

State School Orchestra Plays For Lions Club at Luncheon

Toe-tapping music by a five-piece dance orchestra of patients from the Willowbrook State School featured yesterday's luncheon meeting of the Staten Island Lions Club in the Meurot Club.

The orchestra was brought to the meeting by Vincent Lombardi, director of music at the school, who was the featured speaker at the meeting.

The session also was marked by the presentation of a gavel to the club's new president, Dr. Norman L. Freilich, by International Counselor George W. Watson. Dr. Freilich was absent due to illness at the regular installation of officers June 30. Watson also presented a jeweled president's pin to Dr. Freilich.

Tells Experiences

Lombardi, a graduate of Wagner College and holder of a master's degree in music, told of his experiences as music director for three years at the state school.

"Our children are retarded," he said. "What the average boy

learns in a day may take one of our boys a week, or two weeks, and there is no assurance he will retain what he has learned.

"Children come to us with long histories of social and academic failure. They have learned they can't keep up with others in school or in games. They are the butt of ridicule by other children, and they bear the scars of not being accepted."

In an institution, he said, individuality is often snowed under, much as in the Army. But, he added, an institution, unlike the Army, offers little if any incentive to go on. It is here that music plays a role, for it gives a youngster confidence and the ability to face others, he pointed out.

Variance in Ages

Various programs, including music, are designed to stimulate the child, and to bring out normal reactions to others, he stated. He pointed out that four of the musicians in the band yesterday were teen-agers, but one, the

drummer, was 47 years old and had been living in institutions 33 years.

Some learn to read music even before they learn to read English, he pointed out, and the music brings them out of their shells, makes them proud of their skill. He pointed out that some children who became musicians of some skill soon spread their ability into reading and arithmetic, picking up considerably.

The school's 45-piece band, an all-boy unit, marched in public for the first time this year, taking part in parades in Eltingville, Oakwood Heights and Great Kills, and was given a very handy reception, he added. There have been many more invitations to play, he said, and on Sept. 16, 17 and 18 the music students at Willowbrook will stage a show there, with the proceeds to buy uniforms for the band.

In addition, he pointed out, the school now has a string ensemble, choral groups and dramatic groups.