir James Whitney School, one of four regional centres for the hearing impaired in Ontario. Sir James Whitney provides services for the hearing impaired students living in Eastern and Northern Ontario up to the ages of 21.

Gary Gervis, principal of the senior school, said both students illustrate what one of the school's primary objectives is "to make them employable in skilled jobs."

Heinen, who drives back and forth from Picton every school day, said she would like to get a business job, in such areas as keypunch, data-processing and word-processing. Her second choice would be to enrol in George Brown College in Toronto.

Heinen, said through an interpreter, Sir James Whitney has already provided her with on-the-job training in the business world.

She's been captioning television shows in the school's media centre, as well as taking courses in general office practices in the school's commercial department. During the March break, Heinen was employed at the Unemployment Insurance Commission offices as keypunch operator.

Kelly, who's lived in Belleville for the last two years, wants to become a machinist. While at Sir James Whitney, he's been involved in the vocational programs, from machine shop to auto body and welding. And in the last two years, he's had on-the-job training at Wilson Automotive every Monday.

The senior school principal said the on-the-job training is a vital component of the grade 11-12 students' curriculum.

"One or two days a week, they get experience in the areas of business, machine shop, welding, etc. About 30 students are on this program now. We can teach skills here, but the on-the-job training gives students experience dealing with hearing people. They learn the work ethic. We can generalize in our courses, but students can get specialized training in on-the-job training," Gervis said.

There are about 330 kindergarten to grade 12 students attending Sir James Whitney, said the school's superintendent, Catherine Michalski.

Located on 91 acres of land on Dundas Street West in Belleville, the school employs about 260 people, 90 of whom are instructional, 72 residential counsellors, six home-visiting teachers and the rest support services staff.

The school for the hearing handicapped consists of an academic and vocational school for elementary and secondary students, student residences, a child study

centre which includes audiological and psychological facilities, a gymnasium and auditorium and supporting facilities such as dining rooms, laundry, heating plant and maintenance buildings.

Sir James Whitney also has the only teacher education media centre in the province. Elgin Vader, a teacher-education specialist-media, transcribes a regular CBC children's news show specifically for viewing by the hearing impaired. The centre is now involved in captioning regular television shows for viewing by the hearing impaired students.

The only training facility for teaching teachers for the deaf is also located at Sir James Whitney.

At one time, the centre had up to 50 teachers enrolled in the 10-month course, but over the last couple of years, the number of applicants has been reduced to 20.

Bernice Ryan, principal of the teacher-education centre, said it's been in operation here since 1924. Up until 1967, it was operated by the school, but after that, it became a separate program on the campus of the school, run directly under the central office of the ministry of education.

Graduates from the program either enter the four provincial schools for the hearing impaired or the various school boards which operate special classes for the hearing-impaired.

Michalski said the school is trying to be "very flexible" in its programming to meet the individual needs of students.

"We have total communication programs for some students and oral classes for others... We hope to widen the number of options available to our students," the superintendent said.

Michalski said Sir James Whitney is hoping to become part of the special school of the future project, sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation of America.

"We're looking at the changing roles of the schools for the deaf, and trying to encourage local boards in the province to provide services in the home environment. On the other hand, we'll be looking at becoming more of a resource to school boards and taking in more and more of the very-hard-to-serve students," she noted.

With the passing of Bill 82--which forces provincial school boards to provide special education programs to students-- the school will be "giving more and more time as 'resource people to other boards'", Michalski said.

One of the school's pilot projects this year is the pre-school nursery for hearing-impaired students in Thunder Bay. A home-visiting teacher spends two-fifths of his time in the nursery with the children.

The school also has eight television decoders which are being used by the media centre to caption regular television shows. "We hope to improve their reading skills," she said.