

Neighbors rally to one of their own

By TOM COCOLA
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

Her name is Gladys Rocco and she is a very special person. Just ask anyone in her Dongan Hills neighborhood.

Ms. Rocco, 55, has been living in a state-sponsored community home on Buel Avenue for about seven years. She cannot read or write, but she is capable of performing some household chores.

The state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities told her family last month that they were considering moving her to another home. An OMRDD spokesman explained that the state believes another home with an emphasis on geriatric care would be better suited for Ms. Rocco because she is advancing in years.

Ms. Rocco, however, was upset

with the thought of leaving a familiar and happy environment. Her neighbors were not pleased, either.

"I think that it's not nice," said Kimberly Shannon, 8, who lives next door. "I want Gladys to stay because she's nice to us and she's our friend."

"I don't think they should do this," added Kimberly's older sister, Jennifer, 10, who said she enjoys walking to the store with Ms. Rocco.

Ms. Rocco's story has several ironic twists. As Ms. Rocco exchanged hugs and smiles with Kimberly, it was interesting to recall that Kimberly's father, Michael G. Shannon, represented Dongan Hills residents in a lawsuit against the state to block the

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Gladys Rocco, right, chats with the Shannon children; left to right, Heather, 12, Jennifer, 10, and Kimberly, 8.

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