

Sunderland home closes

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after 23 years

Continued from page 1

people, all from the Sunderland area. These included not only nurses and registered nursing assistants, but a complete kitchen staff and a laundry staff that completed 15 hours of laundry every day. Licensed under the Nursing Home Act, Sunnydale

had "a wonderful staff," said St. John, 75 per cent of whom had been there over 10 years, one from the opening in 1966.

All meals for the residents were cooked in the home's kitchen, constituting more home cooking than institutional food. Each item on the day's menu was

pureed separately to the consistency of baby food and served and fed to the residents in individual containers. "You soon got to know what they liked and didn't like," said St. John. "We had some who wouldn't eat peas, and like babies, they would spit it back at you, others didn't like

liver and the same thing would happen."

For St. John, as for many other staff members, the closing of the home has been an emotionally draining experience. "I'm smiling on the outside, but crying on the inside," she said. "I've seen 77 of them leave.

You get a special attachment to them, and everyone on staff had their favorites so no-one was ever ignored. The staff have just been a super bunch."

The residents, many of them adult in age, all came to the home as children between the ages of 3 and 6 years, yet remained as infants in their physical and mental state. "We had 77 happy kids here," said St. John. "I've been asked how did you know they were happy. You could just tell. They were happy and the staff enjoyed working with them."

For St. John, the final closing of the home is the culmination of 10 years of slowing down. "We've been getting ready to close since 1979," she said. During that period, empty beds had not been filled and retiring staff not replaced. For the past year, one nurse had spent all of her working hours compiling complete information charts on all of the residents to be moved. These not only included medical information, but personal likes and dislikes established by the staff over the years, little quirks and personality traits that would better able future care givers to understand their new charges. "We didn't have to do that," said St. John, "but we did because we felt it was best for the kids."

During her years with Sunnydale, one of St. John's proudest moments came in 1985 when the Canadian Council of Hospitals presented the Sunderland home with accreditation. "We were different from most nursing homes," she explained. "We had a different type of nursing. The adjudicator for the council really praised the staff."

Despite the excellent care, the genuine concern of the staff and efforts by the community of Sunderland to keep Sunnydale open, "the last resident left Friday (June 30) at 2:30 p.m.," said St. John who is not likely to soon forget either the day or the hour.

"We tried to prepare them. We've been telling them that they'd be going to a new home. We started that about a year ago, but whether they really absorbed it or not is hard to tell."

The future of the Sunnydale building is somewhat up-in-the-air at the moment. Located right on the main street the large white brick building will "more than likely become an apartment house," said St. John.

As for Violet St. John, her immediate plans include a long holiday. Living only five doors from the home, she said, "I've been too close for too long. After this, I just want a rest."