

Page 2 of 6

Observers wondered whether the Mount's leadership also weighed the fact that some of its residents — many of whom bear the emotional scars of being abused in drug-infested homes, a problem unknown in Father Drumgoole's day — had become extremely hard to handle. Recent years have brought reports of crime and violence linked to Mount residents, including allegations of bus robberies, burglaries and beatings.

Drespel denied such concerns entered the board's thinking, saying the Mount has been relatively calm the last two years. "There's no child that cannot be helped in some way, shape or form," he said. "We shored up our staffing. We haven't had major incidents." The new path is fraught with uncertainty. Administrators say their ambition is to turn the Mount into an educational, devel-

opmental and recreational center but acknowledge that none of the programs on their wish list are in place.

"As we begin to contemplate new programs, we do it with an eye toward preparing to enter the 21st century and responding to social needs," Drespel said.

Among the proposals being considered in very preliminary talks, Drespel said, are Head Start; a Beacon school, or school that also functions as a community center; afterschool recreation programs similar to the public system's latchkey; an expanded pre-school; an "inclusionary program" pre-school in which developmentally disabled students are placed in regular-education classes; day care; infant care, and partnerships with Bayley Seton Hospital — another Archdiocesan facility — to provide senior care and

nousing.

If the new programs — and their income — do not materialize, however, what will become of the Mount and its 360 acres? Observers have long theorized that the underutilized campus is ripe for development.

"I have contingency plans but

I'm not going to discuss them because I'm approaching this from a very positive point of view," Drespel said.

He stressed that the Archdiocese is not mulling selling any of the Mount's valuable real estate, which includes a rolling seaside meadow, ocean bluffs and

wooded, upland property.

The state has also expressed interest in acquiring some of this land for preservation purposes.

"We're going to be using our facilities," Drespel said. "We are not selling any land. We are going to use the land productively and creatively in line with Father

Drumgoole's ministry."

More than 300 union jobs also hang in the balance.

Drespel said many layoffs are not anticipated, claiming that most workers will fill other jobs that open as the transition in programs occurs. Others will be hired by social service agencies that absorb the Mount's caseload, he said.

Drespel said he envisions a smooth transition where case workers follow their cases.

The future of South Richmond High School, a Board of Educational-education institution on the campus where Mount Loretto residents comprise half the students, is not known.

Drespel said he hopes to have at least a few of the proposed programs in place by July 1, when the child welfare cases cease.

Borough President Guy V. Molinari said his office will try to help Mount Loretto map out its options by gathering information and providing funds.

Molinari said his deputy, James Molinaro, and chief of staff, Marilyn Haggerty-Blohm, got involved in discussions with Mount Loretto when "we became aware of the fact that they were going to change the use. We were mainly interested in trying to achieve some positive re-use of the grounds. There's been a lot of concern on the South Shore about the future use of Mount Loretto."

He suggested the Mount's gym, pool and sprawling fields could fill the void of youth recreational facilities on the South Shore. He advised the Mount to sit down with "professional planners" and devise a strategy.

CHANGES AT A GLANCE

Will no longer accept Child Welfare Agency referrals as of July 1, 1995

Cottages will be emptied for use by disabled clients

Current non-disabled residents will be gradually placed in other programs