

800 'very special citizens' lauded at SERVE fete

By MARY ANN JOHNSTON

SERVE, Staten Island's nationally applauded agency of concerned retirees, paid tribute to more than 800 of its volunteer workers yesterday at a ceremony in the Columbian Lyceum, West Brighton.

It was the eighth such event held annually by SERVE (Serve and Enrich Retirement by Volunteer Experience) which was organized in 1966 with 23 members.

The highest award presented yesterday was captured by Mrs. Eleanor Love, a resident of the Eger Nursing Home, who accumulated a total of 4,879 hours of service during nearly five years as a SERVE volunteer.

Mrs. Love, formerly a member of a SERVE group traveling to Willowbrook State School to mend clothing for the mentally retarded, now continues the work in the Eger Home.

The second highest number of hours served award was given to Henry Hansen, with 4,216.

Mr. Hansen, who has been affiliated with SERVE since 1967, is a retired machinist and works on an almost daily basis in Willowbrook State School's machine shop.

Mrs. Fannie Carannante was named as the SERVE volunteer with the greatest number of hours during the past year. Mrs. Carannante, whose 1,172 hours served this year increased her total to 3,039, assists with occupational therapy at Willowbrook State School and the U.S. Public Health Hospital, Clifton.

She also acts as a receptionist at Doctors Hospital and makes frequent visits to patients at the Clove Lakes Nursing Home and Sea View Hospital and Home.

Mrs. Carannante, and Mrs. Suzanne Cavanaugh, a volunteer worker in the central supply department of Staten Island Hospital, were given awards as volunteers with 3,000 hours of service or more.

SWING AND SWAY

A rendition of swing music, reminiscent of the "Big Band Sounds of Yesterday," presented by the Msgr. Farrell High School Stage Band under the direction of Charles Roberts, kept the nearly 1,000 people gathered in the hall swaying and clapping in their seats until the ceremony was officially opened.

Caspar W. Rittenberg, vice chairman, Committee On Aging of the Community Service Society of New York, sponsors of SERVE, introduced the speakers, saying in preface that SERVE's current enrollment of 898 volunteers had given a total 363,000 hours of service during the past year.

Mrs. Roberta R. Spohn, deputy director of the city's Office for the Aging, the first guest speaker to approach the podium, labeled the volunteers as "very special citizens," adding that "there are so many people with needs but just not enough people on the giving end of life to go around."

Some of the most outstanding praise came from the directors of the four Staten Island institutions benefiting most from the long hours of devoted service.

Dr. Miodrag Ristich, director of Willowbrook State School, told the volunteers they "have brought love, joy and warmth into our wards."

"You are a valuable part of Willowbrook," he added, "You are our unpaid staff and some of the best friends of the residents."

Albert Stapler, assistant hospital administrative officer of the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital, who explained he was at first skeptical about permitting senior citizens to work in a major surgical hospital told the group, "you are just fantastic."

BEST TRIBUTE

A slight jolt rippled through the audience when Joseph D. Keeney, executive director of Sea View Hospital and Home, announced that not only was he seriously contemplating retirement but was looking forward to becoming a SERVE volunteer.

"I don't know what we would do without our active volunteers," he later confessed. "And SERVE has played a major role in our organized volunteer services."

Dr. John D. Dalack, director of the Day Treatment Center of the Staten Island Children's Community Mental Health Center, reported that "since 1968, over 400 volunteers have been trained at the center to help children with learning disabilities."

"These volunteers have helped approximately 2,000 Staten Island children," he said. "And the major things you have given them are the gifts of confidence and competence."

The top awards were presented to the volunteers by Borough President Robert T. Connor, who commended the organization for its "magnificent achievement."

Localizing the famous words of the late President John F. Kennedy, Mr. Connor repeated, "You are not asking what your borough can do for you, but rather, what you can do for your borough."

"I am enormously proud of you people who have devoted your time, energies, talents and hearts to your fellowman," he said.

Other speakers at yesterday's ceremony included, Mrs. Janet S. Sainer, director, Programs for the Aging of the Community Service Society of New York; Miss Ollie A. Randall, board member of the National Council on the Aging.

Charles S. Burt, executive director of the Staten Island Community Chest and Council; Miss Camille Bochicchio, a student in Wagner College's Department of Nursing; Mrs. Polly Normann, director of SERVE, and Mark Barrett, assistant secretary of the Community Service Society.

Representing Congressman John M. Murphy was his administrative assistant, Charles Boyle. Mr. Murphy, unable to attend the SERVE volunteer tribute day was at a reception in Manhattan, sponsored by the Parkinson's Disease Association, in honor of his mother, Mrs. Frank Murphy of West Brighton.