

THE ISLAND

Public school annex opens at Mt. Loretto

■ Schools will be renting the single annex as a stop-gap measure to alleviate overcrowding

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Two months after having its population of orphans, troubled youth and developmentally disabled clients relocated, the Mission of the Immaculate Virgin, Mount Loretto, will open one of its buildings tomorrow as a public school annex.

Yesterday, as school officials toured the building — the former St. Aloysius school — that will ease overcrowding in two South Shore public schools, they discussed the possibility of more educational ventures taking place here.

"This could be a model of the future," said Board of Education President Carol Grasser of the

annex that will combine the third grades of PS 1, Toreville, and PS 3, Pleasant Plains. "And it shows that the parents of this city are working together for the sake of our children."

Jerry Cammarata, the Staten Island representative on the Board of Education, said. "In terms of cooperative efforts between the public and private sector, I can't think of one in New York City that worked out as eloquently as this."

Mount Loretto, which is home to a gymnasium that once was the largest on Staten Island, could provide additional school space without the high costs associated with new construction, he said. He suggested a panel be formed of community leaders, education experts and Mount Loretto officials to discuss the idea.

Stephen Ryan, executive director of Mount Loretto, expressed hope that the schools and community could make greater use of the sprawling Pleasant Plains site owned by the Catholic Archdiocese of New York.

Citing the availability of some of the facility's buildings, gym and

ballfields, he said, "What we need is a partnership with the community to use these."

South Shore City Councilman Vito Fossella commented, "This place could be a grand slam for the community."

For now, the schools will be renting the single annex as a stop-gap measure to alleviate overcrowding entering into a 10-year lease that pays the facility \$136,500 a year for the first five years and \$152,250 for the five years thereafter. The Board of Education also will reimburse Mount Loretto \$570,000 for the renovation.

The opening of the new annex for PS 1 and PS 3 offers all the aspects of a community-driven success story.

Pushing the idea was Dennis Dall'Angelo, president of a local civic group. "I took one look at this building and said it's got to work," said Dall'Angelo, who went on to do needed architectural work for free.

The Board of Education liked the idea but said it would take two years to renovate the building, which had housed residents of the home. Mount Loretto instead hired its own contractor and accomplished the work in seven weeks, in time for the opening of school tomorrow.

The dorms-to-classrooms project included knocking down many interior walls to provide more open space. When students step inside tomorrow they will see new windows, a new fire alarm system, new bathrooms, and a new blacktopped playground.

"It's amazing what has been accomplished here," said Deputy Borough President James Molinaro.

Yesterday workers were still painting and putting the final touches on the 450-seat school as teachers unpacked books from their old schools. Six classes from



ADVANCE PHOTOS ■ MIKE FALCO
Third grade teacher Ania Altman hangs her class calendar in her new classroom at PS 1 and PS 3 annex on the grounds of Mount Loretto.

PS 1 and five classes from PS 3 will occupy the building.

"It's like moving. I'm a little apprehensive, but I think it will be OK," said PS 3 teacher Margaret Scotti.

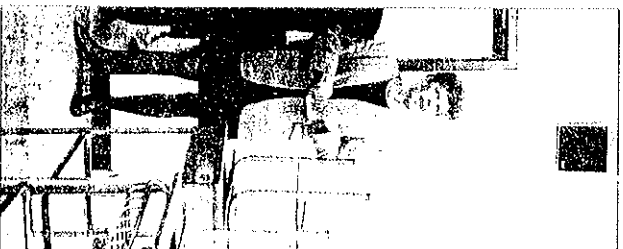
Several parents and students were on hand yesterday to help set up classrooms.

"This will be great. The classes are big and airy," said Karen Kelly of Pleasant Plains, whose daughter, Kerry, will be attending. Her husband, Gary, was installing a few shelves in the back of the classroom.

When Mount Loretto lost funding from the Child Welfare Administration in June, and its youth population was transferred into the state's jurisdiction, the facility lost the reputation it had gained as a home for troubled youth.

But some parents still oppose sending their children to a school located on the same grounds as the South Richmond High School, a special education facility. Mount Loretto officials stress that the high school is about a mile away from the annex.

But Karen Baya, who visited the school yesterday, still had reservations about having enrolled her daughter, Laraine.



Board of Education President Carol Grasser