

A construction crew works on the renovation as offices, a kitchen and dining facilities of the old A&P on Austell Road in Mariette. (Photo — Beverly Crawford)
STRAIGHT Inc. is adding a new roof, as well

Drug Rehabilitation Center Will Help Users Go STRAIGHT

By ELLIE SUSSMAN Reporter, Cobb EXTRA

A vacant supermarket on Austell Road in Marietta will soon become the first Georgia headquarters of STRAIGHT Inc., a private non-profit organization that works to stop teenage drug use.

STRAIGHT bought the vacant A&P building in the 2200 block of Austell Road this month and is removating it for use as a teen drug rehabilitation center according to Dave Tilley, the organization's Atlanta program director.

"We will start the program with approxi-mately 100 youngsters," Tilley said. "We antici-pate up to 350; but not for the first few months, probably not for the first year."

The center's targeted completion date is Aug. 15. Improvements include a new roof and the con-

struction of offices, a kitchen and dining facilities. The Austell Road building is the first STRAIGHT facility in Georgia. The organization has a rehabilitation center in its home town of St. Petersburg, Fla., and another in Saratoga, Fla.

I think the Atlanta area will support it heartily," Tilley said. "There's a great need in the Atlanta area for a facility of this kind.

STRAIGHT puts teens into a five-phase rehabilitation program which their families can pay for on a sliding scale, based on family income.

Most are voluntary participants in the program, but a few are ordered by the courts to attend.

In the first phase, the child is placed in the home of a "foster" family, usually one with a child of its own in the program.

This allows both the drug user and his or her family to have a "cooling off" period from the stresses they have placed on each other.

In the second phase the child "earns" the right to go back to live with his parents, who have also learned how to better handle his problem through the program.

The child returns to school or gets a job in the program's third phase, and in the fourth phase he

learns to spend his leisure time so that he can en joy himself without drugs.

In the program's last phase, the adolescent "makes amends" for his past destructive behavior by counseling other teens with the same problems at the center.

Like the members of Alcoholics Anonymous, STRAIGHT's proponents believe that the most successful treatment comes from someone who has solved or is solving his own dependency prob lem. "The real secret of the program is kids working with kids," Tilley said.

Youngsters in the first two phases of the program spend 12 hours a day at the center and take their meals there. Each "newcomer" is in the constant company of a "buddy," another teen in the final phase of treatment.

The young people spend the greater part of each day in teen-led "rap sessions," in which they can share their feelings about family problems, peer pressure and alienation with each other.

Tilley said observers are amazed that the program can keep teenagers' attention for such long periods of time.

But there's so much diversity," he said. "We're discussing things that are very much a part of their feelings.

"Unlike school, where they may or may not hit on something of interest to them, these things are of pressing interest to the kids all the time."

Bill Oliver, head of the Cobb County chapter of STRAIGHT, said the program is for normal kids whose lives have been disrupted by drug use.

"We're not dealing with the addict, someone is physically dependent on drugs," he said. who is physically dependent on drugs," he said.
"We're dealing with kids who have learned to handle their feelings by relying on drugs.

"If they're depressed, they take an upper - if they're nervous, they take a downer. We teach them to handle their moods without a chemical."

While some of the teens in STRAIGHT have experimented with Quaaludes, speed, amphetamines and cocaine, Oliver said, "the real hang-up is generally pot and alcohol."