Service group to start

By Joel Hunt
Lantern staff writer

Beginning in October, Ohio State will be the home of the first Ohio chapter of Best Buddies, an international volunteer organization for college students.

The program, similar to Big Brothers, is a non-profit organization which gives mentally disadvantaged people a chance to share their talents and personalities with college students through frequent one-on-one activities.

Anthony Kennedy Shriver started the program as an on-campus student volunteer organization while attending Georgetown in 1987.

Shriver's parents, Sargent, who was the first director of the Peace Corps, and Eunice, who founded the Special Olympics, inspired him to create America's first volunteer program to link college students and mentally disadvantaged people together.

After graduation, Shriver expanded Best Buddies to 33 colleges and universities. Today there are 178 national chapters and two international chapters in Athens, Greece.

Amy Burrow, a junior majoring in biology, has been named the director of Best Buddies at Ohio State.

Erin McHam, executive assistant of Best Buddies, International in Miami said she is thrilled Ohio State is getting involved.

"This is our first chapter in Ohio which, hopefully, is a sign of things to come," McHam said.

"We have a strong chapter director at Ohio State and have already had a lot of good feedback from the community," McHam added.

Shriver said parents of the mentally disadvantaged were initially reluctant because college students, especially in the 1980s, have a reputation of being materialistic and self-centered.

"It took time to build up the parents' confidence that the college students are reliable, committed, and that they won't let their son or daughter down," Shriver said in a release.

Burrow said although Ohio State has a lot of qualified students to be a Buddy, she is not concerned with the amount of volunteers right now.

"This year I just want Best Buddies to get on its feet," she said.

"Best Buddies, International won't allow us to exceed 25 Buddies our first two years. This way, we can concentrate on building a good foundation," she said.

Burrow said the OSU volunteers must call their Buddy once a week to build trust and plan one-on-one activities. In addition, she is planning several group events for the coming year including trips to the Columbus Zoo and COSI.