

In wake of legal battle, officials ready Emerson Hill group home

By STEPHANIE A. LACY

The legal battle is over; tempers have had time to cool, and yesterday the moving trucks came and went virtually unnoticed on Diana Trail, a dead-end street on exclusive Emerson Hill.

The house at 8 Diana Trail was the subject of a first-of-a-kind Supreme Court battle in 1979 when seven area residents challenged the legality of a group home in the neighborhood.

Residents charged in their suit that the housing of developmentally disabled youths at the address would cause "irreparable harm" to the neighborhood, lower property values and infringe on the privacy of homeowners.

Supreme Court Justice Charles R. Rubin refused to block the Staten Island Developmental Center from opening the home and ruled residents had failed to

establish the facility would harm Emerson Hill.

Almost a year after the court ruling, the house bustled with activity as staff members prepared for the arrival of three mentally retarded young people, ranging in age from 19 to 23.

According to Elin Howe, director of the Willowbrook facility, the three will become permanent residents Monday and no "adjustment" problems are anticipated.

"The three young men chosen to live at 8 Diana Trail aren't strangers to each other," Miss Howe said. "They have lived together at Willowbrook for several months along with the staff assigned to the house."

At no time, she explained, will there be less than two staff members supervising activities at the house. There will be adequate staff people on duty 24

hours a day, she said.

Two of the young men attend PS 69, 144 Keating Pl., New Springville, and the other is enrolled at A Very Special Place, a day treatment center on New Dorp Lane.

Miss Howe expects their lives to mirror the community's rhythm. "The activities at the house will be comparable to the Emerson Hill residents," she said. "The men will go to school in the morning and return in the evening for their dinner. I don't foresee any problems."

In the beginning, the state-owned house at 8 Diana Trail was proposed as a respite-care facility. During the legal battle, Miss Howe said, the state re-examined the plan.

"We felt a respite-care facility would be disruptive to the other residents in the area," she said. "During the court case we decided the house could be best utilized as a community residence and established a small respite-care home at Willowbrook."

"Our community resident facility on Emerson Hill will be no different than any other family home in that neighborhood," the developmental center director said.

Page 2



A moving van parks in the driveway of a house at 8 Diana Trail on Emerson Hill, which will be opened as a group home next week.

S. I. Advance Photo by Irving Silverstein