

CSI prof gets \$\$ to start Willowbrook work projects

An assistant professor of psychology at the College of Staten Island has received a \$50,000 grant to start a volunteer program for college students at Willowbrook Developmental Centers two-year-old Work Activity Center.

Under the one-year grant, Assistant Professor Edward F. Meehan has begun to assemble a group of student volunteers to work on a one-to-one basis with 130 Willowbrook residents enrolled in the program. Many of the residents are receiving their first actual work experience.

In addition to providing student volunteers, who will receive academic credit for their work at the institution, Meehan said he and the students will work directly with the 43 state employees at the center to help them work with the center's clients, all of whom are profoundly retarded, some with physical handicaps.

"Many of our clients have been rejected by other private programs because they may have behavior problems or handicaps that need more individual attention," said John Bright, director of the work center. "We hope the college students will be able to

provide that attention."

Meehan, a Manhattan resident who has been affiliated with the college since 1975, said that the students will also set up individual programs to prepare the residents to learn work skills.

Under the program, the Willowbrook residents, who range between 16 and 65 years old, come to work each day, performing such tasks as assembling pens, and packaging various health-related items.

"It's a wonderful program that needs the involvement of the community," Meehan said. "And we hope to set up a permanent program involving the college community. It's a great experience for our students, most of whom are psychology majors, and I believe it will be good for the clients and state workers as well."

But Felton King, president of the union representing Willowbrook's employees, said he thinks the \$50,000 contract may be a waste of money.

"I haven't been informed of this contract, but it seems to me that it doesn't make sense giving \$50,000 to some professor when we have so many state workers who can do the job," said King, president of the Civil Service Employees Association.

In the past, King has charged that the state has signed lucrative contracts with such private groups as United Cerebral Palsy Association of New York state at the same time it plans to layoff state workers.

Meehan maintains that his program isn't designed to replace state workers, but merely to allow them to be more effective. "There's no question that this center is short-staffed and that the state workers are doing a terrific job. There's no way we can replace them."

— BRUCE ALPERT