

Fire hits site eyed for retarded

Firemen yesterday morning quickly extinguished two suspicious fires in a Dongan Hills building that the state has selected as the site for a counseling and service office for the area's mentally retarded persons. It was the second incident of possible arson at the building in the last five months.

According to officials, firemen discovered two separate fires in the vacant two-story brick building at 26 Dumont Ave. after being called to the scene to quell a rubbish fire outside the building. One of the fires was discovered in a first-floor room and another in an office on the upper floor, firemen said.

Firemen said the blazes, which caused only light damage, must have been deliberately set since they were apart from each other in the building.

The building had been unoccupied for the last several months after being used for the past 10 years by caseworkers for the New York Foundling Hospital.

On May 1, a suspicious fire caused medium damage to the building. The blaze was only two weeks after Community Board 2 approved the building for use as a center for the retarded to be run by the state Borough Developmental Services Office.

A three-month investigation by both police and fire marshals failed to turn

up a suspect in the May 1 fire.

Shortly after that blaze, Deputy Chief Fire Marshal John Barracato said that investigators had obtained "heresay" information that the fire may have been started by an area resident or residents opposed to the planned use of the building.

Elin Howe, director of the Staten Island Developmental Center and the Borough Developmental Services Office, said last month that the state was still hopeful of opening the building for use by the area's 200 retarded residents.

She said at the time that negotiations for the purchase of the structure were continuing with the building's owner, Joseph Perrotta. She was not available for comment early today.

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