

Dukakis visits Nemasket Group

FAIRHAVEN – The second anniversary of the Nemasket Group, an employment training program for the mentally retarded, earned a visit from the governor on Sunday.

Gov. Michael Dukakis visited the program site at the former Tripp School for a reception and tour of the facility which has placed 13 mentally handicapped people in the job force and is currently training about 30 more. Some of these people have never worked before.

More than two years ago, Fairhaven resident George Graves went to state Sen. William “Biff” MacLean to implement a fundraising campaign to remodel the Tripp School for the “Job Paths Project.”

The two men worked to raise \$400,000 with help from the community and area businesses. When the expense of renovating the building was procured, the state Department of Mental Health provided the Nemasket Group with a grant to fund the job training program. The Nemasket Group also serves as a training center for people interested in entry level positions in the mental health service. In conjunction with the Office of Job Partnerships, the Group has trained 31 people during the last year of which 27 are currently working in the

field. Four of these were hired to work for the Job Paths Project.

Executive Director of the Job Path Project, Louis Nisenbaum, said when the Project began he realized that there was a shortage of trained personnel in the mental health field. Through the aid of the Office of Job Partnerships, Nisenbaum developed a training program at the Nemasket Group. He said many people trained through the employment programs are former homemakers and welfare recipients now working in the field of mental health.

About 70 people attended Sunday’s reception to celebrate the success of the program. Nisenbaum said, “The reception is meant to be a ‘thank you’ to the community and fundraising program.”

Nisenbaum described the Job Paths Project as a public-private partnership, because the state supports the program and the private sector raises the funds to maintain the building. Because of the public support, Dukakis said, “If ever there was an example of teamwork, its right here.”

MacLean, in turn, commended Dukakis for his support of the program through state funds. The senator also lauded the initiative of Graves in getting the program off the ground.

“Without him there wouldn’t be any building for this program, if he hadn’t knocked on my door to do something.” Maclean said. “If anyone deserves credit,” MacLean added, “it’s he and his wife June.”

While speaking about knocking on people’s doors, MacLean informed the group gathered at the reception that the Nemasket Group has begun a new fundraiser. The money will be used to repair windows and pay for a new roof on the building. MacLean said the fundraising committee eventually would like to set up an endowment fund to pay for future repairs to the building.

The Job Paths Project is a work program geared toward people living in the community as opposed to those who are institutionalized. According to Nisenbaum, there is an imbalance of public funding for the mentally retarded living at home. He said public funds for training programs are usually earmarked for people living in institutions.

People interested in learning about the Job Paths Project of the Job Partnerships training program for those interested in working with mentally retarded should contact Nisenbaum at 999-4436. The Nemasket Group serves communities from New Bedford to Bourne.