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A weekly report on issues and happenings in your community

# CROSSROADS

Thursday, March 26, 1998, Section **BW**

## Physicians put patients' needs ahead of pay

By **JIM PARKS**  
Special to The News Journal

**PENNY HILL** — Children & Families First commemorated a total of more than a century of placing service to the community ahead of personal gain recently when it presented David and Ethel Platt with its annual J. Thompson Brown award.

The Platts practiced together as family-medicine physicians in Wilmington from the 1940s until their retirement in 1989. Soon after that, David Platt, now 83, organized a free service which sends doctors into schools to talk

about health. He is still involved with the service, now operated by the Medical Society of Delaware, and is a volunteer at the Claymont Community Center's health clinic.

Ethel Platt, 81, tutors learning-disabled students at Springer Middle School.

The Platts, who live in Ridgewood, are both active with the University of Delaware's Academy of Lifelong Learning.

"They are two exceptional people who have contributed substantially to the community for many years," said Mary M. Johnston, president of the board of Children &

Families First, a social-service agency.

"From the beginning, they served a population which was underserved and continues to be, whether they could pay or not. I don't think it ever occurred to them not to do that kind of work."

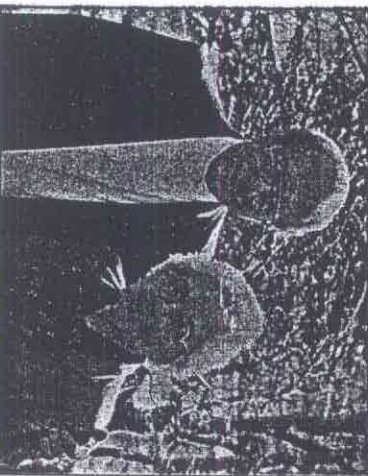
David Platt said he and his wife decided in the 1960s to keep their offices in the city "because that's where the need was."

"We thought people needed care no matter what their incomes were. We had patients who could afford to pay and did, but that was never the first thing we thought about," Ethel

Platt said. The Platts were among the first physicians in the area to regularly accept Medicaid reimbursement as full payment.

Ethel Platt said current medical-insurance practices have damaged doctor-patient relations. "You might go to a family doctor for years and suddenly find out he's not on the list [of approved physicians] and you have to go someplace else," she said. "The problem is that it's for profit — to make profits for the stockholders and enable executives to make those fantastic salaries."

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The News Journal/BOB HERBERT  
Dr. David Platt, 83, and Ethel Platt, 81, have retired from practice but remain active in community service.

## Crossroads

# Doctors: Retirees continue to help young people

### FROM PAGE 1

With a doctor of medicine degree from the University of Pennsylvania and an internship at the old Wilmington General Hospital behind him, David Platt hung out his shingle at Pourth and Franklin streets in 1941. Three months later he was drafted into the Army Medical Corps. Most of his World War II service was with a regimental field aid station in the South Pacific theater. He was discharged in 1946 with the rank of major.

Ethel Platt received her medical degree from Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania and interned at Frankford Hospital in Philadelphia "when no Wilmington hospital would have me because, or so they said, they didn't

have facilities for a female intern." She took over David Platt's practice in 1942.

Although both were undergraduates at Penn, they did not meet until they were in medical school and attended a student convention. They married a year later. Their only son, Richard, and his wife, Oral, are both physicians. They teach at Harvard University medical school.

David Platt said it was natural that their practice be directed mainly toward working-class patients. "That was the background we both came from," he said.

He grew up over the shoe-repair shop his father, Joseph, had at 214 King St. and went to Wilmington High. Ethel Platt's family, the

Friedmans, had an auto-accessories store and sidewalk gasoline-fueling business in the Fishtown section of Philadelphia.

They both attended college on scholarships.

David Platt said the ready availability of medicines that were not even in the conceptual stage when he began practice is the biggest change he has seen professionally, but the most significant differences have shown up in schools.

"Kids today are routinely dealing with things that almost never came up in our time. They're experimenting with drugs, alcohol and sex and at younger and younger ages," he said.

"Once in a while in the past generation, you'd have a young, un-

married person go off to live for a few months with a relative in some other city, but now teen pregnancy is open and just about everyone at least knows someone who has been involved in that or some other problem."

Platt said he gives students his home telephone number and invites anyone who wants to ask a question or talk about something privately to call.

"One night I got a call from a girl who said she and her boyfriend wanted to have sex and wanted to know what precautions to use," he said.

"She was 11 and the boyfriend was 12. I tried to dissuade them, but, needless to say, I didn't sleep very well that night."



From the desk of  
DRS. DAVID and ETHEL

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11/27/98

Dear Alma,

The photocopies of the Wall of Fame are all I could find. Joe Saborsky, who was there as a former recipient, snapped the pictures. To the left of my photo is Julius Reiser, and to the right is Dr. John Munroe, emeritus professor of history of U. of W. Va.

The program had no mention of our names. The script under my photo is an abstract of my C.V. Harold's must be similar.