

job, — even to the point of not applying himself to study for promotions — Coughlin set about as an organizer, founding program after program in Jefferson County.

He found an empty store and enlisted the aid of a retired Army officer to set up a workshop for five children, and from that humble beginning evolved a community program serving as a model for many communities in New York State.

He also monitored the state school where his daughter was — very very carefully.

Finally, in 1968, Coughlin took a leave of absence from the state troopers so he could go to school full time and become eligible for the paid position of an executive director of the ARC chapter. He was graduated from Goddard College in Plainfield, Vt., at the age of 33.

Thomas A. Coughlin was born in Brooklyn on Feb. 12, 1938. He attended Midwood High School and joined the Air Force upon graduation. He met his wife-to-be, Joan, when stationed in Watertown, N.Y.

In 1975, soon after Gov. Cary was inaugurated, he visited Jefferson County. Coughlin recalls that by that time, "we had opened eight community residences, brought about 250 of our children back home, and were providing full, comprehensive day programming for nearly 600 clients."

"The governor's satisfaction with our program led him to recommend me for the position of deputy commissioner for mental retardation," Coughlin's first public office. "His instructions to me were quite clear — 'Do the same thing on a statewide basis.'"

The job remains far from done, Coughlin admits, with Tracy, for one still not ready for placement in the community. She is now on Staten Island in the privately operated Nina Eaton Center, receiving specialized services, learning how to walk and talk again.

As for Coughlin, he wants to stay in his position for two, maybe three years. After too long, you know, public officials' ideas get stale. We need a change."

He enjoyed most being director of Willowbrook Development Center during the trying year of 1975. "I loved that so much that Dr. (Lawrence) Kolb (then commissioner of the Department of Mental Hygiene) literally had to pull me back to Albany to resume my duties there."

"And when I leave this job," Coughlin asserts, "I just want to go back to running programs, delivering services to any retarded kid in this state who needs them."

—SYDNEY FREEDBERG

Page  
2 of 2