

Willowbrook Record Defended

By MAXINE SITTS

"Our image? There's nothing wrong with our image. But Willowbrook is constantly used as a political football."

Dr. Jack Hammond became serious as he told of the highlights of his first three years as director of Willowbrook State School.

One year after he was named director, Dr. Hammond was faced with changes that Willowbrook was "filthy" and "zoo-like."

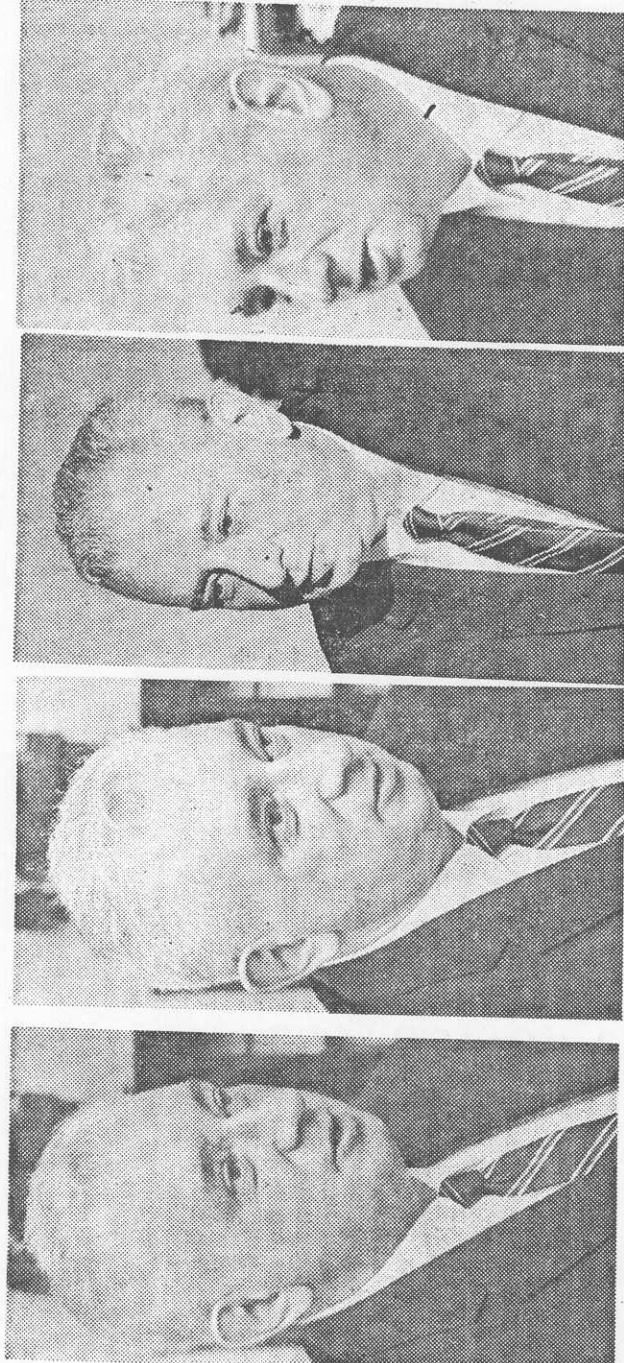
His direct answers to the charges, during grand jury investigations and press conferences, helped put those charges to rest.

"I'm sure there'll be another 'scandal' — it's part of the job," he said. "You get used to it after a while.

"What bothers me, though, is that I can't get any work done. While I'm running around talking with the press — being my own p.r. (public relations) man, the work sits on my desk."

He cracked a slight grin. "We must be doing something right — I know we aren't as bad as politicians have claimed," he observed.

Hammond has had his problems the past three years, but he preferred to talk about the progress he feels Willowbrook has made under his direction.



Patient programs and relief from overcrowding and understanding—Dr. Jack Hammond cited these as major accomplishments at Willowbrook State School during his first three years as director.

"Programs for patients are our most important activity," Hammond answered without hesitation when asked about recent improvements.

He cited the Hospital Improvement Program which was started a year ago. This training program put 50 severely retarded children on an intensive 24-hour-a-day schedule.

A one-year report showed the program to be a complete suc-

cess, and Willowbrook will continue to receive extensive federal funds to run the sessions.

Because of the encouraging results during the first year, the state has allotted Willowbrook \$1 million to build a 33-classroom infant therapy center for the program.

The air-conditioned building, with a plentiful supply of skylights, will replace prefabricated temporary rooms used last

year. Hammond is equally concerned about overcrowding and understaffing at Willowbrook.

In the past three years, he said, the number of patients decreased by almost 1,000, through reducing admissions and transferring residents to Suffolk State School.

At the same time, the staff has been increased by more than 1,000. The school now has

about 5,500 residents and 3,000 employees. Staff increases include additional occupational therapists, physical therapists, recreation directors, registered and practical nurses, teachers and attendants.

For his efforts to relieve overcrowding and understaffing, Hammond was awarded a distinguished citation award in July.