



The rubble of a fire-charred Dongan Hills building, which state officials seek to open as a facility for the retarded. Fire marshals suspect arson.

S. I. Advance Photo by Tony Carannante

## Marshals hunt arsonist in office fire

By SYDNEY FREEDBERG

Fire marshals are seeking an arsonist who set fire to a Dongan Hills building late Sunday in what they say may have been an attempt to prevent the opening of a facility for the area's retarded citizens.

"At this point we are working under the assumption it might have been a person or persons opposed to the idea," Deputy Chief Fire Marshal John Barracato said.

The blaze at 26 Dumont Ave., which caused medium damage to a portion of the two-story structure, apparently was fueled by a flammable liquid discovered by investigators yesterday at the foot of the building's stairwell, Barracato said.

On April 19, over some area opposition, Community Board 2 approved the use of the building as a state Borough Developmental Services Office, which would provide counseling, therapy and recreation for the community's retarded residents.

Fire officials will decide within the next few days if they will ask the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Justice Department to investigate possible violations of federal civil rights statutes stemming from the suspected arson, Barracato said.

Elin M. Howe, director of the Borough Developmental Services Office, said yesterday the state still intends to seek a lease to rent the premises so the office can open, perhaps by the end of the summer.

But the building's owner, Joseph Per-

(Continued on Page 2)

Page 1  
of 2

# Fire marshals seeking arsonist who set blaze in Dongan Hills office

(From Page 1)

Perrotta of Midland Beach, said yesterday he doesn't know what to do. Sifting through the rubble of the fire-charred structure, Perrotta commented:

"I'm in shock...Perhaps it's a vendetta. If it is, I don't know if I want to pursue this anymore. Who knows what could happen if I do?"

A portion of Perrotta's brick building, located on a quiet, residential block, is used now by New York Foundling Hospital caseworkers. "I've leased out to a child-caring agency for 10 years," Perrotta declared, "and there was never any objection from the community. I don't really understand why there is a problem now."

Architect Andrew Tsaris, surveying the structure along with two contractors yesterday, called the damage "not as bad as it looks."

Twenty-two windows were smashed, the roof caved in one spot, two rooms were badly burned, but little apparent structural damage resulted from the blaze, Tsaris said.

The building was unoccupied when firefighters from three engine and three ladder companies reported in response to an alarm sounded about 11:55 p.m.

Meanwhile, the leader of the Dongan Hills United Civic Association, which sparked opposition to the site as a center for the retarded, decried the suspected arson as a "disgrace."

"I believe it's terrible if the fire has been declared suspicious," president Bernard Kosinski said. "We oppose what the state is doing and believe it should not be. But when it comes to the nitty gritty, whatever follows has to be by the rules."

Kosinski maintained his group con-

done no violence or "acts of vengeance" and said he would call an emergency meeting of the group's board of directors to put that on the record.

Miss Howe, before learning a flammable substance had been discovered at the fire scene, said: "I would hate to think this had anything to do with our plans to occupy. That would be very unfortunate."

More than 600 people attended the April 19 meeting at which Community Board 2 approved the center by a margin of 26 to 8. Some Dongan Hills residents objected strenuously, saying property devaluation would result.

The proposed center is to house offices of administrators now located at the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook. It is to serve up to 200 residents who have either been repatriated into their home communities from the Willowbrook institution or are living in the Board 2 area now, Miss Howe said.

Most of the services are to be provided by caseworkers who will visit clients within their homes, according to Miss Howe. The center is to be open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., as well as two evenings a week.

At the April 19 meeting, some Dongan Hills residents asked if other locations were considered. A representative of the borough services office said other buildings had been examined, but the state preferred the Dumont Ave. site because it did not require extensive renovations.

Chief Barracato asked anyone with information about the fire to call investigators at 965-8298. All calls will be kept confidential, he said.

Page 01  
12