

## Features



Residents and staff of six Catholic Charities' group homes residences twist the night away at a dinner/dance at St. John the Evangelist Church.

Bonnie Trafelet/Courier-Journal

## New neighbors debut at dance

By Teresa A. Parsons

It was something akin to a housewarming that drew nearly 60 people from as far away as Penn Yan and Lyons to a school hall on Humboldt Street in Rochester earlier this month.

Residents, staff and family members from five Catholic Charities-operated community residences for developmentally disabled adults gathered October 10 to celebrate the opening of a sixth home at 400 Newcastle Road — just up the street from St. John the Evangelist Church.

The occasion was a dinner/dance with live music by the Sneakers band. Sponsored by several local supermarkets and other businesses, the event also raised \$130, which will help fund a summer vacation for Newcastle Road's newest residents.

Since the home's 12 occupants didn't actually move in for another week, most were thus able to get acquainted with their neighbors in an ideal setting — the dance floor.

On Tuesday, October 20 — only five days behind schedule — moving day arrived, and residents and staff members quickly transformed the empty house into a home. Six men and six women ranging in age from 22 to 30 then began the process of settling in and adjusting to new roommates, housemates and neighbors.

Although some renovation was necessary to add extra bathrooms and widen stairways, the house, which was originally built as a duplex, was already well-suited to use by a group because of its size. Each resident shares one of six bedrooms on the second floor. Below, on the first floor are shared spaces — a large living room, kitchen and dining area, laundry room and television room, in addition to offices for staff.

Four full-time staff members, a house manager and assistant manager divide the everyday responsibilities of overseeing the house. Eight additional people work part time on an as-needed basis.



Band leader Jimmy C. joins the audience to sing a song.

Apart from eating and sleeping on week nights, most residents won't actually spend a great deal of time on Newcastle Road. Each is enrolled in work or school programs during the day, and many will continue to spend weekends with their families.

When first proposed, the residence nevertheless faced what seems to be inevitable opposition from some neighbors. The majority have since been friendly and welcoming, according to Don Austin, resident counselor. "Most neighbors, even if they were opposed in the beginning, stop in to see what they're dealing with," he said. "These are very warm, affectionate people. When they see that, the eventually come around!"

House managers credit the support of staff at St. John the Evangelist for helping to overcome neighbors' apprehension. "By letting us use the parish facilities for parents' meetings and to raise money, the church really does play a big part in calming people's fears," explained Laurie Pearson, assistant house manager.

Both house managers and parish staff members view such cooperative efforts as essential to integrating Newcastle Road residents into the larger community. Anna Martin, youth minister at St. John's, represents the parish staff on the group home's neighborhood-advisory board. "I see the church in the role of reconciler, as being involved in neighborhood concerns," she said. "These will be people in our neighborhood, and so it will be natural to involve them in some of our activities."



Lorraine Passino shares a dance with Ken Erickson, as the Sneakers band slowed the pace long enough to let audience members catch their breath.