

# While search for missing therapist went on Phone calls threaten other women at center

By MARY BETH PFEIFFER

City and state police again combed the grounds of the Staten Island Developmental Center yesterday, in search of a 46-year-old mental hygiene therapist who was abducted screaming when she stepped from her car to report for work early Tuesday morning.

Meanwhile, an aide in Building 11 at the center told police she received a

phone call at home yesterday from an unidentified man who asked her if she was "worried." The call — to the woman's unlisted telephone number — comes one day after a nurse at Building 11 received a similar call saying an employee at that building "would be next."

Deputy Police Chief Patrick Murphy, who coordinated yesterday's search of the 382-acre Willowbrook campus, said it was "hard to say" if the call and the disappearance of Ethel L. Atwell are related.

"The kind of publicity that this has gotten generates all kinds of calls," he said. "There's no way I can attach any importance to it at this point, but we surely won't ignore it."

Although police confirmed they had been told of yesterday's call to the Building 11 aide, they refused to comment on the call to the nurse Friday.

Participating in the last-ditch search of the campus yesterday were the Newark woman's four sons, as well as 25 un-informed police, 125 auxiliary police, 20

state troopers, nine forest rangers and several dozen employees of the state facility for the retarded.

Searchers fanned out in straight lines from the outermost reaches of the campus and worked their way toward the center. By late yesterday afternoon, however, the search had not turned up any trace of the missing woman, a Willowbrook employee for 15 years.

Murphy said searchers found several pieces of clothing, but family members said they did not belong to Mrs. Atwell. Additionally, Murphy said the searchers dug into several new mounds of dirt without finding any trace of the missing woman.

By 2 p.m., four hours after the search began, police turned their efforts

toward neighboring Willowbrook Park.

Before the search began, Frank Atwell, 24, Mrs. Atwell's second oldest son, said he was prepared "for the worst" in the search for his mother.

"It's probably the most grim task I've ever undertaken," Atwell, who serves in the Navy at Andrews Air Force Base, said, adding he thought his mother's abduction was the work of a "maniac."

Atwell added that the Friday before her disappearance, his mother and grandmother went to Pennsylvania for a four-day weekend, where they attended ceremonies in which the oldest Atwell son, Anthony, 27, was sworn into the Pennsylvania bar. Mrs. Atwell has been separated from her husband for 20 years.

"She was telling me that he scored so high on his bar exam that he could practice law in three states without taking individual bar exams," he said.

About the time the search was getting underway, a 28-year-old Building 11 employee reported receiving what she called a "prank" phone call.

The woman, who asked that her name not be released, said she reported the incident to police "because of all the stuff that has been happening lately."

In addition to Mrs. Atwell's disappearance, a nurse at the center, Shin Lee, was found murdered and buried in a shallow grave on the campus last Aug. 6.

The aide said the caller said, "You're not worried, are you?" She described the rest of the call as "obscene."

Frank Atwell, meanwhile, praised the police for comforting the family and conducting an exhaustive search. "But our next worry is what is going to happen after this," he said, expressing the hope that police would not abandon the search.