

Workshop grows, so do skills of mentally retarded

By SYDNEY FREEDBERG

He was a huge, monolith of a man -- about 6 feet, 2 inches, and 220 pounds. Everything about him -- his hands, his arms, his head -- seemed larger than life. The features of his sun-faded face were thick and fleshy, as if sculpted in dough. His eyes were like stone.

The man glanced about at cars traveling down Bay St., Stapleton, nodded to waiting men and turned to help an aging woman who struggled with morning packages.

It was about 9:50 in the sunny morning, not quite time for work. The man strolled back to the three-story brick structure with barred-windows.

Greeting him was a small, pretty woman, 30ish a blue-eyed blonde with a slender figure and shy, self-conscious ways. A pair of unlikely confederates.

He scratched the side of his head. She stared a bit awkwardly, and they smiled

at once and said hello. Together, they entered the Bay St. building to a shop cluttered with metal tables, prodigious machines and other factory-like paraphernalia.

They took their seats and began work, which consists of packaging mostly, things like pens, sanitary belts, nails and string.

Alongside of the large man and the small woman, 60 others, a few of them blind, others deaf, all of them mentally retarded, were working. But in the shop, there is no such talk.

And now the number of workers and an already-flourishing "business" are about to grow with a move down the street to a larger shop -- at 215 Bay St., Tompkinsville.

Staten Island Aid for Retarded Children, a 23-year-old voluntary agency that operates the place, calls it the Staten Island Aid Rehabilitation Center, or

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