

Eden II group home celebrates opening

First group home for autism on Island

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Ten years ago, a group of parents banded together to solve a common problem: The special services their autistic children needed were not available on Staten Island.

Yesterday, they celebrated the opening of the first group home for autism on Staten Island, which is operated by the non-profit organization they founded, Eden II Programs.

"It was a morning, noon and night effort and it was a truly difficult effort, but truly, truly satisfying," said Kathleen Patterfield, a founding member of Eden II. Standing before an audience of about 100 people, she was describing the muscle it took to get the group home up and running.

"It started with inquiries to Sen. (John) Marchi. He was supportive and then a couple of fathers went

up to Albany," she said.

Eden II operates the group home for 10 autistic men and boys in the Arden Heights community. The home opened its doors in April with the support of Community Board 3 and minimal opposition. Its clients range from age 14 to 30, according to Dr. Fred West, executive director of the home.

The doctor added the men pose no threat to the surrounding community because their disability causes them to be severely withdrawn.

In addition, he said they are always supervised by at least four staffers.

The Carlton Boulevard home operates on an \$800,000-a-year budget provided by the state Department of Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities. The structure was constructed

with \$800,000 in state funding.

Mrs. Patterfield spoke before an audience of about 50 people, including the autistic clients, their families, and friends and the staffers of the group home.

As part of the celebration, Sister Alice Marie O'Connor, a Dominican Sister of Sparkill, N.Y., blessed the house.

Awards were given out as well. A plaque was presented to the Humanity Club for its monetary contribution, which was used to buy patio furniture for the home.

The parents of the group home clients were presented with a plaque that will be hung on a wall in the home.

Eden II Board of Directors member Michael Flanagan sized up the creation of the home as "the miracle of sharing."

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Chatting outside the Island's first group home for autistic men, are, from left, Dr. Fred West, Jane Maguire, Kay McGowan, Kathleen Patterfield and Joseph Casucci.