

Middletown, N.Y. 10940

Friday morning June 28, 1974

School officials charged in assaults on retarded

By JEFFREY PAGE
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LAKE HUNTINGTON — The co-owners of the Cohecton school for the mentally retarded and their residence director were arrested by state police here Thursday on charges they sexually abused an assaulted with electric cattle prods a number of the school's residents.

Meanwhile, it was learned that the state Dept. of Mental Hygiene ordered the school closed for 30 days beginning Tuesday. The department plans to conduct a hearing within the next month to determine if the school's license should be revoked. Revocation was called "very likely," by a department spokesman.

Arrested were owners Dr. Edward Kurtzer, 41, and Harold Levine, 49, both of Brooklyn, and Charles Trotti, the 27-year-old residence director who reportedly lives on the school grounds.

Kurtzer, who reportedly holds a PhD in school psychology, was charged with sexual abuse in connection with "physically touching" a 27-year-old female resident, and with one count of third degree assault. Levine was charged with two counts of third degree assault in applying electric cattle prods on two residents.

Trotti was charged with four counts of third degree assault. Ronald Heppes, state police Bureau of Criminal Investigation Agent, said two of the assault counts against Trotti concern use of a cattle prod. The other two charge him with beating residents with his hands.

The three were arraigned before Cohecton Justice Maurice Gilbert. Kurtzer and Levine, who are brothers-in-law, were each released in \$500 bail. Trotti was remanded to the Sullivan County Jail in lieu of \$1,000 bail. A hearing was set July 11.

Each of the charges is a Class A misdemeanor and carries a maximum sentence of one year in

the county jail and a \$1,000 fine.

Use of cattle prods on retarded people is strictly forbidden" under mental hygiene rules and regulations, according to Asst. Dist. Atty. Marvin A. Newman.

The prods, which are known as Hot Shots carry about a half dozen size D flashlight batteries and a capacitor. The instruments are designed to deliver an electrical jolt strong enough to get a cow or bull to move. Newman said they were used for routine punishment.

An instruction decal on one of the prods seized by state police advises the user how to place the instrument on the "animal."

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