

Your support of Special Olympics can do wonders

ALBANY — CSEA President William L. McGowan this week reiterated his appeal to union members to help "Sponsor an Athlete" in the New York Special Olympics set for June 14 at Elmira College.

"Special Olympics isn't just a game," McGowan said. "The program contributes to the physical, social and psychological development of the mentally retarded. Through positive, successful experiences in sports, individuals who have been told 'you can't do it' gain self-confidence to prove they can do it. Special Olympics help begin building a self-image associated with success rather than with failure. Special Olympics success often carries over into the classroom, the home and the workshop."

McGowan said, "Special Olympics needs the support and involvement of people-oriented organizations such as CSEA to carry out its ongoing programs for mentally retarded people, and to reach even more individuals who could benefit from such participation."

Complete information on how you can "Sponsor an Athlete" can be found in the full-page Special Olympics ad on page 11 of this issue.



THE JOY IS EVIDENT in this happy scene at the Staten Island Developmental Center during local Special Olympics competition there on May 2, 3 and 4. And the joy will be multiplied many times over when hundreds of competitors gather for the New York Special Olympics June 14 in Elmira. Among those who worked hard on the local level and share in the happiness of the competitors are Staten Island Developmental Center CSEA Local 429 President Felton King, right, and Developmental Center Director Elin Howe, third from left.

Public Sector

Official Publication of
The Civil Service
Employees Association

Vol. 2, No. 32

(ISSN 0164 9949)

Wednesday, May 21, 1980

O. D. HECK

short staffing, hazardous conditions, erosion of services

ALBANY — Furious over deteriorating effects a state-imposed hiring freeze is having on patient care and working conditions at the O. D. Heck Developmental Center near here, a group of Heck employees last week conducted a protest demonstration in front of the State Department of Mental Hygiene offices at 44 Holland Avenue, Albany.

"We can no longer tolerate the hazardous conditions and erosion in services to clients," O. D. Heck Civil Service Employees Assn. Local 445 President Peter Looker told reporters as workers behind him chanted, "Short staffing is no staffing," "Lift the freeze now" and "Quality care now."

According to Looker, staffing is down by approximately 20 percent from just one year ago, but the state tells him it must drop to 90 percent before the freeze will be lifted. "In my unit alone the average number of workers has gone from eight to five in 14 months and the state

BOB WAXMAN participated in protest demonstration by O. D. Heck employees. He is at the center of a heated controversy, claiming his public statements about poor care and working conditions at the facility are behind management's efforts to fire him. His sign reads, "Freedom of speech? Forget it if you're a state worker. It will be hazardous to your job."

enough employees to cover for those taking classes. He says they are getting only 50-60 hours of training a year, when they should be getting 200 hours.

And instead of being taught behavioral management and crisis intervention techniques, which they need to handle the multiple handicapped and severely disabled clients at O. D. Heck, the employees are simply learning how to physically care for their charges. "Naturally, this training is important," says Looker, "but it must go beyond the physical to enable us to give quality care."

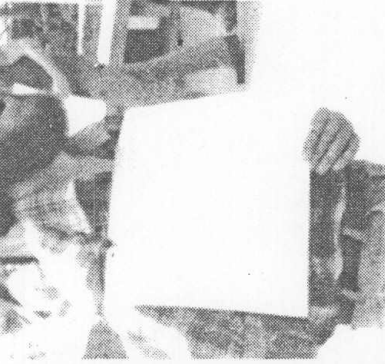
Forced overtime is another sore spot with the employees. They are being required to work a 16-hour day to provide minimum coverage on the units, and some have been harassed by management for refusing to stay. "The administration thinks it is cutting corners by hav-

ing employees stay overtime, but it would be more economical to hire more staff than to pay present employees time and a half in overtime," Looker commented.

"We just hope the demonstration has opened some eyes," said Looker. "We cannot work like this any longer and we'll be back if we don't see some improvement soon."

The demonstration had originally been planned for April, but was postponed by the union when the Associate Commissioner of DMH Zygmund Slezak promised major staffing changes and the hiring of eight nurses.

However, instead of hiring six LPN's which the union felt were needed to best handle patients, the state hired five RN's. Also, according to Williams, the staff changes resulted in the removal of three nurses from direct patient care to supervisory duties.



WHILE O. D. HECK EMPLOYEES march in protest behind them, O. D. Heck CSEA Local 445 President Peter Looker, left, discusses the union's position with CSEA Field Representative Donald McCarthy and Joyce Smi, Local 445 Secretary.

Albany.
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According to Looker, staffing is down by approximately 20 percent from just one year ago, but the state tells him it must drop to 90 percent before the freeze will be lifted. "In my unit alone the average number of workers has gone from eight to five in 14 months and the state refuses to hire replacements," he explained.

The demonstrators demanded that the hiring freeze be lifted immediately and the staff level restored to that of March 1979, "so that the well-being, habilitation and health of our clients can be re-established." They also called for the allocation of sufficient staff to provide for those who have been resettled since the imposition of the freeze and that all admissions be halted until quality care and adequate programming can be achieved.

As a result of the shortage, one nurse is being left in charge of 30 or more patients at a time. There should be a minimum of three nurses with that number of clients, says Lucy Williams, CSEA shop steward and a nurse at O. D. Heck.

This situation nearly led to a disaster in a recent fire at one of the Heck buildings in February where a night aide was left watching 12 sleeping clients. Fortunately she was able to call aides from another building to help rouse, dress and lead the patients out of the burning building.

The number of accidents has gone up dramatically, says Williams, with at least one client being taken to emergency rooms a day. Just check the records at Ellis and St. Claire's Hospitals, we're there every day," she said. "The number of accidents and incidents during the month of January alone rose nearly 50 percent. We're just not able to look after them the way we should."

The aides and nurses, says Looker, are unable to get the amount and kind of training they need to deal with clients, because there are not

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Assembly committee sets hearing

As The Public Sector was going to press, State Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly, chairman of the Assembly Mental Health Committee, announced her committee will conduct a formal, closed-door, hearing into allegations about staffing and working conditions at the O. D. Heck Developmental Center. She announced witnesses will include parents of residents at the facility, staff and administrators at the facility, and personnel from the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities. If necessary, she noted, the committee would use subpoenas to obtain witness testimony.



DISCUSSING POOR CONDITIONS at the O. D. Heck Developmental Center is this group during a public protest demonstration outside Department of Mental Hygiene offices in Albany last week. From left are Heck employees Pat Cuthbert and Edith Feldman. At right are CSEA Shop Steward Lucy Williams, a nurse at the facility, and CSEA O.D. Heck Local President Peter Looker.