Wheat Ridge Ministries
1905 - 2011

The history of the Lutheran Sanitarium at Wheat Ridge, Colorado, is interesting as well as inspiring.

The beginnings of Wheat Ridge were modest indeed. There is no evidence the founding fathers had any conception of the impressive proportions which their ministry of mercy was to assume, nor of the widespread services which the organization would render in the years to come.

How It All Began …

Disturbed by the fact that the Lutherans in Denver were not able to provide adequately for their many brothers and sisters inflicted with tuberculosis who were coming to Colorado in quest of health, the Rev. J. F. S. Her, pastor of St. John’s Lutheran Church in Denver, advocated the establishment of a tent colony for the care of these people.

1903

Fifteen members of St. John’s meet to address the problem and initiate the necessary steps to undertake this project by founding the Evangelical Lutheran Sanitarium Association of Denver, Colorado.
In May, 1905, the Association purchases 20 acres for its “Health Farm” in the Wheat Ridge, Colorado, area. Fifteen tents are erected, including the tent designated as “Walther League Tent No. 1,” which was donated on July 17. The first patient was admitted on June 8. Dedication of the tent colony takes place on September 10.

1905

The first Sanitarium Christmas Seals are issued in 1910. Distribution of the Seals is done largely through the Walther League, the international youth organization of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.

The Rev. John Schlerf is installed as the first full-time superintendent and chaplain of the Tent Colony. Up to this time, Pastor Her had served in this capacity.

Lorenz W. Frank, M.D., was appointed Medical Director of the Sanitarium in 1913, a position he held until 1948. Most of the medical policies that made treatment successful at the Sanitarium were due to Dr. Frank’s knowledge of TB and his diligent efforts to combat it.

1916

The tent colony, which has increased to 29 tents, is becoming worn out. The increasing number of patients makes it necessary to replace the tent colony with a modern pavilion. Ground is broken on June 14, 1921; dedication services are held on August 7, 1921. The tent colony is dismantled – during 16 years of service nearly 950 patients had been sheltered there.

In 1923, the Walther League issues a successful appeal for $100,000 for the purpose of liquidating the remaining debt and purchasing necessary furnishing and equipment.

At the 35th convention of the Walther League in St. Louis in 1927, the League formally takes over the Sanitarium.

On July 20, 1930, the 25th Anniversary of the Wheat Ridge Sanitarium is observed.

On February 26, 1933, the Chapel of the Good Samaritan is dedicated.
On November 21, 1942, the Wheat Ridge Foundation was established for the purpose of assisting Lutherans in other tuberculosis sanatoria in the United States and Canada and to assist Lutheran pastors working in TB sanatoria by providing them with funds to purchase religious literature.

On June 22, 1946, the Association adopts a resolution to reorganize the Evangelical Lutheran Sanatorium Association under the name of “Wheat Ridge Foundation” and amend the Articles of Incorporation.

In 1942, the Sanitarium Association adopts a new constitution, which changes the word “Sanitarium” to “Sanatorium.”
Life at the Sanitarium
The Tent City
The decision is made to convert the Medical Social Service program into a Lutheran Family Service program.

In 1955, the Medical Mission Program is established with grants in India, Hong Kong and Nigeria.

On May 4, 1958, the Rev. Edward May is installed as Executive Director of the Wheat Ridge Foundation.

The Lutheran Hospital and Medical Center receives property of the Lutheran Sanatorium and starts operating under its name on November 1, 1960. Medical Mission work begins in Guatemala and Japan.

In 1959, the Lutheran Hospital and Medical Center, a Colorado corporation, is organized. Basic transfers of property are authorized.
In 1961, the Wheat Ridge Foundation relocates to the Walther League Office in Chicago.

In 1968, the Wheat Ridge Foundation gives a grant to Rev. Granger Westberg, which launches the parish nurse movement.


In 1973, Wheat Ridge provides a seed grant to begin Stephen Ministries training, which has since equipped thousands of people for caring ministries in their congregation and community.

In 1977, Wheat Ridge provides a seed grant to begin Stephen Ministries training, which has since equipped thousands of people for caring ministries in their congregation and community.
The Wheat Ridge Foundation celebrates its 75th Anniversary.

1980 The Wheat Ridge China Rehabilitation Project, led by Dr. Marcy Ditmanson and Joyce Ditmanson, begins in 1987 and continues today.

1987 In October 1989, the Carter Center of Emory University and the Wheat Ridge Foundation host a national symposium of religious leaders.

1989 In 1990, Wheat Ridge receives “Recognized Service Organization” status from The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.

1990 Richard W. Bimler is named the new president in 1991 and in 1992, Wheat Ridge Ministries is chosen as the new name.
The initiation of the area representative structure takes place in 1992.

In 1993, Wheat Ridge is officially recognized as an “Affiliated Social Ministry Organization” of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.


In 1996, Wheat Ridge Ministries establishes its “Congregation Health and Hope Grant” program, which awards grants to congregations starting new health and hope ministries.

In 2000, Wheat Ridge Ministries launches its first Hearts for Jesus Project – “Hearts for Jesus: Hope for China!”

The Good Samaritan Fund Grant is established and co-funded by Wheat Ridge Ministries and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service to help congregations establish programs for immigrants and refugees.

Wheat Ridge Ministries celebrates its 100th Anniversary in 2005 and hosts a “National Symposium on Health and Hope” in Denver, Colorado.
The Walther League Legacy Fund surpassed the one million dollar mark at the 2005 reunion of Michigan Walther Leaguers in Frankenmuth, Michigan. The Fund continues to provide seed money for new ministries of health and hope to benefit young people in the United States and around the world through Wheat Ridge Ministries.

Dr. Richard Herman becomes the fourth president of Wheat Ridge Ministries on January 1, 2006.

Wheat Ridge Ministries launches a new visual identity and brand message in March 2011.

2005

2006

2008

2011