

Union head still concerned about Willowbrook security

By BRUCE ALPERT

Officials at the Staten Island Developmental Center have initiated stiffer security procedures, but the president of the center's employee union says workers are still concerned about their safety.

Under a new system that began Monday, no one is allowed past the electronic gates onto the grounds of the 382-acre Willowbrook institution without displaying an employee sticker or, in the case of visitors, without naming the person to be visited and leaving behind a license-plate number.

Felton King, president of the Staten Island Developmental Center Chapter of the Civil Service Employees Association, said the new system is a step in the right direction. But he said the institu-

tion still does not have enough security guards to adequately protect the institution's 2,500 residents and 4,500 employees.

"Most workers are still afraid to go to work," King said. "And it's because the state hasn't lived up to its commitment to improve security."

Concern for safety began in earnest last year when a nurse, Shin Lee of Sea View, was found strangled to death not far from the institution Aug. 6. She had been reported missing July 20, when she left work after completing a 4 p.m. to midnight shift.

Appeals for better security grew even more intense when a therapy aide disappeared Oct. 23, shortly after she arrived on the institution's grounds for the start of the 6 a.m. shift. The woman, Ethel L. Atwell, 46, of Newark, has never been

found.

Parents of residents at the developmental center have complained that many people, in some cases friends of employees, walk through the grounds without authorization.

James Walsh, an administrator at the center, said the new system should keep unauthorized persons from entering the institution. And he said the state is now beginning to fill vacancies in the center's security force.

The institution is budgeted for 53 security officers, but currently has a force of 44 guards, Walsh said.

King, meanwhile, said the union is preparing a letter urging all of its members to cooperate with the new security system.

"We agree that this is a worthy project and should be abided to," King said.