

# Loretto Lads Clean Up at Willowbrook

BY MARY ENGELS

"The place needed a spring cleaning." The acting director of the Willowbrook Developmental Center, Tom Coughlin, was talking about the formerly littered 384 acres of Willowbrook's property.

"Since we wanted it done in a reasonable amount of time, we decided to go afield for help."

The center chose 55 young people from Mount Loretto, the child-caring institution on Staten Island, to do the job. Many of the young men were part of the landscape and gardening class taught at the Mount's Public School 25R, so they were no novices to outdoor work.

"The best part of it," said 17-year-old Daryl Manson from Brooklyn, "is the pay." Several of the fellows added: "Yeah, man!"

All were paid about \$2.25 an hour out of the center's personal service program funds.

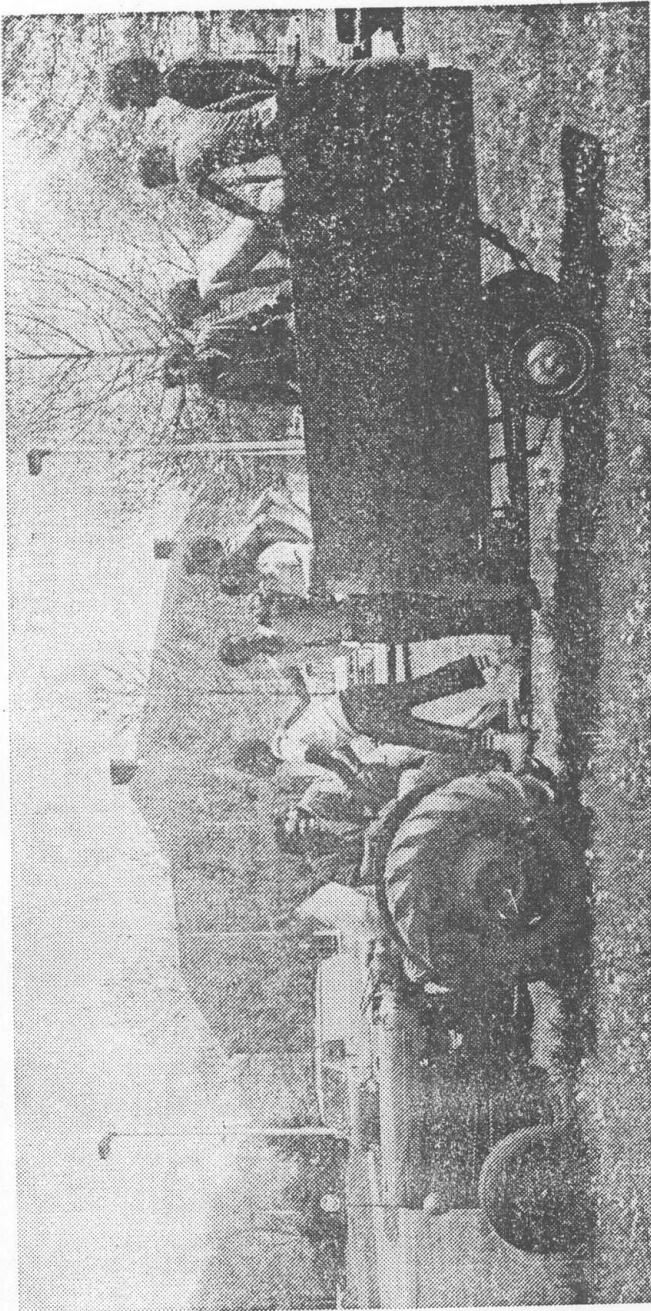
Most of the work consisted of cleaning up the garbage that was strewn around the mammoth property.

"Then we had a lot of brush-cutting and lawn-mowing to do," said Charles Arroyo, 16, of Bronx.

"It's a good job, working outdoors," said Michael Witherspoon, 16, adding that "some of the residents would come over to talk to us and we would help them if we could."

Robert S. Parsons, grounds supervisor at Willowbrook, praised the young people's work.

"They did a great job. We can't



Some Willowbrook residents get a lift. They are on their way to do some spring cleaning on the grounds.

find a piece of garbage around here now. I only hope we can get some of them back to work this summer."

Coughlin agreed and also seemed pleased at what the boys had accomplished.

## Court Keeping Tabs

"There is so much work for regular staff to do here I am glad we could get their help," he said.

The director is getting ready to appear in Brooklyn Federal Court this week to say just how far the center has come in complying with a court decree to dismantle the giant center, as worked out between the officials and the parents.

He is also making plans to close Building 2 tomorrow. At one time it had about 275 residents and is now down to about 40.

"Some of them are being moved to another building on the grounds while others in the convalescent unit are being put in the Basic Research Institute of Mental Retardation near by.

"If I had my way," said Coughlin, "every building would be knocked down after it was closed. But that's wishful thinking."

Barely in his post a month as caretaker director, Coughlin said "it has been a great experience to me to head up this place. But my boss, Commissioner Lawrence Kolb, keeps asking me when am I coming back to

Albany to take up the deputy commissioner's job again."

Coughlin sees Willowbrook as a place that should be run in "the traditional manner."

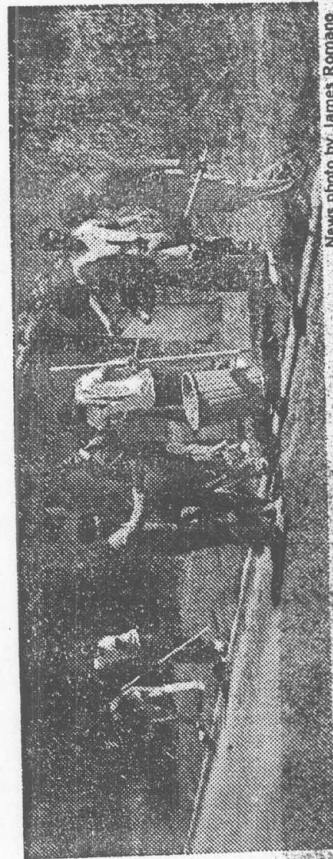
## Cautious on Decentralizing

"I guess I am an old-fashioned thinker but you can carry decentralization too far. You have to have a strong central administrative force to work from first and that is what I am trying to establish."

He feels that his replacement as the new permanent director "should come from the ranks of the Department of Mental Hygiene."

"We have had a doctor and an administrator from outside as directors. That has been good, but we should have someone familiar with the local system as well. The trouble with this place, you might say, is it has had too many directors, each doing his own thing."

"It needs someone who knows the place and the system and hopefully will be here for a while."



News photo by James Romano

The area will be clean as a whistle when they finish.