

William D'Ambrosio, the chairman of the Human Resources Committee that recommended the board oppose the plan, had argued the presence of the residence would "alter the quiet cul-de-sac environment of the immediate area" and "hampers the fundamental goal of socialization and integration" of the residents into the community because of the relatively remote location of the house and the "deep-rooted and intense resistance of the community."

HeartShare, a Brooklyn-based social services provider, wants to purchase 119 End Pt. for six Islanders, ages 19 to 24, who are mildly or moderately retarded. Some of the potential residents work part-time at McDonald's; others are engaged full-time in vocational training programs. None takes psychiatric medication but all require 24-hour supervision.

Proponents of the plan believe fear and misinformation are primarily behind the strong objections of area residents.

"There's a lot of misinformation about who the developmentally disabled are," said Witkowsky. "It is not mental illness. It is mental retardation, autism, cerebral palsy."

Lorraine De Santis, whose 23-year-old son lives in a community residence for the developmentally disabled in Dongan Hills, agreed.

"Maybe [the critics] don't have someone like this in their family," she told the Editorial Board. "If they did, they could not say the things they do. My son is like a 2-year-old. He's not a criminal. He doesn't make the community unsafe."

Some local social services providers expressed disappointment that no elected officials attended the raucous meeting of Board 3 on Tuesday, especially after area lawmakers turned out earlier this month for a legislative breakfast hosted by the Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Council (SIDDC) to

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The recent move to establish a community residence for mentally retarded adults in a South Shore neighborhood is not an isolated incident.

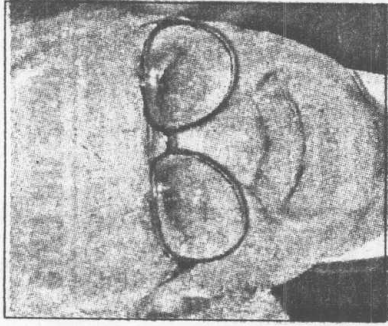
Staten Island can expect 35 to 40 similar residences to spring up across the borough during the next four years, local social services providers say.

The predicted increase is due to a state initiative — called New York State Creating Alternatives in Residential Environments and Services (NYS CARES) — unveiled by Gov. George Pataki 18 months ago to phase in enough communal living space for thousands of New Yorkers who have been languishing for years on a massive waiting list while funds were hashed out in Albany.

On Staten Island, 209 developmentally disabled adults are awaiting accommodation, said Bob Witkowsky, director of the Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Services Office.

"But that list is growing," Witkowsky told the Advance Editorial Board yesterday. "It's growing [by about 30 names a year] as people move into Staten Island and it's growing as parents grow older and can no longer take care of their children."

On Tuesday, Community Board 3 voted overwhelmingly to reject the establishment of a community residence for six mentally retarded adults on End Place in Greenridge.



"We have our work cut out for us, but that goes with the job. You need to take positions sometimes that others are going to disagree with you about. But that's what leadership is all about."

*Borough President
Guy V. Molinari*