

# Despite problems, Urban League to push Island programs

By BRUCE ALPERT

Seven months ago, a bitter internal conflict at the New York Urban League surfaced publicly with the firing of David C. Smith as the league's Staten Island director, a post he held for eight years.

Today, many of the issues that triggered the conflict remain unresolved and the future of the financially strapped league on Staten Island is in doubt.

"Unfortunately, nothing has been settled," said Martha Bendix, a member of the league's Staten Island Branch Auxiliary Board and vice-chairwoman of its day care corporation's board of directors. "The issues still remain the same as they were last summer."

Chief among the issues is the status of \$159,000 in assets that Smith and local board members say belongs to the day care corporation — the operators of the Whitney M. Young Jr. Memorial Day Care Center in West Brighton and the Child Power Center in New Brighton. The funds have been listed in the New York Urban League's unrestricted account since May and day care officials are concerned that the league may use the money to lower its reported \$1 million deficit.

The funds took on added significance, they say, when the Internal Revenue Service on Feb. 14 placed liens on all Urban League property throughout the city, saying the league owed more than \$600,000 in taxes and interest dating back to 1971.

Other issues that remain unresolved include:

¶ An alleged conflict of interest in which four members of the league's board of directors continue to sit on the board of the league's day care corporation. In April, 1976, the city's day care agency said city regulations forbid the league from continuing to receive rent from the Whitney Young center — it receives \$85,000 a year — at the same time it has representatives on the day care board.

¶ An appeal by Smith to the league's board of directors to be reinstated to his \$25,000 a year director's post. League Executive Director Horace Morris said this week that Smith definitely won't be reinstated, but Smith said he still hasn't received an official word from the board.

¶ Selection of a new director. Only recently was a selection committee named to begin evaluating candidates for borough director on Staten Island. Morris said a new director will probably be named in the next month, filling a void that Thomas Wilson, executive director of the Staten Island Community Corp. says has left the Island league without any leadership.

¶ The status of anticipated revenues from the sale of bonds for a league-sponsored housing project in Mariners Harbor — the 535-unit Arlington Terrace. The league offered the money to the IRS, which reportedly rejected the offer, at one point, estimated at close to \$700,000. Smith maintains the money was intended for housing-related projects on Staten Island.

¶ The status of a year-long investigation into summer lunch programs operated by the league on Staten Island and in Manhattan. According to officials from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, reports of alleged abuses in both programs are now filed in the U.S. Attorney's offices in Brooklyn and Manhattan. The bulk of the investigation, sources close to the probe say, rests with the Brooklyn program.

¶ The future of the league's offices, now located 110 Victory Blvd., Tompkinsville. William Sims, director of fund development and public information for the league, said a move to larger quarters is under consideration because of "repeated vandalism" at the league's Tompkinsville offices.

Despite its problems, Morris, in a telephone interview, said the league is committed to maintaining its programs on Staten Island.

"We will continue to be a part of serving Staten Island," said Morris, predicting that when a new director is named, the league will be in a better position to work on programs to assist the poor in the borough.

As an example of the league's continued viability, Morris pointed to the recent approval by the Board of Estimate of a \$600,000 contract, enabling the league to continue to operate a federal jobs program on the Island. Most of the 130 jobs are expected to go for positions with the state Department Mental Hygiene and United Cerebral Palsy Association at the Willowbrook Developmental Center.

But others are less certain about the viability of the league on Staten Island.

"The future of the Urban League on the Island depends on how they deal with the outstanding issues," said Smith, who currently is a \$28,000 a year consultant with the city's Health and Hospital's Corp. "And so far they haven't done anything to renew confidence."

According to Smith, few people who provided financial assistance to the league in the past will be willing to do so now, in light of the league's efforts to use funds raised on Staten Island to pay off its debt to IRS.

"It just isn't morally right," Smith says, to turn day care assets, raised on Staten Island to provide child care for working parents, over to IRS.

"And the league isn't doing anything for day care when it considers moving out of 110 Victory Blvd., thereby taking rent money away from the day care corporation," Smith said. The day care corporation receives about \$20,000 in rent from the Urban League for the 110 Victory Blvd. offices.

Wilson, executive director of the Staten Island Community Corp. says that unless solid leadership is brought into the league's borough office shortly, the league's programs will be in jeopardy.

"Unfortunately, the Urban League is now an aimless organization, there is no sense of direction, no solid administration," Wilson said.

Asked to comment on charges that the league is not functioning efficiently on Staten Island, Morris said the "league is continuing to operate fully" in the borough. He said that efforts were under way to resolve all of the issues of conflict between local officials and the league, but he would not say when or how they would be resolved.