

Top of the Week

# Praise the Lord and keep out the opposition

By MARC DAVIS

We Staten Islanders like to think of ourselves as humane, religious people. We love puppies, little babies and grandmothers. We read the Bible regularly. We especially like the part that says, "Love thy neighbor."



Marc Davis

And we do love our neighbors. It's easy. The people we don't love never become our neighbors because we ban them from the neighborhood.

That, at least, seems to be the moral of a group home controversy now brewing in Tottenville.

Staten Island group home controversies, like the tides and seasons, are utterly predictable. The state wants them; the neighbors don't. Without knowing the specifics, you could still write the script weeks in advance.

In this case, the state wants to buy an existing duplex at the foot of Amboy Road, a block from the water, and convert it into a home for 10 mentally retarded adoles-

cents and young adults, ranging in disability from moderate to severe. Two would come from the South Shore itself, eight from the Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook.

A public hearing by Community Board 3 has been set for Wednesday night and, by all accounts, it should be predictable. Board Chairman Jack Potenza expects the issue to be a "pretty hot item."

But then, Staten Islanders usually approach group homes in their neighborhoods the same way they approach strangers in their home. Best to shoot first and ask questions later.

One Tottenville resident, for example, rejected the idea before he had even heard any details.

"We don't want it," said Pat McDonnell stubbornly. "They're too liberal. Social workers are too liberal. They think people should be allowed to run around loose."

McDonnell leaned back on his car and shook his head. "We don't want anything new here. We have enough people causing trouble around here," he said.

Apparently, there are many

people in Tottenville — and all over Staten Island — who "don't want anything new here."

Horst Hasselbach, for example, lives three houses away from the proposed group home. Four months ago, he adopted a white Scotty dog that had been abandoned in the area. Compassion, however, extends only as far as puppies.

"I finally scraped a few dollars together, bought this house and live in this nice neighborhood, and all of a sudden they come along and want to put this home here," he complained.

"We moved out here because it's nice and quiet. That's the reason most people moved to this neighborhood. It's a dead end street. The only people who drive down here are lost. We don't need this (group home)," he said.