

It's your opinion

Has suggestion for Willowbrook

As a very concerned parent and community leader in the field of mental retardation, I should like to express my opinion on the prime land of 260 acres of the Willowbrook Developmental Center. For the past three years I have been fighting to retain this precious land while serving as a member of the Mental Retardation Advisory Committee of the State of New York Department of Mental Hygiene.

The word is now out that the State of New York will retain 120 acres for the center and turn the rest of the land over to the City of New York and let the City Planning Commission find a way to turn the land into productive use. If this happens, you can rest assured some big developer will move in and put in row after row of houses.

This we can not let happen. We need Willowbrook Developmental Center for all our mentally retarded boys and girls and adults who are residents of Staten Island. Yes, I would favor the land being used for a park or medical college or a private university. What I would like to see is private residence homes built on the Willowbrook Developmental Center grounds to house 10 to 12 adults to each home.

Our mentally retarded here on Staten Island are being prevented from living in our communities on Staten Island. Whenever a proposal is put forth for a half-way house or hostel or residence home the community in which such proposal falls in, is blocked by some civic organization or group which does not want this type of home in their back yard.

Our handicapped boys and girls and adults have just as much rights as any one else. We are all citizens and we all pay taxes. We must start somewhere on Staten Island to build these homes for our handicapped. The grounds of Willowbrook could be our starting point.

As the founder and chief executive officer of the Exceptional Children's Social Club, and with some 15 years of experience in the field of mental retardation, I should be most happy if the State of New York would donate some of the land to our organization to operate some of these resident homes for the members of our organization. We now have over 125 families in our club and I am sure that some of our adults could make a good living in these type homes...

THOMAS J. PRISCO,

Dongan Hills