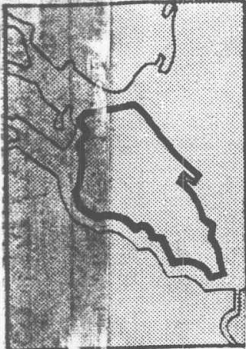


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LEADING



in Staten Island

Willowbrook's New Chief: Job Won't Be Dull

By MARY ENGELS

"Hello, I am Dr. Lee Cannon and I am Willowbrook's new director."

With that introduction the facility's fifth director in as many years ushered us in to his office to hear his plans for the Willowbrook Developmental Center on Staten Island for the mentally retarded.

Exuding confidence, Cannon said that one of the reasons he'd been chosen for the post was his experience in the state Department of Mental Hygiene.

"They wanted someone who was familiar with the workings of the department, and I have been with the agency for eight years—most recently, as the deputy regional director for the Mid-Hudson area," he explained.

On the job barely a few days, the new director whose first name is actually Lester although he is known as Lee, said of his position, one of the toughest hot seats in state service. "It won't be dull. I see as my main goal to bring us into compliance with the federal court so that by 1981 there will only be 250 residents at Willowbrook."

"My philosophy is that the developmentally disabled should receive appropriate and high-grade social services in the community as opposed to institutional-based services," he said.

"My biggest obstacle," he added, "will be setting up community residences."

"After that hurdle is overcome, the next will be dealing with the employees about their relocation and transition after the residents have moved into the community in their own boroughs."

There are now over 900 employees



News photo by Jim Romano

Dr. Lee Cannon: "I see my role as primarily one of program development and organization of services."

at Willowbrook and a resident population of about 2490.

Cannon is no novice at Willowbrook, having been there as assistant to acting director James Forde, back in 1975.

"In the 15 months since I left, I must say I have seen quite a bit of improvement. The resident population was higher by a few hundred then. There has been an increase in the day programs on the grounds, as well as a dramatic increase in staff, so we have almost a 2-to-1 ratio of staff to residents."

"The buildings look better and cleaner, as do the grounds. And most important, the residents look better. They seem to have better clothing and more amenities," he said.

He admits to having been "one of Willowbrook's severest critics. I used

to think the place was taking all the state's money but not producing enough in the way of programs or working fast enough to reduce population. It was one of the reasons that made me take the job. Unless one does something about it one shouldn't stand back and criticize," he said.

Originally he had applied for the position of director for a facility in Brooklyn. When the post was offered to someone else, he was asked if he'd like Willowbrook.

"First I Laubhed"

"My first response was to laugh. Then I thought about it, discussed it with my family and colleagues and thought: 'Why not?'"

He was screened by all the various Willowbrook groups, such as the Consumer Advisory Board, the parents group and Willowbrook's Benevolent

Society. Although he was criticized by the parents organization who felt they should have been given a choice of candidates, Cannon said this did not faze him. "One of my strong points is being able to work with groups. As director of Willowbrook, one must be used to working with a multiplicity of groups," he said.

"I intend to be a very, very visible visits to the various buildings, and I director in my visits to the various buildings, and I will have formal meetings with out deputy directors every Wednesday to see how things are going."

"A Special Challenge"

Cannon also said that he hoped to be able to develop an operational plan for community development over the next five years in order to reach the goals set forth in the federal court decree.

"I don't see how we can proceed until we have some kind of document that shows where we are going," he noted.

Would he borrow from some of the previous directors efforts towards that goal?

Cannon answered: "Of course. It is not necessary to invent things as long as you improve on what someone else has started."

"Willowbrook holds a special kind of challenge. It has been an enigma in the department of Mental Hygiene. What is to be done with it — the largest facility of its kind in the department's jurisdiction.

"As long as there is something challenging to do here, I'm committed to remain. But when it reaches its goal, as I am certain it will, and becomes the Staten Island Developmental Center for only 250 residents by 1981, then it will be time for me to move on."