

Our opinion

Is this our community?

Staten Island has, over the years, earned a reputation as something of a special borough among the city's five.

The Island itself is perceived as a quiet place, far removed from the bustle of Manhattan and the congestion of the other, more populous boroughs. Island residents, meanwhile, are seen as individuals who care about their community and who are dedicated to the preservation of those values that make the borough the special place it really is.

From time to time, however, incidents occur and force one to wonder whether the Island's image as a special place has not been tarnished, perhaps permanently. Consider these events, all reported in the news pages of the Advance:

¶ In the early morning hours of Sept. 11, a wooden cross is set afire on the rear lawn of a New Dorp Beach house occupied by several persons, one of whom employs a live-in, Honduran maid.

Several young people are seen

fleeing from the scene of the cross burning, which police say appears to be racially motivated.

¶ Last Sunday evening, in a quiet, residential section of Dongan Hills, a group of teen-agers beat a small cat with sticks, throw the injured animal into a sewer and pelt it with debris as it attempts to flee for its life.

Despite a rescue effort by the Fire Department and other agencies, the defenseless creature dies of the injuries deliberately inflicted.

¶ On last Monday night, a blaze the Fire Department says was started intentionally damages a West Brighton house leased just a few days earlier for use as a half-way house by individuals who have completed jail terms and desire a transitional period before returning to society on their own.

The incident calls to mind other fires of suspicious origin that have damaged facilities — including a center to serve the mentally retarded — to which there was prior opposition by some members of the com-

munity.

It is not our purpose in citing these incidents to condemn the members of any community or to suggest that the Island is beset by serious problems without any practical solution; indeed, the Island remains an attractive borough in which to live, and the vast majority of its residents remain dedicated to making the Island an even more desirable place.

But neither is everything right when young people torture animals or engage in activities reminiscent of the Ku Klux Klan. And neither is everything right when the arsonist's torch is used to usurp the rights granted to others by the Constitution or by the democratic form of government by which we live.

We don't believe for a moment that the unpleasant incidents of recent days are representative of the Island or of those who live here. We do believe, however, that concerned citizens and public officials ought to be addressing the indications that the values upon which our community is built are being threatened by some very irresponsible individuals.