

Neighborhood fights to preserve special home

By CRAIG PIECHURA

In an ironic turn of events, residents of McClung St. in Southfield are fighting to keep a home for the retarded in their neighborhood.

The nine-bedroom home with 6½ baths is located east of Lahser, one-half mile north of Nine Mile. The house was the subject of a heated city hall controversy five years ago.

The owner of the house, Stanley Juzenas of Southfield, was found guilty in 1975 of violating the city's single-family residential zoning by running a "boarding house" for six unrelated tenants.

Six mentally retarded young men and two full-time supervisors moved into the house at 20939 McClung on Oct. 21, 1977, and soon became "good neighbors," according to people who live on the street.

The same six young men live there today and social workers report that the men have shed their institutional behavior and are making great strides.

Now the neighborhood is concerned about the possibility of losing their neighbors because the owner, Juzenas, has put the house on the market, asking \$149,000 for the home and one-acre lot.

Church groups and other non-profit agencies have toured the home but none have made a purchase offer in the two years the house has been on the market.

One real estate agent who showed the house to an interested client admitted that while she was professionally obligated to show the home, "I'd feel very guilty selling the house. I'm glad it didn't fit the buyers' needs."

The "housemother," Cherie Frisby, said she too would hate to lose the home and worries about the negative affect of uprooting the six retarded men who call the McClung house their home.

JUZENAS said he wants to sell the home to the state, but the state doesn't want to buy. Juzenas receives \$875 per

month from C.B. Residential, a non-profit agency licensed by the state and run by Colleen Brayton of West Bloomfield. But the yearly lease on the residence expires next month. Mrs. Brayton said Juzenas is asking for a monthly payment of between \$500 and \$1,000 under terms of the new lease.

"Selling would be better," Juzenas said. "Today what's \$875? If I look for myself for an apartment that apartment costs \$425 and has only two bedrooms."

Juzenas said he has inspected a home for the retarded on Burgess St. in Detroit which the state built for \$320,000 which, he said, is not nearly as big as the house he built on McClung and has no backyard. Juzenas forbids the home's residents from using his yard, explaining that "they have playgrounds in schools."

"Compare it for yourself," he said. "I want to sell. I am getting older and older. It is too much for me."

Ms. Brayton said she would buy the house if she had enough money or if she can locate someone willing to buy the house for investment purposes and lease it to the retarded for at least three years.

"BUT I AM not into real estate, just running the house. (Juzenas) did tell me at the very beginning he would put the house up for sale. He's not being sneaky about this. (But) he's not at all sympathetic to the cause," Ms. Brayton said.

Ms. Brayton runs a similar residential home for the retarded on Hull St. in Farmington and is trying to open a third home on Green Lake in West Bloomfield in the face of stiff opposition from homeowners in that area. Nearly \$450 worth of windows had to be replaced at the home on Green Lake, said Ms. Brayton.

One of the major reasons she wants to keep the home on McClung open is that it is so well-received by the people in the area, she said.

Three neighbors back up that claim. "They are retarded," said Mrs. Mar-

Salich, next-door neighbor to the residential home for the retarded. "They are slow in mind and slow in physical manner. They are not wild, not crazy. There is no noise during the night like before, when it was a boarding house. These young men mind, they behave."

"They take the garbage out, you see them helping. Here they are treated like people, not like a bunch of something in an institution. Here they are treated like people. And I know (house manager) Cherie's good with the boys. They are nice people doing good work."

Mrs. Frisby said the state should buy the house and eliminate the uncertainty about the future for the residential care facility.

"The state should buy the house," she said. "Absolutely. They know institutions don't do a good job."

ALL THREE neighbors said the home's appearance and inhabitants have improved since the retarded moved in.

Joan Cullen, of 20920 McClung, said she didn't even know it was a home for the retarded until she saw a TV story about the home.

"It doesn't bother me at all," she

said. "I just notice them working in the yard weeding and things. Are they good neighbors? In a sense, but to me a good neighbor is someone you communicate with and we don't have much contact with them. However, I am not opposed to it."

Another neighbor said that one of the things that may have improved neighborhood relations was an open house held at the home.

"I went over there once," said Mrs. Irene Unleber of 20960 McClung. "It was nice. I spent the time talking to her (Mrs. Frisby) and he was neighborly."

"This is a big house. How can just one family live there? For those kids, that house's great."

Kathy Harris, director of community services for the state agency for the retarded, the Macomb-Oakland Regional Center (MORC), said the center is trying to locate a private investor willing to buy the home from Juzenas as an investment and continue to lease it to Ms. Brayton's non-profit organization, C.B. Residential. She admitted that the threat of sale is "kind of a constant hassle."

According to a real estate agent familiar with the home, it would cost an

investor \$1,436.73 monthly to pay for a mortgage at 20 percent down, including taxes and insurance.

Ms. Brayton said she receives \$37.90 per day from the state per resident which is expected to cover staff costs, food, rent and utilities. The state pays her \$4,800 a year for administering the program. And she said she isn't about to crowd more retarded residents into the home to make up the difference. "I don't want to run a mini-institution."

Jerry Provencal, director of MORC, said "the neighbors are really great and we'd hate like hell to lose the home but the state doesn't get into real estate."

In the meantime the six residents of the home — Terry, Donald, Bob, Kenny, John and Kent — are oblivious to the politics of keeping the home open.

Terry shows a visitor how he can flawlessly spell words like chicken,

Miller's (as in beer) and even the street "Liversia's."

Bob brings out his bowling bag and his trophies.

Terry struts proudly in his new cor-deuro pants.

They talk about their trips to Custard's Last Stand ice cream parlor and the movies they've seen lately — "Love at First Bite" and "Smookey and the Bandit."

"It's very important that we not be broken up," said Ms. Frisby. "They're family. When one of 'em's gone they're missed."

How long does Ms. Frisby, who lives at the house with her 7-year-old retarded daughter, Kelly, expect to be house manager-housemother for the retarded?

"I'll be here as long as we can hold out. As long as these guys' home is functioning, I'll be here. As long as the state doesn't start to cut funds."

Mahan appointed

Gregory J. Mahan has been appointed to the newly-created position of development director at Our Lady of Mercy High School, Farmington Hills.

For the past four years he has served as an instructor in the religious studies department.

The school also has retained the services of the Birmingham development firm Peterson, Rounding and Schou-

man to assist in the development program.

Mahan, 30, earned his B.A. degree in theology and philosophy from St. John University in Minnesota in 1971 and his masters from the University of Detroit in 1975.

He also has completed 100 hours of graduate studies at St. John Provincial Seminary in Plymouth.

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