

# Business groups urged to aid Willowbrook children

By ARTHUR M. SMITH

Members of the business community have been invited to "get in the swim" and help the children at Willowbrook State School through business-sponsored programs.

The appeal came from Nathaniel Ratner, owner of the Fountains apartment complex on Clove Rd. and chairman of the Willowbrook Businessmen's Committee, who opened the Sunnyside apartment's indoor pool and gymnasium yesterday to 25 teen-age boys and girls from Willowbrook.

And if noise and laughter from some very happy children are any indications, Ratner's project looks like an unqualified success.

The kids seemed to take to

the water naturally, without any fear or apprehension. They splashed and paddled around the 60-foot pool, playing "ring around the rosie" and water ball.

Nearly all of them practiced some basic swimming strokes and there were five or six really excellent young swimmers in the group.

"Some of these kids already have their junior lifesaving badges," said James Thomas, head of recreational therapy at Willowbrook. He explained that the children had learned to swim at the school's outdoor pool, although there is no indoor facility for use during colder weather.

Sporting a bright red bathing suit, State Sen. Leonard M.

Simon started the fun yesterday by diving in the pool and swimming its length while the children cheered. He was soon surrounded by eager, affectionate youngsters.

"Too many of these children are holed up in Willowbrook when they could be out in the community," Simon said later, drying off at a poolside table.

The Brooklyn Democrat is sponsoring legislation in Albany that would encourage community programs for the mentally retarded, along the same lines as the Fountains pool project. The emphasis would be on improving the children's physical, emotional and social growth outside institutional settings like Willowbrook.

Ratner and co-owner Hank

Geiser said they would open the pool to Willowbrook children each Monday afternoon. Located in the basement of the apartment tower at 1100 Clove Rd., the pool and gymnasium are usually closed to tenants on Mondays, so there is no conflict in scheduling.

"The possibilities for programs by the business community to help the retarded are limited only by the ability and interest we put into them," said Ratner.

He added that business groups often sponsor programs for "kids who already have too much, rather than for children who really need help."

"Everybody talks about conditions at Willowbrook. It's about time we did something about it."