

'School of future' will cater to needs of deaf population

By HENRY BURY
Staff Reporter

Sir James Whitney School, one of three provincial schools for the deaf, is the first and only Canadian school to receive funding from an American foundation to better serve the deaf population.

The Belleville school will be receiving a total of \$250,000 over the next three years from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation of Battle Creek, Mich. as part of the special school of the future project. The project's aim is to make schools for the deaf better resource centres for meeting the needs of the deaf population.

This project is being administered through Gallaudet College in Washington, D.C., the only university for the deaf in the world.

The Belleville school for the deaf, which serves about 330 children from northern and eastern Ontario, will be one of six schools for the deaf, five others are in the United States, which will be working over the next three years "in evolving the concept of the special school of the future," says Catherine Michalski, superintendent of Sir James Whitney.

Michalski said Wednesday the provincial school, which is also a regional resource centre for the deaf, was one of three new schools for the deaf added this year for the foundation's project.

Besides Sir James Whitney, the other five American schools for the deaf involved in the project are in Georgia, California, Louisiana, Buffalo, and Wisconsin.

"The main focus of the special school of the future project is to develop the special school for the deaf as a model resource centre in the field of deafness for children in their own programs; deaf children in public school settings; families of deaf children, including pre-schoolers and adults, and the professional community and the community in general," Michalski said.

The \$250,000, she noted, will be used to put on workshops for its staff and staff from other schools associated with Sir James Whitney, to pay for educational exchanges between the school and other professionals, and the hiring of experts to conduct workshops in problems dealing with the deaf.

The school will also have access to the expertise that is available at Gallaudet College in the area of deafness.

"We hope to be able to develop even more expertise ourselves so that we can evolve with the changing needs of the deaf community and the local school boards," Michalski said.

Guy Buller, co-ordinator of

resource services for the school, said the objectives of the foundation's project, are "congruent" with the overall objectives now being carried out by Sir James Whitney and the ministry of education.

Buller said these objectives include educating the parents of deaf students, through workshops and seminars, on problems and communication skills dealing with their children; developing and revising curriculum for the deaf; providing workshops for deaf adults in such areas as politics, consumerism and community interaction; making the professional community aware of the problems of deafness; trying to solve some of the major problems faced by the deaf population; increasing the understanding and expertise in deafness on the part of public school administrators, teachers and specialists; and developing a network of affiliated schools for the deaf.

"The fact that Sir James Whitney has been invited to accept a leadership role in this exciting project is indicative of the fact that Ontario's provincial schools for the deaf have long been held in high regard by leaders in deaf education in North America," Buller said.

The school's involvement in this project, he added, is a "winning situation."

"We can only gain by it. We'll be doing what we have been doing but with the extra resources and contacts with other leading centres for the deaf."

Michalski said the Belleville school has been a "ripple" school for the school for the deaf in Buffalo for the past two years, where its staff have participated in professional development courses in the teaching of the deaf.

"A special school like ourselves can't stay the same as it was years ago. It has to become more of a resource to the community and other school boards," Michalski said.

"What we're hoping to do is involve this school more with the community and the deaf community and to have the deaf community more involved with us. We hope to make other professionals in other fields much more aware of both the problems and talents of the deaf," the superintendent said.

"Sir James Whitney is ahead of many schools for the deaf in the United States. It has a policy that the school act as a resource centre and this new involvement in the school of the future project is going to give us a new impetus, a shot in the arm to keep us going where we are.

We'll continue what we're doing and expand that," she said.