

Ceremony opens new group home

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United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) of New York State ceremoniously opened a group home for children yesterday in Charleston as it closed the doors on another facility in the South Beach Psychiatric Center that served as a bridge between institutionalization and home-style living.

Attending both ceremonies was the UCP state chapter founder Nina Eaton — who also is the namesake for both facilities.

On hand to preside over the events was state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) Commissioner Thomas Maul as well as UCP employees, state and borough officials and UCP clients and their families.

The Nina Eaton Children's Residence on Sharrots Road in Charleston is the new home for 14 New York City children between the ages of 8 and 15. What makes the group home unique is the fact that it is equipped to handle "medically frail" children who were previously forced to live in hospitals. For example, half the children can't swallow but must have food pumped directly into their stomachs, UCP associate execu-

tive director Susan Constantino said.

With a full-time staff of 27 employees, the home operates at a cost of approximately \$300 a day per child, Ms. Constantino said. The custom-built ranch-style house has 14 bedrooms, two recreation rooms and two living rooms.

The children have their own rooms because, due to the severity of their disabilities, they are prone to respiratory ailments. Separate rooms are necessary so they do not continually get each other sick, Ms. Constantino said.

The group home has a big back yard with play equipment to encourage neighborhood children to come over, Ms. Constantino said.

With the last of its 140 clients settled in group homes the UCP's Nina Eaton Center in the South Beach Psychiatric Center campus was officially closed, yesterday. When it first opened 20 years ago, the center was part of a new trend in care for those with cerebral palsy, UCP associate executive director Duane Schielke said. "It's laid out like a home rather than a hospital; it offered therapy and independent living skills" and was outdated by the group home concept, Schielke said.



ADVANCE PHOTO/IRVING SILVERSTEIN

From left, Marlene Ruggiero, Mark Elphage, Bill Green, Nina Eaton and Thomas Maul gather at the new United Cerebral Palsy group home in Charleston.

During her remarks at the dedication of the new group home, Ms. Eaton said staff members have already seen "miraculous" advancements in the children placed in the group home.

The state UCP provides health services, homes and therapy to an estimated 30,000 people throughout the state.