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SILVER SPRING

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School to focus on learning disabilities

■ Private facility to open in church for grades 5 through 9

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

The Siena School will open Sept. 5 in Silver Spring for students with language-based learning problems, such as dyslexia. The private school, which will be based in an area church, is hoping to attract students from the region by providing an environment tailored to meet their needs.

"These are bright children who have not been successful in traditional learning environments," said Eric Heyer, Siena's executive director and founder. "Though they learn differently from their peers, they can still have successful futures. For them, college is

a possibility. A future is a possibility."

Siena and the Chelsea School in Silver Spring are similar in regard to the types of students they educate. However, some students receive public funding to attend Chelsea, while none of the students at Siena receives such funding, Heyer said. Tuition will be \$23,500 for middle school and \$24,000 for high school. Siena's staff anticipates that about 20 percent to 25 percent of the 30 students enrolled at the school will receive financial assistance.

For the 2006-2007 school year, Siena will serve students in grades 5-9.

Siena will use the Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum as the framework for its academic program to provide content in the subjects of reading/English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies.

"I'm excited because the teachers are trained to teach children with

learning disabilities, and that will benefit my daughter," said Lisa Martin, a psychologist specializing in learning disabilities whose daughter Ali will be in seventh grade at Siena this fall.

Martin, a Silver Spring resident, said that Ali attended a five-week summer program at Siena and has already improved her writing.

For the first few years, Siena will be at Montgomery Hills Baptist Church along Georgia Avenue. Heyer emphasized that though the church will not be Siena's permanent site, it is suitable now.

With the school's official opening less than a month away, Heyer is excited. "There's a tremendous amount of positive energy when you're starting a new school, and we want to channel that positive energy into something that will provide students with the means to be successful," he said.