

Special ed preschool dedicated

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Community Resources officially dedicated its special-education preschool to past executive director Joan P. Hodum during graduation ceremonies in the Richmond preschool yesterday.

Ms. Hodum headed Community Resources for more than 20 years, and a wide range of programs, including a vocational training center, were launched under her guidance.

"Joan Hodum is a selfless individual who embodies the 'human' part of human resources," said Dana T. Magee, the agency's current executive director.

Ms. Hodum said, "Community Resources is a wonderful organization and it will go further than I ever dreamed."

The special education preschool program nearly folded several weeks ago, with school officials finding it increasingly difficult to operate the program at a deficit.

Officials said the state was not reimbursing Community Resources sufficiently for the programs and services provided at the school.

Magee and others from Community Resources had repeatedly written the state Education Department, asking that Community Resources be granted a waiver from current reimbursement-rate formulas.

After several attempts to resolve the situation, Magee told Education the program would have to shut down. The department accepted the program's closure and Community Resources began sending out letters to parents telling them their children would have to move to other schools.

As part of this process, Community Resources officials notified the Staten Island state Legislature delegation — which they had done throughout the long negotiation with Education — letting them know the program would have to be closed.

"We were going to do whatever possible to keep that program going," said Robert Helbock, counsel to state Sen. John Marchi (R-Sta-

ten Island), who was instrumental in getting the situation resolved.

Marchi arranged for a meeting of all five members of the Island delegation, the state Division of the Budget, Education and representatives of Community Resources.

Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly (D-North Shore), Assemblyman Robert Stranieri (R-South Shore), Assemblyman Eric Vitaliano (D-Mid-Island), state Sen. Vincent Gentile (D-East Shore/Brooklyn) and Marchi all attended the meeting.

After a subsequent visit to Albany, Community Resources reached an agreement with Education on the reimbursement formula, and the program has been able to continue.

"You always hear stories about how bad politicians are, but in this case it's completely the opposite," said Magee at the time. "They truly deserve a hand for all they've done, especially Sen. Marchi. We couldn't have achieved this without him."

Representatives from all five statewide legislators attended yesterday's dedication.