

Resistance to group home eroded on Cloverdale Street



Cloverdale Street resident Ken Erickson welcomes Sister Seraphine Herbst, SSJ, director of the School of the Holy Childhood, and Sister Benita Nicholas, SSJ, to a neighborhood block party Saturday, September 20.



Marty Becker joins neighborhood kids in a impromptu putting practice next to Lakeshore Country Club.

Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal



David Russell and Martha Wood couldn't stop dancing to music played by the "Shades of Time" band. Band members donated their services for the afternoon.

Block party celebrates newly found acceptance

By Teresa A. Parsons

The beauty of the block party Cloverdale Street residents celebrated last Saturday was that it was so ordinary.

Under gray skies, nearly 100 neighbors gathered to share hot dogs, popcorn and homemade baked goods. Clowns from "Parties Galore and More" tied balloons in animal shapes and painted designs on the faces of children and adults alike. A band called "Shades of Time" played in the garage of the house at 90 Cloverdale, and lots of people danced. Everything was free, and everybody pitched in to help. It was a typical, friendly get-together.

But for the residents of 90 Cloverdale — 12 developmentally disabled adults — their first block party was also a sweet taste of independence and a sign of acceptance.

Cloverdale is a dead-end street just east of Lakeshore Country Club in Charlotte. The community residence is the last of less than a half-dozen homes on the street.

Although the house is relatively secluded, people in the surrounding area voiced plenty of objections back in 1983, when the residence was proposed. They signed petitions and argued at planning commission meetings, pleading for pro-

erty values and against increased traffic.

One neighbor whose fears have been allayed is Jean Ward. She lives right next door with her husband and two children.

"Initially, I was a little concerned," she recalled.

But she was willing to give it a chance. First, she toured another community residence in Lyons, N.Y., which like Cloverdale, is operated by diocesan social ministry through Catholic Charities.

Then she and two other area families joined the home's Neighborhood Advisory Committee. The committee works with staff to ensure that residents are integrated and accepted in the community as well as possible.

"I got involved because I wanted to get a feel for how things were going over there," Ward said.

After three years, things appear to be going well by anyone's standards.

"Once in awhile, a neighbor will complain that one of the kids (residents) is riding his bike in their driveway or something, but that's about the extent of it," she said. "There really have been no major problems — at least not to my knowledge."

For one thing, she pointed out, the residents have little free time. They attend school or training programs and work at jobs, keep house and maintain a schedule of social activities that almost anyone

would envy. On the weekends, many residents with families go home.

Some neighbors still resent the home's presence, according to Anne Jardas, another advisory-committee member. Nevertheless, she believes the residents have a right to be on Cloverdale Street.

"They enjoy the same things everybody else does, whether it's living in a nice home and neighborhood or going down to the beach or down to Abbott's for a frozen custard," she said. "They are a credit to our neighborhood, and we would like other neighbors to get to know them."

On the average, residents will stay at Cloverdale for three to five years. A staff of six people supervises the residence, working in shifts. Their aim is to help residents develop the skills to move on to supervised apartments or other independent living situations.

Cloverdale resident Martha Wood, 26, hopes to make that move soon. Next month, she is scheduled to move into the area's first supervised apartments, operated by Lifetime Associates, Inc., a Brockport-based non-profit agency that develops housing alternatives for disabled people.

Before Martha moved to the Cloverdale residence, her parents, Kathryn and Arthur Wood, harbored just as many reservations about the home as

some of the neighbors had. The Woods have long been active on the board of Lifetime Associates as well as Facilities for Group Homes of Rochester, Inc., which purchases homes and leases them to agencies for group homes. Their son Christopher is also developmentally disabled and lives in a community residence.

"I was initially opposed to having my children move away from home," Kathryn Wood recalled. "But with hindsight I can see it was the best thing we could have done for them."

Residents have "tremendous opportunities for socialization" which are not available at home, Wood said. "They get to be more independent, to do things most people take for granted, like moving away from home."

But it can take years to place someone in a home like the one on Cloverdale Street. One reason is the fierce opposition most neighborhoods offer to the establishment of new homes.

The Woods have faced that opposition at planning commission meetings and neighborhood forums. Their stomachs have soured at the ignorance and fear displayed by people from whom they expected tolerance and understanding. Fortunately, they have persevered long enough to hear comments made by people like Jean Ward.

"I don't think you could ask for better neighbors," she said.