



John Mitchell/staff photographer

Blaney walks over the proposed site for the retreat.

Retreat-to-nature site sought

Post-Tribune staff report

Rolling farmland in rural LaPorte County is the proposed site for a community of group homes and other facilities for mentally handicapped adults and others seeking a retreat to nature.

The Share Foundation hopes to purchase and develop 284 acres of property along U.S. 20, including a 16-acre pond and 70-acre lake, into facilities that would eventually include a community of group homes for Northwest Indiana and southern Michigan residents with mental handicaps, said the Rev. Dennis Blaney, president of the Share Foundation board.

Formed about 10 years ago, the Share Foundation is a non-

denominational, not-for-profit organization devoted to working with people who have handicaps and agencies that serve the handicapped.

Since July, the Share Foundation has raised \$100,000 in private donations that will be used as a down payment for the land, which is being farmed, Blaney said. The largest single donation was \$1,200, Blaney said.

Plans call for four cabins for weekend retreats, along with a lodge that could be used for business meetings or other gatherings, Blaney said. Eventually, Blaney said, there could be 15 permanent homes for mentally handicapped adults, forming a community of about 40 to 50 residents. Each home would have two mentally handicapped residents and a house manager. The total

project cost could top \$2 million, Blaney said.

Blaney, pastor of Sacred Heart Church, said the purpose of the development is two-fold.

First, the foundation hopes to develop permanent living sites in a community setting for people with mild to moderate mental handicaps. People with mental handicaps who live in Lake, Porter, LaPorte and St. Joseph counties as well as southern Michigan could apply for residency in one of the permanent homes.

Second, the foundation hopes to develop a lodge to give others a weekend away to become refreshed. Those individuals could be victims of domestic violence or child abuse. "They need some time and a program

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to help them cope," said Blaney. In addition, managers of area businesses may gather at the proposed lodge to relax or share ideas outside the office setting.

"We hope to have a variety of different crafts and things like that," Blaney said of the site, which is halfway between Michigan City and South Bend, near Rolling Prairie.

The tentative timetable calls for

purchasing the land sometime after the first of the year. Once a study of the land is complete, the foundation would begin the process of getting the necessary approvals from the State Board of Health to operate the group homes for adults with mental handicaps, the LaPorte County zoning board to rezone the land, and local health board for septic permits.

By the fall of 1992, Blaney anticipates that two cabins that would be used for weekend retreats would be built.