

## Mabley families anxiously wait

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*Bob Metallo, a resident at Jack Mabley Developmental Center, Dixon, proudly demonstrates the recycled paper compactor used by residents during their work hours. The nine state-run developmental centers in Illinois had their collective budget cut by 22 percent by the state Legislature. The Department of Human Services does not know yet which, if any, centers will have to close. (David Rauch/drauch@svnmail.com)*

offices.

The center, the only of its kind in northwest Illinois, is on the east side of Dixon next to the Miller Golf Complex and Meadows Park on Washington Avenue.

The Metalos' mother, Barbara Cozzone Achino, referred to Bob as "Mr. Social Butterfly" as he led a group of residents and their relatives around the center.

"(He) goes around and visits everyone," she said. "He has the freedom you and I have."

But the future of the Mabley Center is unclear.

The state Legislature recently passed a budget that cuts funding for the nine developmental centers in the state by 22 percent, said Tom Green, a spokesman for the Department of Human Services.

The department and the governor's office must decide what it will do with less money, and if any centers will be closed. Green said the answer should be known before July 1.

State Rep. Jerry Mitchell, R-Sterling, said there had been agreements made in the last round of budget negotiations that there would be no closures for a year.

Most of the families of Mabley's residents don't know what they'll do if the center closes.

"We would be devastated," said Achino, of Cherry Valley, who also is the president of the parents association. "Lives would be at great danger. ... How about the individuals like my Michael, who will never be able to handle change? He will beat himself to death."

Achino said Michael Metallo was not born blind, that he had caused his own blindness through self-injury.

DIXON – The recycling center at the Jack Mabley Developmental Center smells like paper. The walls are unfinished, and there are several bins and barrels full of pages from old library books.

Bob Metallo, 41, leads the way, turning on lights and opening all the doors.

Metallo, who has a developmental disability called fragile X syndrome, works at the recycling facility Monday through Friday, compacting cardboard boxes and shredding paper.

He is one of 91 living at the state-run center, including his brother, Michael, 38, who is blind in addition to having fragile X syndrome.

The center is made up of seven homes, each with a capacity for 17 people, though none are full, center Director Tim Naill said.

There also is a recycling facility, a gazebo and a main building that houses a sensory room where residents can go to let off steam, a vocational work center, common spaces and

One of the alternatives to campus arrangements like Mabley are community group homes, which typically are within a neighborhood. Kreider Services operates many group homes in the Sauk Valley.

But Achino and several other family members of residents were not optimistic about that working.

"The community placement Michael was at, they couldn't deal with his behaviors, so they admitted him into a psychiatric ward, where he went from 147 pounds to 107 pounds," Achino said

Her other son, Bob Metallo, has tried six different placements. Two of those times he ended up in jail for running away.

She said other facilities haven't been equipped to handle his condition like they are at Mabley.

Michelle Cooney has two brothers living at the Mabley Center.

Daniel Cooney, 40, was at a community placement in Amboy before he came to the Mabley Center. One day he had wandered away from the home and into a neighbor's house, where the neighbor pulled a gun on him.

"I'm proud of them and how handsome they look," Michelle Cooney said, lightly touching wallet-sized photos of her brothers, "but it's not to be fooled that they are operating at about the age of a 4- or 5-year-old."

Dawn Furtek, 44, lived with her mother, Cindy Black, now of Crown Point, Ind., before coming to the Mabley Center.

Black said she couldn't work full time before because sometimes, for several months, she'd have to take near daily trips to the doctor's office 50 miles away.

"We would all love to have our family members home, but is it realistic?" Achino said. "You don't have time to even breath. It would be impossible."

They said the Mabley Center is the best option for their relatives.

"It's a home to her," Black said of her daughter. "She's been here 26 years."

Both of the state legislators who represent Dixon voted against the budget that cuts the developmental centers 22 percent.

"As far as I'm concerned, the needs in the budget are education No. 1 and human services No. 2," Mitchell said, "and they took the biggest cuts in this budget."

He said it's the state's job to take care of the neediest of citizens, which includes the residents at the Mabley Center.

Sen. Tim Bivins, R-Dixon, also pointed to the 160 people employed at the center.

He said cuts needed to happen, but they should have been "fair and equitable."