

On Your Mark dedicates home

By ANN MARIE BRESLIN
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

Supporters of On Your Mark, a community agency for the developmentally disabled, gathered yesterday in New Brighton to dedicate its first group home for autistic young adults.

Dozens of volunteers, workers and family members of the young people streamed through the beautiful brick Cape Cod home on Brighton Avenue yesterday, admiring its decor and praising those responsible, including Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly, in whose name it was dedicated. Mrs. Connelly was detained and did not attend the ceremony.

"The residence creates a home-like environment, and allows (the residents) to be as active in the community as they can be," said Eugene Spatz, executive director of On Your Mark.

Spatz praised residents of New Brighton, who did not voice opposition to the home as other communities have to similar residences. "New Brighton welcomed us with open arms," he said, citing Community Board 1, which unanimously supported the home.

The home will house eight autistic teen-agers and young adults and will be supervised, though less restrictive than an institution. Many of the residents have been on waiting lists for such a resi-



ADVANCE PHOTO/TONY CARANNANTE
Eugene Spatz, executive director of On Your Mark, shakes hands with Catherine McGowan, who has an autistic son; Barbara DeLoretto, director of the group home; and Kathy Shields of the Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Service Office.

dence for five or six years, Spatz said. A ninth bed is available for temporary residents, providing a respite for relatives caring for an autistic child.

He said this could not have been accomplished without the assistance of the State office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, which will cover the cost of the house and contribute other funding.

During the three-hour open house, parents of the autistic young people admired the brightly colored traditional furnishings, and spent time in the large bedrooms, neatly organized for their children.

"It'll be a wonderful thing for the children," said Catherine McGowan, whose 26-year-old son will move into the home next Sunday. "It's a gorgeous home and

I'm very grateful to the community and to On Your Mark and to the state for making it possible.

"Staten Island has to become aware — we need so many homes like this one. A lot of people are ignorant to what an autistic child is."

The home will employ eight full-time staff members, and will be supervised by Barbara DeLoretto.