

500 Willowbrook residents treated to 'best' party ever

By ROBERT A. WILLIAMS

"Of all the parties we have, this one is the best," 19-year-old Tony said as he sat in a wheelchair and smiled.

For Tony and 500 other residents of Willowbrook State School, last night was the night they had been waiting for. It was Building 10's sixth annual "Summer Festival," an evening of toe-tapping music, delightful dancing and general merriment.

"Many of our residents have no visitors," Alyce Teichmann, team leader of the building, explained as she moved through the throng which had gathered in the courtyard of the U-shaped building. "This party is something they can look forward to."

Mrs. Teichmann, who has worked at Willowbrook for the past 25 years, instituted the idea for a summer party and this year coordinated the efforts of 100 parents, relatives, staffers and volunteers who sponsored the affair.

Willowbrook houses about 4,000 residents who reside in 23 buildings. Each building, in fact, sponsors separate activities, usually for the residents of that building.

But last night's gala affair drew residents from most of the buildings in the sprawling institution for the mentally retarded.

Tony, who has been at Willowbrook for the past five years and who now has a normal IQ (his bones are so weak, however, that they fracture at the slightest jolt) kept his eye on the dancers who bounced to the rhythm of the Jerry Bogar combo.

Hugo, who is usually subdued and withdrawn, took to the dance floor and sported a grin as he moved through steps with summer staffer Connie Boelke, 20, a Rictymond College senior

who lives at 791 Manor Rd., Castleton Corners. Felix, who is also confined to a wheelchair, broke out a handwritten poem and offered it to a visitor.

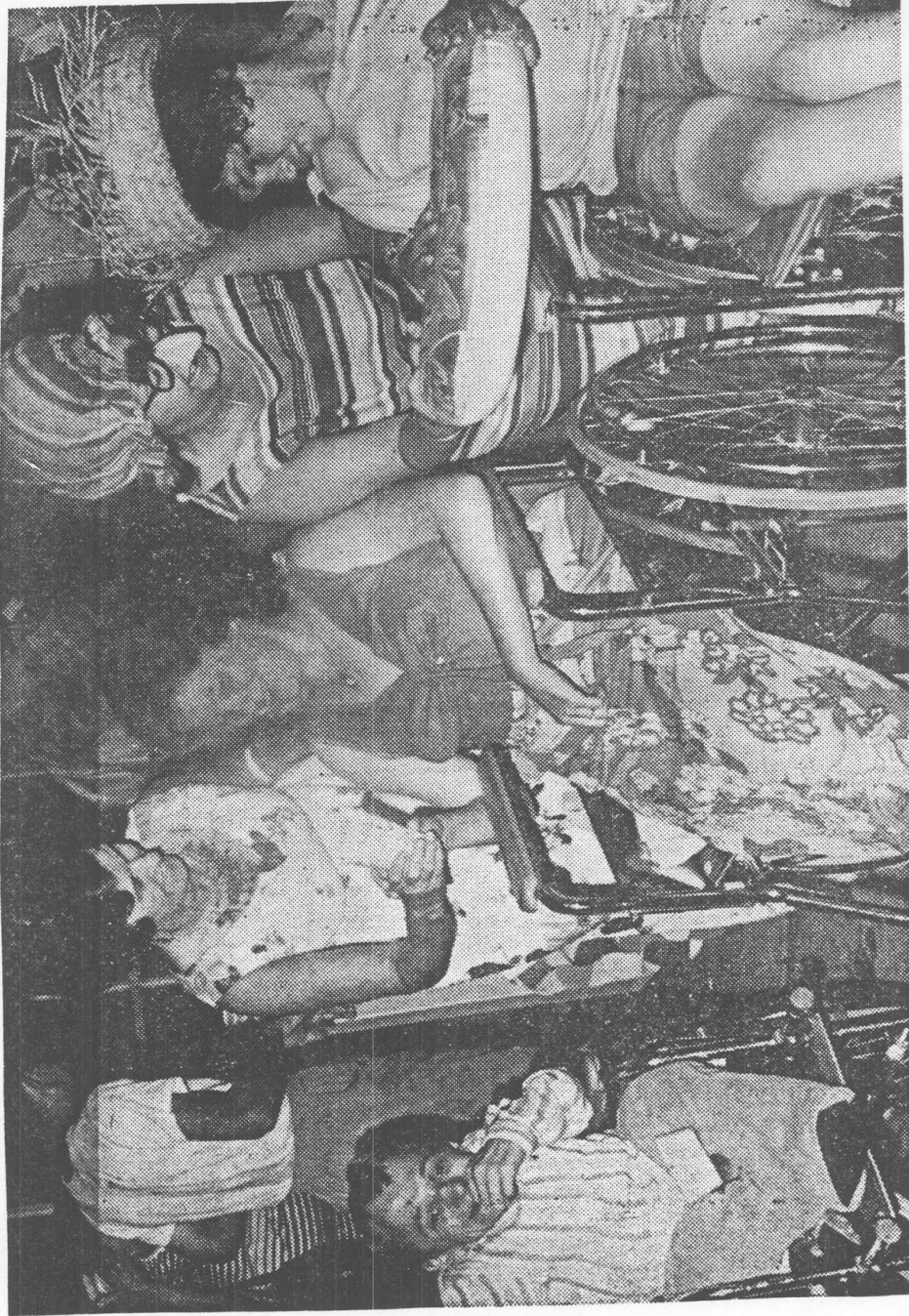
"It gives me a tremendous amount of pleasure just to watch them have a good time," Mrs. Joann Gingold said as she walked through the crowd greeting most of the residents by name.

"The kids I work with are abandoned and have no one," added Mrs. Gingold, who lives at 110 Maple Parkway, Mariners Harbor, and who has been a Willowbrook volunteer for the past 18 months.

Another volunteer, Don Sepatkin, 18, of Brooklyn, was armed with a camera and flash attachment and moved through the gathering snapping pictures of the residents.

Olympia Sirico, also of Brooklyn, whose brother, Guido, has been a Willowbrook resident for the past eight years, was among the relatives who turned out for the party.

"It's just fantastic each year," she said as she sipped punch. "And each year they love it more."



Tony, Helen and Glen, left to right, three Willowbrook residents who are confined to wheelchairs, receive party goodies from Alyce Teichmann, left, team leader of Building 10, and Mary Krawczyk, a staff member who is dressed as "Miss Building 10."

S.I. Advance Photo by Tony Carannalis