

# Group home on Emerson Hill set to open

After winning a court battle initiated by area residents, the state is getting ready to open a small group home for the disabled on a quiet, dead-end street on Emerson Hill, considered one of Staten Island's more exclusive neighborhoods.

An official of the Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook said the house at 8 Diana Trail would probably open some time in August. Although it was initially to be a respite or temporary care home there will now be two permanent clients housed there, the official said.

James Shea, deputy director of the state center for the retarded, said that state workers were now rehabilitating the small, shuttered house to make it comply with the various federal and state safety codes.

Some residents of Diana Trail had filed a suit in Supreme Court in February, saying the facility would do "irreparable harm" to the neighborhood, lowering property values and impairing the privacy of Emerson Hill residents.

Justice Charles R. Rubin refused to block the state from opening the home, however, and said the area

residents had failed to establish that the facility would indeed harm Emerson Hill.

Shea said the two permanent residents would come from the sprawling state center in Willowbrook which is under a federal court order to reduce its resident population to 250 by 1981. The state has been reducing the center population by establishing small group homes and apartments.

Although there has been much opposition to the community placement process, the Diana Trail residence marked the first time on Staten Island that community groups had attempted to legally block a facility. State and federal courts have clearly established the legal right of retarded persons to be placed in community facilities.

The concept of respite care is a new one which the state has long wanted to develop. It allows a parent with a disabled child to bring the child to the respite care home for up to 30 days at a time, allowing the parent to have, for example, vacation time or to take care of medical matters.

The state has estimated that there are 224 persons living on Staten Island who would be eligible for the care. A similar respite care facility was opened two weeks on the grounds of the center.

Shea did not know why permanent residents were added to the Diana Trail facility. Director Elin Howe was on vacation and unavailable for comment. Community boards do not have to approve placement in facilities that house three or fewer disabled persons.