



ADVANCE PHOTO/JAN SOMMA

Members of this group home like to relax by watching television and reading in the living room.

Group homes win friends

Most neighbors pleasantly surprised

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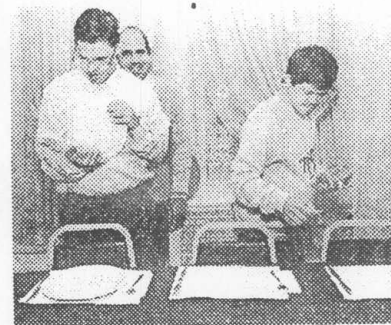
Bob Ottiano harbored the same worries most of his neighbors had when Project Hope, a group home for 11 mentally retarded men, was proposed for 43 Beethoven St., Fort Wadsworth.

What would these people, these strangers, be like? Would they stalk the street, night and day, unsupervised? What would the home look like after they moved in? How about parking and traffic? And what about the value of his property should he try to sell — would it decrease?

After living across the street from the home for nearly a year, Ottiano discovered the answers to all the questions ... except the last one. He has no plans to sell his house.

"I was opposed to it (the group home) at first, because I didn't know what was going in. You're dealing with the state, and you never know what they're going to throw at you," Ottiano said as he stood on the front lawn of his Hope Avenue home, about three houses down from Project Hope. "It's a whole different ball game than what I thought it was going to be. It's like night and day."

The state has plans to open or sponsor 20 new group homes in Community Boards 2 and 3 before the end of next year, and others in Community Board 1 are in the process of opening now.



Group home dilemma

The fears of Hope Avenue homeowners are common for neighbors of the sites chosen by the state for group homes. Similar feelings drove residents of Cromwell Avenue in Dongan Hills to fight a group home on their block all the way to court. Ten years later, the home, operated by the Association for the Advancement of the Blind and Retarded, fits into the neighborhood just like every other house on the street.

"I have no complaints," said

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