

Serve Wins National Award For Senior Citizen Program

By FRANK McKEOWN

A 6-year-old Staten Island pilot project, which has been used as the model for the federal government's Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), was honored Thursday in Washington by the National Center for Voluntary Action.

The Island project, Serve, which presently has more than 600 volunteers, was started in 1966 by the Community Service Society as an effort to use senior citizens to their fullest and to establish a new image of the aging.

The title of the group is an acronym for the organization's aim: Serve and Enrich Retirement by Volunteer Experience.

The Island project, which is coordinated by Mrs. Polly Norman of 228 St. Mark's Place, originally began with 28 volunteers.

Since then it has grown to become the largest single program in the country utilizing older persons as volunteers in community service.

The Island organization, which has given rise to similar groups throughout the state, has grown to more than 600 volunteers who provide weekly service in 30 different programs on the Island.

Average Age Is 71

The volunteers, whose average age is 71, travel twice each week to Willowbrook State School to assist in caring for the residents and to make themselves generally useful in varying ways.

Among their chores are assisting in the repair of machinery, shoe repairing for the residents, stamping new clothes and supplies, sorting donations and wrapping gifts.

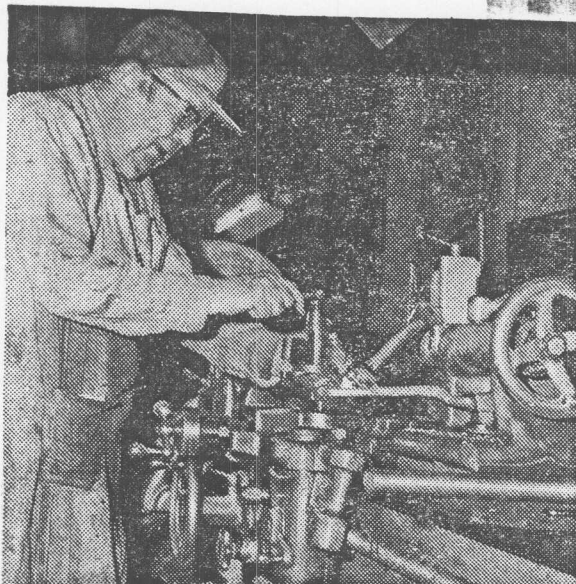
They also repair furniture and the gardeners...



As part of her volunteer duties, Mrs. Lucille Navickas (left) visits one of the young residents at the state school.



Serve volunteers also visit Staten Island Hospital. Mrs. Clara Hausmann assists in meal preparation for patient.

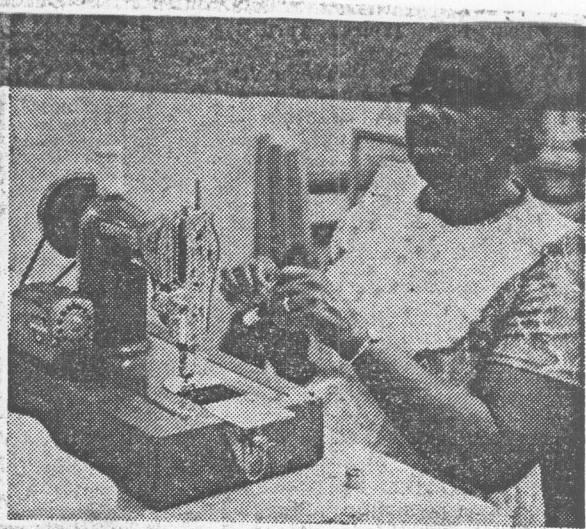


Henry Hansen, who has more than 2,000 hours as a Serve volunteer, operates lathe at Willowbrook State School machine shop.

Page 1 of 2 pages



Mrs. Eva Voss gives a lesson in needlepoint to one of the girl residents at Willowbrook.



Mrs. Vannie Harris mends clothes for Willowbrook at the Mariners Harbor Senior Center.



NEWS photos by Jim Romane and John Steen

Mrs. Sadie Romeo, Mrs. Filomena Vitale, Mrs. Anna Sciacca and Mrs. Angela Farrugio (left to right) do mending at Willowbrook.

clothing and prepare material for use in the occupational therapy rooms.

Other volunteers make weekly visits to the Public Health Service Hospital in Clifton where they assist nurses in the recovery room, help prepare patients for examinations, and prepare special sponge dressings used in brain surgery.

The oldsters also gather at Berry Houses two times a week to prepare bloodmobile kits for the Red Cross and to sew lavettes, ditty bags and children's clothing.

Activities Varied

Other activities in which the Serve volunteers are involved are providing dance instruction at senior citizens' centers, caring for the gift shop at the Richmond-town Restoration, and preparing and checking mailing lists for the annual Red Cross fund drives.

"We also have a program in which old and discarded books are cleaned up, repaired and given to health clinics and welfare hospitals throughout the city," Mrs. Norman said.

The senior citizens also regularly visit such places as the Eger Home, Sailors Snug Harbor, Sea View Hospital and Home, Manhattan Psychiatric Hospital, Staten Island Hospital and the Red Cross.

Help Kids to Read

"One of our most recent projects," said Mrs. Norman, "is a parochial school reading program in which the volunteers help children who have difficulty learning to read. The parochial schools are not eligible for state assistance programs in this area."

"Reading volunteers work on a one-to-one basis with two or three selected children for 45 minutes twice weekly," Mrs. Norman added.

She said 165 children, whose reading skills are at least two years below school grade level, are in the program from two public and 10 Catholic schools in the borough.

The Community Service Society's pilot Serve project has blossomed to the point where there are now 42 such pilot programs in 21 counties in New York State.

Title III Grant

Mrs. Vera G. Avery, project information specialist, said Serve-in-New-York-State was initiated in 1969 under a Title III grant from the state office for the Aging.

"Each of these programs operates under the auspices of a local agency or community group," Mrs. Avery pointed out.

"but they receive guidance from the Community Service Society."

Following the program's success in New York, she added, the Serve operation became a model for the federal government's RSVP groups.

Programs in 11 States

"RSVP was begun last year with a grant of \$500,000 to set up similar programs in 11 states," Mrs. Avery said. "This year, the original amount slated for RSVP had to be topped from \$5 million to \$15 million."

The award the Serve group received Thursday night in Washington's John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is given annually to the group performing the most outstanding community service.

Formerly known as the Lane Bryant Volunteer Award, it consists of a plaque and \$5,000.

Joseph Reina, an 80-year-old widower who spends two days a week at Willowbrook, accepted the honor for his fellow Serve volunteers.

Sunday News
 Page 2 of 2 pages
 February 13, 1972