

Navy picks Willowbrook grounds for its resale office

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WASHINGTON — Navy officials have selected the Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook as the new site for its billion-dollar-a-year Resale Office, Congressman John M. Murphy announced yesterday.

Murphy said the office, which employs 800 and is now located in a dilapidated structure in downtown Brooklyn, should be operating at the Willowbrook facility in two years.

It was not immediately clear which buildings the Navy intends to take over on the grounds of the sprawling institution for the retarded, which is being phased out under a federal court order.

"We have the best of both worlds here," said Murphy, who blocked the Navy's original proposal to relocate the office to Fort Wadsworth after the Army abandons the post later this year.

The base is slated to be absorbed into Gateway National Recreation Area on Staten Island.

Murphy released a Sept. 4 letter from Acting Navy Secretary James Woolsey

informing the congressman that "after considering a number of sites, we have concluded that a location at the developmental center would offer the most advantages."

Woolsey said the Navy already has asked the U.S. General Services Administration to start negotiations with the state "regarding a possible lease as soon as possible."

The announcement follows an Aug. 24 meeting in the Pentagon attended by Rear Adm. William Ryan, commander of the office, and former Borough Presi-

dent Robert Connor, who is now an assistant secretary of the Navy and has been coordinating the talks on the relocation issue.

Ryan, who toured Willowbrook on Aug. 6, reportedly told other top Navy officials during the session that, although he considered the Island facility the "prime site" for the office, the center would need about \$8-million worth of renovation and refurbishing to accommodate the resale operation.

The major obstacle to the Willowbrook site apparently was cleared when

State Sen. John J. Marchi, chairman of the State Senate Finance Committee, persuaded Albany officials to offer the Navy a lease arrangement under which the state would supply the "upfront money" for the renovation work. The Pentagon would then reimburse the state on an amortized basis.

Interviewed yesterday from his Staten Island headquarters, Marchi said he was "really delighted" by the Navy's apparent decision to accept the offer. "They (Navy officials) were surprised we could move so fast but we told them

we could move as fast as they wanted us to," Marchi said.

According to the senator, the lease arrangement at first encountered determined opposition within the Department of Mental Hygiene, which runs the center. But he said the department eventually relented as a result of combined pressure from himself, Gov. Carey and former State Commerce Commissioner John Dyson.

In choosing Willowbrook the Navy ap-

parently rejected bids from two other members of Congress — Rep. Joseph Addabbo, D-Queens, influential chairman of the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, and Sen. Harry Byrd of Indiana to locate the Resale Office in their areas. Byrd reportedly proposed a site in Norfolk, one of the most important naval hubs in the nation.

Aides to Murphy called the selection of the Staten Island location a "big victory" for the congressman, especially in view of the harsh criticism leveled against him for his refusal to go along with the Fort Wadsworth proposal. Some borough officials even charged that Murphy's action jeopardized the Island's chances of getting the resale operation.

Murphy continued to defend his position on Fort Wadsworth yesterday, insisting that locating the Resale Office there would have hampered the efforts to integrate the base into the Gateway network.

The decision by the Navy to move the office to the borough also seems to insure the jobs of the approximately 80 Staten Islanders on the facility's payroll. Murphy suggested that the other employees, mostly residents of Brooklyn, Queens and Nassau County, L.I., might move to the borough.

Both Murphy and Marchi emphasized that, in addition to boosting employment in the city, leasing of the Willowbrook facility's buildings would guarantee Albany significant federal revenues oh facilities that might otherwise become a drain on the state treasury.

The Resale Office has an annual payroll of about \$15 million and does more than \$1 billion a year in transactions, consisting mostly of purchases for the Navy's giant Post Exchange (PX) System.