

# It's your opinion

## Connelly disagrees with editorial

The purpose of this letter is to take issue with the Sunday Advance editorial appearing the day Robert Miraldi's first article dealing with the hapless residents of the Christmas Tree Inn was published.

In a few strokes of the pen, another tragedy was inflicted. The editorial depicts the retarded as the victims of the community-based facilities when in fact, it is the mentally ill who are without advocates and are victimized.

It is surprising to me that the Advance, which has in the past shown such keen perception and deep sensitivity to issues of this nature, could be so irresponsible in correlating the problems of the mentally ill with the mentally retarded/developmentally disabled.

As chairwoman of the New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Mental Health and Retardation, I took the initiative in 1977 to sponsor legislation which separated a huge unresponsive bureaucracy into three distinct categories: the Office of Mental Health, the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, and the Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse. That restructuring became law.

It was not an empty gesture! It was a long overdue measure to reorganize an unwieldy department — to achieve accountability and to clearly identify the differences and needs of all the disabilities. There is a very dramatic difference between an individual who is mentally ill and one who is retarded or developmentally disabled. The advocates (families, friends, etc.) of the retarded have made tremendous progress in establishing community based facilities which can be models for many homes now housing so-called normal individuals. The retarded can be trained to reach maximum ability — they can be taught social skills, they can enter sheltered workshops and perform productively.

The pen you are holding in your hand now may well have been assembled and packaged by a retarded individual. The group homes are supervised and well-run, and the resident must accept a share of the household responsibilities. That is not to say that every retarded, developmentally disabled or chronically mentally ill person should or could function in a community atmosphere. In my opinion, there will, in the name of humanity and common sense, always be a need for an institutional setting but hardly the scope of past generations.

Whether or not they live as a group or in their own home with family, the retarded make better neighbors for the most part than many of our "normal" youngsters who have been creating havoc in our community — hanging around, harassing the public and vandalizing property. So many agencies and individuals have worked tirelessly in this group home effort, it is a pity to have such an unfortunate editorial attempt to destroy all they have accomplished and their spirit to boot. We can only hope they will just take a pause, draw a deep breath and start anew.

ELIZABETH A. CONNELLY,  
Member of Assembly,

Willowbrook

## Community boards

# Respite care for retarded on agenda

A proposal to open a respite care home for retarded persons at 8 Diana Trail, Emerson Hill, will be on the agenda of two committees of Community Board 2 Tuesday at 8 p.m. at the board's office, 302 New Dorp Lane, New Dorp.

Respite care is a new service the state is trying to offer to parents who have retarded offspring living at home. The parents would bring their child to the house on a planned or emergency basis for up to 30 days at a time. The state would pay for the service.

Discussion of the concept and merits of the idea and the proposed site will be the focus of the board's social services and health and hospital committees.

Other Board 2 meetings include: Traffic committee, 8 p.m., Monday, and youth activities committee, Wednesday, 8 p.m., both at the board's New Dorp office.

Neither Community Board 1 or 3 has meetings scheduled this week.

Community Board 1's executive committee will meet Thursday at 7 p.m. and its steering committee will meet at 8 p.m., both at the College of Staten Island, St. George. Community Board 3 has no meetings scheduled.