

Mrs. Jerome O. Ellis, Good Friend to Children In Need

By KATHRYN GRANT

Mrs. Mary Campbell Ellis may be Staten Island's smallest grant. As petite and trim as a cut-out doll, this Douglass Hills woman has a list of community activities to her credit which, if piled on top of each other, would be taller than she.

The wife of Civil Court Judge Jerome O. Ellis, a grandmother and impeccable homemaker, Mrs. Ellis is one of the founders of the Staten Island Aid for Retarded Children and has remained with the organization from its planning stage 11 years ago, to its complex and many-sided program of today.

"Our biggest problem," says the Notre Dame Academy alumna, "was the unawareness of the public. Eleven years ago, retardation and mental health were unknown terms."

Handicapped children were kept under cover at home until they were old enough for school. There was no orientation for the classroom and often children whose mental capacities allowed formal education were lost because of their anti-social and undisciplined behavior. "So our first project was pre-school orientation,"

WITH THE PURPOSE of affording children with no other resources an opportunity of pre-school training to acclimate to a classroom situation," the founders began a four-point program, first of which was public education of the community.

The most important tangible demand was space, followed closely by the need of a qualified teacher with an early childhood certificate. Last in importance to the children directly, but not to the continu-

ance of the cause, was funds. New Dorn Moravian Church offered one room in the parish house for a year and with proceeds of numerous dances, Chinese auctions and house-to-house solicitations, the Staten Island Aid for Mentally Retarded Children began with 12 pre-kindergarten children.

The enrollment grew, funds grew, people in the community began to understand.

Today, with Mrs. Ellis as treasurer and member of the board of directors, the organization owns its own building at 1150 Castleton Ave., West Brighton, and offers a program from nursery group classes to teenage classes teaching girls domestic science and boys simple handiwork.

It also sponsors a Girl Scout troop and has facilities for bowling and other recreations. Even parents of retarded

children aren't forgotten for their problems are heavy, too, and Mrs. Ellis, being such a mother, understands. Her son, Jerome O. Ellis Jr., 20, is a student at the Bancroft School for Emotionally Disturbed and Retarded Children in Haddonfield, N. J. She is a member of the school's nominating committee.

A THIRD GENERATION Islander, Mrs. Ellis is proud of the fact that the Staten Island Community Chest accepted SIA into membership within the three-year time limit. (An organization must be active at least three years before it is eligible for Chest support.)

This quick acceptance aroused a quick interest in the judge's wife and she has been an active worker for it since. She served as the chairman of the South Shore during its 1958 campaign.



MRS. JEROME O. ELLIS

Another task accepted by one of this year's Women of Achievement is the work at

Willowbrook State School. "It's hard work and it's exhausting work, physically and emotionally, but it's extremely rewarding work. It's giving a thirsty child a drink of water."

Named to the board of visitors to the school by Governor Rockefeller, her term will expire in December, 1971.

Mrs. Ellis also is chairman of the volunteers of the state institution under the Ladies of New York Catholic Charities.

Because of the effort and dedication needed by volunteers, Mrs. Ellis says recruitment is difficult and is thankful for the hard core of truly dedicated and unselfish people who help.

She assures her volunteers that "I wouldn't expect you to do anything I myself wouldn't do." With this Alexander the Great philosophy, Mrs. Ellis is always at work

in her organization and never sitting aside directing.

"I've been offered the presidency of several organizations, but I don't want to get lost in the paper work and other administrative chores. I want to work."

BUT MRS. ELLIS is not an indestructible force of power. All it took to slow her down last year was four broken ribs and a broken shoulder.

The accident occurred on a trans-Atlantic ship which was taking the judge and his wife to her first European vacation.

She had to be flown home from Naples, Italy, and spent a long while recuperating.

This must have slowed her up, she says it did, but nobody can figure out where. An optimist at heart, she is still looking forward to her European jaunt. "It will be easier this time, all the plans

are made from last year."

Vacations are important to the Ellises. It means the family together and each year they visit Long Beach Island, N. J. and Maine. They also take a winter vacation which includes her daughter Mrs. Walter W. Schimphel of New Dorp, and her three grandsons, David, Robert and Jeffrey.

But all her community and family projects don't crowd her time for solitary moments and feminine pleasures. She likes to knit and she needs work and has an excellent collection of China and has an imported crystal that would make the fiercest critic sit up with glee.

The Advance's Woman of Achievement Award is the first public recognition to this woman who builds temples without her name inscribed across them, and the only complaint anyone might have is that it is long overdue.