

# Retarded neighbors raise little ire on Livonia street

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

Can the mentally retarded and "normal" persons share a neighborhood? That question sparked controversies

## Parks hosted record crowd this year

Attendance at Oakland County parks reached an all-time record high in the first nine months of 1978, according to Eric Dieckel, manager of the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission.

A total of 735,658 persons enjoyed the park facilities between Jan. 1 and Sept. 29, representing a 24 per cent increase over the same period last year.

Pacing the increase was the Waterford Oaks wave action pool, with attendance topping 111,400—a 46 per cent rise over 1977.

Figures for four facilities—Addison Oaks, Groveland Oaks, Independence Oaks and the Waterford Oaks wave pool—showed a combined attendance gain of 38 per cent.

The Red Oaks golf course, which opened in Madison Heights in June, accounted for much of the increase in attendance at the commission's three golf courses. More than 11,700 people used the new nine-hole course in just three months.

Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission owns and operates seven parks, spanning 2,500 acres.

this year in Southfield and St. Clair Shores, but things seem to be working in one Livonia neighborhood.

There's a normal looking home in the 500 block of Melrose in the Rose-dale Gardens section of Livonia. But by normal standards, its abnormal. In addition to the five-person family, four elderly retarded men and one 19-year-old boy, who is recovering from a nervous breakdown, call the residence home.

There was resentment, recalls Lorraine Bartel, who operates the foster group home along with her husband, Lawrence. Her neighbors, several years ago, filed suit in Livonia district court to stop the Bartels from operating the home or force them to move.

"Livonia wanted us to relocate to a commercial area. They said we were

operating a business," Mrs. Bartel said. "I grew up in a normal residential area. They should have a chance to live in a residential area just like you and me."

A new state law allowing group homes to be placed in residential neighborhoods, however, was passed and signed during the trial.

Mrs. Bartel and her neighbors said the initial lawsuit was filed to prevent elderly men from being placed in the neighborhood. Prior to the Bartels' purchasing the home, it had been operated as a foster home for elderly retarded women.

"Before we moved in," Mrs. Bartel said, "I thought the people here had accepted the foster care concept. Women were living here before."

"One neighbor even suggested that I

take in women instead of men. Well, I'm not a flowery, frilly kind of person."

AS NEIGHBORS explain it, they were afraid of what the retarded men might do to their children. As the fears subsided, the neighbors began to accept the foster home.

"We're pretty much adjusted to the home," said one neighbor. "Nothing bizarre has happened in the neighborhood."

"We used to tell our children not to play with their children or go over to their house, but you can't keep an eye on them every minute of the day," she said.

Not everyone, however, has accepted the Bartels and their five tenants.

"If you took a vote in the neighborhood," one neighbor predicted, "most people would probably say they don't want them here."

She said most neighbors were concerned about the effect the foster home may have on their property values. "Most of us have all our equity tied up in our homes," said one neighbor who has lived on Melrose Street for 13 years. "We don't want to lose it."

Others resent the fact that the Bartels receive money from the state for taking care of the mentally retarded in an area zoned for residential use.

"My husband is a hard-working man," said one neighbor. "It's a service department manager, but he couldn't repair cars here in his garage in his spare time."

Mrs. Bartel receives more than \$340 a month for each of the mentally retarded men for whom she cares.

Financially, it takes everything we've got," Mrs. Bartel said. "We feed them well. We pay for all their recreation."

SHE DENIES that she's into the foster group home operation for financial reward.

She said she is there to help the mentally retarded. "I'm a teacher, a full-time teacher," Mrs. Bartel said. She said she tries to teach them basic skills and sometimes more complicated matters like cooking and gardening.

"Here they feel good about themselves. They have some self-esteem."

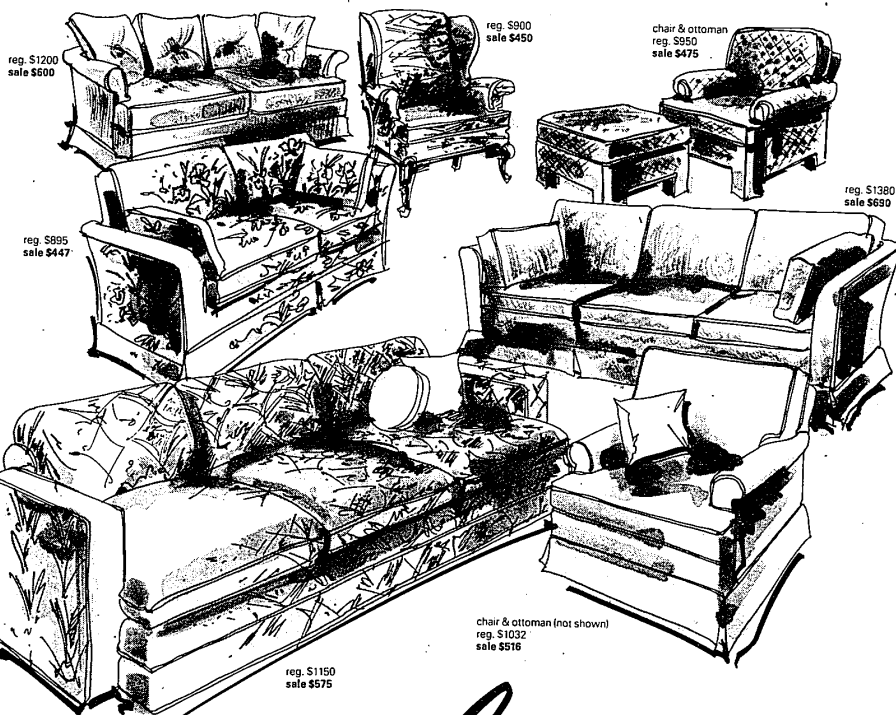
"I haven't found too many people in institutions that feel that way," she said.

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