

Boston Globe

Globe South people

### **Building a special place for special needs children**

January 11, 2009

[http://www.boston.com/news/education/k\\_12/articles/2009/01/11/building\\_a\\_special\\_place\\_for\\_special\\_needs\\_children/?page=full](http://www.boston.com/news/education/k_12/articles/2009/01/11/building_a_special_place_for_special_needs_children/?page=full)

With hope, all things are possible, said **Paula Kavolius** of Walpole. And the project she has founded, the Yawkey House of Possibilities, being built on donated land at Stonehill College in Easton, will offer hope to families with special needs children.

Kavolius is a member of the Volunteer Information Agency of Milton, and a parent of a special needs child. She saw the need for programs for families like hers, a place for special needs children to go for the day or overnight, to give the family a break from constant care and a chance to take care of themselves. She founded the nonprofit in 2003. Stonehill agreed to give the program 2 acres on its campus for a \$1 lease, and with the help of donations and in-kind services, the project got underway last year and should be up and running by June 1.

"What we're doing is being done 100 percent privately; it's a total grass-roots initiative," said Kavolius, a Westwood native, of the project that will cost \$1.8 million when completed. "Especially with the state cutting back on social services, it's critical we keep this private funding intact."

She said the project will be the first of its kind in the nation built on a college campus and, if successful, could serve as the model for others around the country.

The 11,000-square-foot facility will provide day programs, and some overnights, to special needs children. Kavolius said social service organizations will refer children to the program.

Her son, Timothy, who is 12 and nonverbal, "is our greatest gift - he brings more joy to our life than challenges," she said.

But caring for Timothy is tiring for her and her husband, she said. "I won't lie about that, but that's what I'm trying to address with this project. It shouldn't be like that." Parents should get time to take care of themselves as they take care of their children, she said.

The Yawkey Foundation is the main sponsor of the project, she said. Stonehill College, City Lights Electrical Co. of Canton, Granite City Electric of Quincy, the New England Regional Council of Carpenters, and the Knights of Columbus of Massachusetts are the main sponsors, all giving money and/or in-kind services and material, as have many other local businesses.

"In this world, with all the cutting and slashing, it's important for private people to dedicate their lives to better it," she said. "We can't be leaning on the state anymore, we have to try to solve some of our social issues ourselves."

For more information, visit [www.houseofpossibilities.org](http://www.houseofpossibilities.org).