Caregivers meet those who need care

Annual legislative breakfast brings together 260 people

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VANCE STAFF WRITER

Edward Fanuzzi needs help carg for his 4-year-old grandson.

He asked for help with the autischild yesterday at the Staten land Retardation and Disabilities Council's amual Legislative reakfast in the Staaten, West righton. The event is designed to ring together disabled people, leir families, legislators, service roviders and officials of the state ffice of Mental Retardation and evelopmental Disabilities DMRDD)

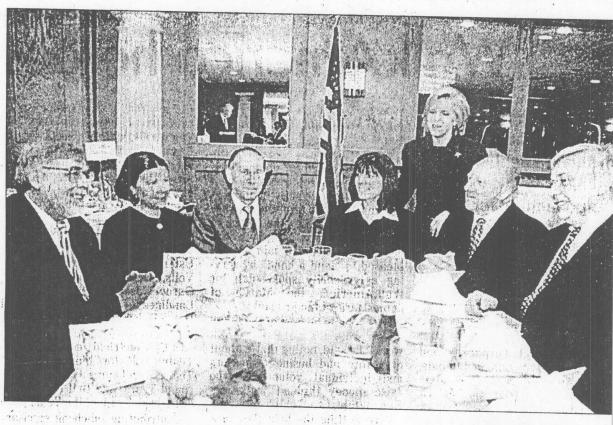
Fanazzi, of Mariners Harbor, as ed to tell the some 260 atndees why he needs help caring r his grandson, John.

"I need different services, ainly respite care, [and] after hool services," he said. "I'm the imary care taker. He's autistic. e doesn't speak ... This is why e need help."

Donna Long, chairwoman of the aten Island Retardation and isabilities. Council, said she anted to highlight New York ate Cares, a plan forwarded by ov. George Pataki. The program ms to eliminate the waiting list

New York for residential accement and services. Funding r 1999-2000 totaling \$24.6 million ill go toward creating 980 beds, 0 case management positions, 0 day service slots and \$1.3 million for new family support services for people waiting at home.

Bob Witowski, the Staten Island rector of Developmental Disalities Services Offices (DDSO), id the breakfast was a chance resple to put issues on the



ADVANCE PHOTO IN FRANK J. JOHN

Meeting at a legislative breakfast in the Staaten are, from left, Bob Witkowsky, Laura Kennedy, Ed Fanuzze, Kathy Nowak, Donna Long, Doug Wetlesen and Thomas Maul.

table. He said Staten Islanders tend to have a larger turnout than any other borough "because Staten Island is known as a closely knit community, where people help out those less fortunate than ourselves."

Thomas Maul, the commissioner of OMRDD, said it was imperative to take advantage of the dialogue yesterday. He said it was an excellent event because big problems regarding the "needs, wants and desires of families in the Staten Island area" are spelled out.

Elizabeth Kennedy, 21, of New Brighton, said she planned to discuss the impact family support services have had on her family. Her sister, Julia, is developmentally disabled.

Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly (D-North Shore), one of several legislators at the breakfast, recently complained that the Island has been shortchanged by the state Division of Disability Determinations (DDS) of the office of Temporary and Disability Assistance. Its role is to adjudicate claims for the Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income programs. In New York City, it has offices in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens. Mrs. Connelly wrote to Brian J. Wing, commissioner of Temporary and Disability Assistance, outlining why the borough deserves its own branch.

"Most think we're just a hop,

skip and jump away [from Man hattan]," she wrote. "Well, we ar not. For a large number of State Islanders, whether they are disabled or not, traveling to Manhattan is very time-consuming costly, tedious and, to put i mildly, nerve-wracking."

Also attending the function were: Assemblyman Rober Straniere; Councilmen Jim Odd and Stephen Fiala; state Sen. Vin cent Gentile, and Tracey Durfee the special assistant to Maul. Representatives were sent from the offices of Assemblyman Eric Vitaliano; Rep. Vito Fossella; state Sen. John Marchi (R-Staten Is land); Borough President Guy V Molinari, and Councilman Jerome O'Donovan (D-North Shore).

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