

Obituaries

Harold Piepenbrink, former director at Willowbrook

Harold C. Piepenbrink, a former director of Willowbrook Developmental Center, died Saturday in his home, 463 Goshen Ct., Gahanna, Ohio, of cancer. He was 45.

Mr. Piepenbrink came to Willowbrook in March 1975, after the state Department of Mental Hygiene had conducted a nationwide hunt to find a director for the 2,595-bed center for the retarded.

Mr. Piepenbrink, heralded as a management specialist, worked at Willowbrook until last December when he underwent major surgery in St. Vincent's Medical Center.

Because of the long search for a director and because it was hoped that Mr. Piepenbrink could cure Willowbrook's administrative woes, the announcement of his illness was a major setback in attempts to improve the level of care at Willowbrook.

Mr. Piepenbrink was criticized before he took the Willowbrook job because his training and experience was in the mental health, not mental retardation, field. At Willowbrook Mr. Piepenbrink reportedly had problems dealing with the state's civil service system.

Mr. Piepenbrink was director of the Tinley Park (Ill.) Mental Health Center before coming to Willowbrook. He was president of the Association of Mental Health Administrators.

Born in Wisconsin, Mr. Piepenbrink had master's degree in hospital administration from Northwestern University, was business administrator at Manteno State Hospital and held an administrative post at the District of Columbia General Hospital.

Mr. Piepenbrink once said that directing Willowbrook was "the biggest challenge of my life." He added that he didn't believe the facility could not be well run. "Willowbrook's problems can be solved," he said.

He is survived by his wife, Nancy; two sons, John and James, and a daughter, Alison Lee; two brothers, and a sister.

The funeral will be tomorrow in Mount Vernon, Ill.