

Staten Island

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Handicapped youngsters play in crowded room at South Beach Psychiatric Center as therapist Sandy Svenson (standing) and Bob Greenstein work with them.

Jim Romano/Daily News

PHOTO BY JIM ROMANO

Palsy's Sea View site still in limbo

By MARY ENGELS

THE DECISION of the Health and Hospitals Corp. on whether to return the Sea View property on Staten Island to the city for possible sale and development leaves one health organization in a state of limbo.

Five years ago United Cerebral Palsy of New York City began to explore the possibility of using 30 acres of Sea View

property for a community rehabilitation campus. The area they had in mind was the site of the Old Farm Colony where the elderly poor had once lived.

Overcrowded conditions at the present UCP facility at South Beach Psychiatric Center and the need for new and expanded programs to service the island's multi-handicapped were the prime concerns voiced by UCP for acquisition of the new site.

Now, after spending almost \$70,000 in

a planning study for the area that also included a long range development program, the organization is no closer to its goal than it was five years ago.

Arranged for a study

According to the organization's executive director, Leslie Park, "We entered into a license agreement for the property with Health and Hospitals Corporation in 1977. At the time, we asked them to participate financially with us in the development of a long-term plan for the Farm Colony site.

"We then arranged for a comprehensive planning study with the architectural firm of Perkins and Will. In June of 1978 the study was completed.

"We then proceeded to get approval for the state monies for construction budget to renovate some of the old buildings on the property. However, to come up with our share of the extra money needed to fix up the place we had to show proof we had a long-term lease with the city, which had control of the property.

"While Health and Hospitals has been playing with the decision for four years, overcrowded conditions persist at our present South Beach location and besides, a psychiatric center is no place to have handicapped kids."

Cited the group's plans

Park cited the plans UCP have for the Sea View property. They include: "First and foremost a much-needed child rehabilitation and school unit. Second, a year-round recreational facility for all multi-handicapped people to enjoy. Nowhere else in the five boroughs is this amount of greenery available," he said.

The director also said it was the intention of UCP to erect housing, possibly 50 garden apartments, for the handicapped to live in year-round, or in some cases be a weekend retreat for parents to enjoy while their children take part in recreational activities.

In the event Sea View is sold to land developers, the organization said it will seek nearby acreage at the Staten Island Developmental Center.

"We are asking Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly to look into the possibility of getting us 30 acres in the southern portion of the Developmental Center. Unfortunately, this will take time and our clients are suffering for it."

A visit to the organization's present quarters in Building C at South Beach Psychiatric Center show conditions indeed "cramped and crowded."

Space is a problem

A brief tour by Program Director Rona Hanshaft, showed narrow hallways cluttered with wheelchairs and clothing because of a lack of closet space; small overcrowded rooms where classes and meals are administered also because of space shortage, and little if any areas for recreational pursuits.

"More than 100 are participating in our programs at present," said Hanshaft. "There is also waiting list of 200 more."

One mother, Pat Garcia, whose daughter Donna, 5, is UCP's state poster child, commented, "The people are literally running into walls here. They desperately need space to learn, yet it isn't available. I don't know what the youngsters would do if it wasn't for the dedication of the teachers."

The mother praised the work the organization had done for her daughter.

"She was 18 months old when we first brought her here. She had no mobility whatsoever and people had told us to leave her in Willowbrook. Today, she can ride a bicycle, get around on her own to some degree. Don't people realize if it wasn't for a place like this that helps youngsters become educable and sociable they would be wasted?"

"What else are we here for if we can't help our kids."



Residents crowd around table as they prepare for St. Patrick's Day gala.