

55,000 towels disappear from Willowbrook

4 car wash operators accused of possessing some

By SYDNEY FREEDBERG

Staten Island detectives are investigating the theft of 55,000 white towels valued at \$60,000 from the Willowbrook Developmental Center.

Operators of four Island car wash facilities were arrested yesterday and accused of possessing a total of 50 allegedly stolen towels, police said. All the recovered linen bore the red letters of Willowbrook Developmental Center.

The towels, all owned by New York State, were reported missing Wednesday by Willowbrook's chief security officer, Anthony Ragucci.

Ragucci told police that the institution's laundry manager, Joseph Trimarchi, became suspicious and conducted a linen inventory about one month ago, after he had gone to an Island car wash and had his vehicle dried with a Willowbrook towel.

Yesterday, following the report to police, four two-man detective squads began combing Island car washes in an attempt to find the towels.

"In some cases we had an inkling we'd find some, but others we hit arbitrarily," said Detective Joseph Guido of the Crimes Against Property Squad.

Arrested and accused of criminal pos-

session of stolen property were James Gildea, 36, of Fanwood, N.J., of a car wash at 4463 Amboy Rd., Eltingville; DeAngelis, 46, of 50 Cannon Ave., Travis, of the Dongan Hills Car Wash, 1549 Richmond Rd.; Peter Thomassen, 25, of Brooklyn, of Car Wash Sales, 2042 Hylan Blvd., Grant City, and Albert Cappillo, 54, of Brooklyn, of the Exxon Car Wash and Service, 1025 Bay St., Rosebank.

A total of 54 towels and a Willowbrook laundry bag were recovered by police. Working with Guido on the arrests were Lt. Hugh Bennett, Sgt. Patrick McCarthy and Detective John Harkins.

The four men were issued summonses and told to appear for a hearing in Criminal Court, Stapleton, March 10.

Guido said the accused car wash operators offered a similar description of a man from whom they told police they bought the towels about one month ago.

The man is probably part of what Guido called "an organized ring." Sources within Willowbrook reported the towels were selling at \$10 for a 20-pound bag.

Elin M. Howe, Willowbrook's director, said yesterday Willowbrook the in-

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55,000 towels missing from Willowbrook; quiz car wash operators

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stitution for the retarded, which has 1,625 residents, had been suffering a "towel shortage in recent months." She said an internal investigation into the theft is under way, with security officials attempting to determine how the towels were pilfered.

Police said they have no leads in the theft or whether the ring was operating on the grounds.

Guido said thousands of towels might have been sold to car wash operators in other boroughs.

Atamas Kobryn, Willowbrook's deputy director of administration, said lack of security at Willowbrook is "an expensive proposition indeed."

Miss Howe agreed that all institutions have "a problem of this type," but said: "Obviously there is something wrong if someone can walk out of here with that much stuff."

Willowbrook uses about 15,000 towels a week, all laundered in a central facility on state grounds and distributed daily by need to residential buildings.

"But this has left us with only 10,000 or 12,000 towels," Kobryn said, "and we have to keep getting them replaced."



Detective Joseph Guido holds one of the stolen towels recovered by police in their raid of car wash establishments. S.I. Advance Photo by Tony Carannante