

St. Joseph's School

STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE ■ WEDNESDAY, MAY 15, 1991

says welcome to Rosebank

Group home residents find a warm welcome

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Carrying balloons and singing songs, students of St. Joseph's School in Rosebank welcomed the residents of the Hope Avenue Residential Home to the neighborhood.

The celebration started at 9:15 a.m. with a service in St. Joseph's R.C. Church. Then all 312 students, holding brightly colored balloons, lined up outside the church for the half-mile procession to the group home, where they officially welcomed their new neighbors.

Once they got to the home, they presented the residents with personalized banners welcoming each of the 11 mentally handicapped men who live there. They also presented them with baskets of cookies and fruit, a watermelon and coupons for a pizza party.

"On behalf of the Hope Avenue Residence I would like to thank all of you for such a warm and hearty welcome," said

It's good news!

Freda McDuffie, supervisor of the residence that opened in January. "It is my hope that other communities on Staten Island, and statewide, will follow the fine example that you have set in opening your community to our population."

Rose Errico, the assistant residential supervisor, explained that the Hope Avenue home is the first step toward an independent life for the residents.

Monsignor John Servodidio, pastor of St. Joseph's, came up with the idea of welcoming the new neighbors to offset protests from some residents who had complained about the group home.

"It's simple. If you are a believer, then these people have a God-given right to be here, and if you are not a believer, then they have a constitutional right to be here," Monsignor Servodidio said.

He said that in school, students are taught to "live and let live" and that all

people, even the handicapped, are God's children.

"Hopefully," he added, "the other communities on Staten Island will see what we are doing and learn."

Linda Bilotti, principal of the school, surprised Monsignor Servodidio by wishing him a happy anniversary for his 37th year in the priesthood.

She said the students were receptive to the idea of welcoming the residents and added that some were familiar with mental retardation because they had either friends or family members who are mentally handicapped.

Peter Benedetto, who lives on Hope Avenue, stood outside his house and watched as the students filed past.

"It's a beautiful parade, and it's a great house, the way they have it set up over there." He said the residents have all been good neighbors and that there have been no problems so far. "We're all human beings," he said.

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