

## Word Stumblers

### The Agony Of Speaking Up May Be Over For Stutterers



**SMOOTH TALKING:** A microphone, stop watch and little black box with flashing lights help Ann Marie Collins, 8 years old, smooth out her speech. Therapist Carter Rainsford encourages her to keep talking. (Post-Dispatch Photo by Robert C. Holt III)

By RICHARD H. WEISS  
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Mike Seeck, a South County nursing student, used to stumble over "liver" and "lima beans."

Paulinus Johnson, a Franciscan brother, would get clammy hands when he tried to tell a service station attendant to "fill it up with regular."

Pat Leahy, a kicker for the New York Jets, often found kicking field goals easier than blurring out his name.

These three men, like 2,000,000 Americans and about 20,000 St. Louisans, suffer from that ancient

and mysterious malady called stuttering. No one has found a cure for stuttering, but slowly — indeed, somewhat haltingly — Seeck, Brother Paulinus, Leahy and a few dozen others here have started to gain fluency through a new program offered at the St. Louis Hearing & Speech Center.

The therapy, developed five years ago by psychologist Ronald Webster at Hollins College, Roanoke, Va., is called the Precision Fluency Shaping Program. It's been used on only 52 stutterers here over the course of a year, but clinicians at the Hearing & Speech Center are ecstatic with the results so far. Tests involving 15 students who have been out of the program from eight to 10 months, show that about 90 per cent are retaining normal or near normal speaking ability, says Gerald J. Meesey, the center's director of services.

In Roanoke, where the therapy  
See **STUTTERERS**, Page 6



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