

## At last, a place to call home

By Cate Lecuyer  
staff writer

July 10, 2009



Mark Goldberg of Beverly Farms laughs with his son, Matthew, 38, at Bridgewell, a new group home in Beverly. There are five men, ranging in age from 38 to 73, living there after spending most of their adult lives in nursing homes.  
**(Deborah Parker / Staff Photographer)**

BEVERLY — Matthew Goldberg, 38, got out of bed on Tuesday, one of the first times he's done so in the past seven years.

"It's the first time you've been up just to be up, right?" his mother, Jody, asked him.

He nodded his head.

Goldberg was in a motorcycle accident when he was 21 and suffered a traumatic brain injury that left him paralyzed and unable to speak. But mentally, his mother said, he's completely aware.

Bound to a wheelchair or bed, Goldberg spent the first decade after the accident in a facility in Boston and the last seven years in a nursing home in Beverly, where he rarely got up and developed painful bed sores.

"He received very good care," Jody said. "But the one thing that frustrated him the most is he was surrounded by elderly people."

All that changed in May, when he became one of five residents at a new group home opened by Bridgewell, a private nonprofit that worked with the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services to place him there.

"It's a huge difference," Jody said. "His attitude has completely changed. He feels hopeful now."

During an open house this week at the Wayland Road home, Goldberg sat in his wheelchair in the living room and watched as people milled about, talking and laughing. Here, his four roommates range in age from 46 to 73. One man has cerebral palsy. Another suffers from seizures and wears a helmet. His artwork decorates the walls and his room. For many of the residents, Goldberg included, this is the first time they've had a space to call their own.

"They all picked their own colors and decorations," said Bonnie Smarsh, assistant director of residential services.

Goldberg's room is decked out in blue, with Sports Illustrated calendars on the wall and New England Patriots pictures on his door.

"Our goal with Matt is to get him to a sporting event of his choice," Smarsh said. It's something his family never would have imagined two months ago.

"His family said, 'Oh, no, he'll never do that,'" she said. "But we're in the business of proving people wrong."

She's also got more immediate plans. "Our short-term goal is to have him host a Super Bowl party," she said. "Hopefully with the Patriots in it."

With staff working around the clock, the idea is to encourage residents to have their families visit, or have friends over, as they would anywhere else. It's their home.

Funded primarily by the state, Bridgewell owns about 61 group homes on the North Shore and in the Merrimack Valley. The Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services collaborated with the University of Massachusetts to identify the five local men who would be ideal for a group home setting. Then, the state commissioned Bridgewell to build them a house, Smarsh said.

With wide hallways, ramps, spacious showers and built-in handicapped features that cater to each individual — like a Hoyer lift above Goldberg's bed — it's designed as a place where they can spend the rest of their lives, Smarsh said.

There's also a big garage to fit the wheelchair van, which is used to bring residents to day activities, like cooking classes or social outings.

Eventually, she hopes to get Goldberg to participate.

"He's a 38-year-old man," she said. "Who wants to sit home all day?"

Staff writer Cate Lecuyer can be reached at [clecuyer@salemnews.com](mailto:clecuyer@salemnews.com).

Copyright © 1999-2008 cnhi, inc.