

CSEA union leader threatens pullout at UCP facility

By ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

A union leader at the Staten Island Developmental Center yesterday threatened to instruct his membership to stop working in a Mariners Harbor training center for the disabled because he suspects it poses a fire hazard.

The training center, operated by United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) of New York State, opened in mid-June with the potential to serve 200 brain-damaged and neurologically impaired residents of the developmental center.

Felton King, president of Local 149 of the Civil Service Employees

Association (CSEA), said he had been denied permission to inspect the training center by UCP director Robert Schoenhorn, who has insisted that occupants are safe.

King said he plans to ask CSEA leadership at the state level to join in pressuring for cooperation from UCP.

Noting that the training center — located in a former indoor tennis facility at 2324 Forest Ave. — lacks a sprinkler system, King said, "We don't want to happen here what happened in New Jersey when 23 people burned to death."

He was referring to fatalities that

resulted from a fire Sunday in a Bradley Beach rooming house occupied by many mentally ill and retarded guests assigned there by the state.

The union leader's complaints about the training center first surfaced during a four-day "sickout" by employees at the Staten Island Developmental Center. The job action, which ended Monday, was used to dramatize union charges of inadequate staffing and maintenance at the Willowbrook institution.

As verbal sparring between the union and the administration continued yesterday, the institution's legal

staff was investigating the possibility that conditions created by the sickout had led to the critical injury of a mentally retarded man.

Michael Hollender, 34, is being treated in St. Vincent's Medical Center for multiple head injuries sustained when he fell Saturday night from a second-story window in Building 7 at the institution.

James Shea, developmental center deputy director, said yesterday that Hollender's ward did not meet staffing requirements Saturday because of employees who called in sick. Only one worker was watching 17 residents, some with se-

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vere behavior problems, at the time of the fall, Shea said.

Hollender is said to have tumbled over a three-foot-wide ledge behind a screen that is supposed to be locked at all times. Few employees are issued keys to the screen, which opens inward like a door, but Shea said he had heard of at least one mentally retarded resident who was able to jimmy the lock.

Shea conceded that faulty plumbing, peeling paint and leaking roofs plague the institution. Clothing distribution also tends to be haphazard, he said, since the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) has instructed facilities under its jurisdiction to eliminate through attrition the position of clothing clerks.

Maintenance, he said, has deteriorated because of chronic underbudgeting by the state. Since 1975, the budget has been pegged to a floundering plan to empty all but 250 residents from the institution by a court-imposed deadline of May 1981, Shea explained. Nine months before the deadline, about 1,100 residents remain — far more than the projected census.

State mental retardation Commissioner James E. Introne contended

yesterday that insufficient estimates of the Willowbrook institution's operating expenses have been compensated for by retrospective infusions of money in the state's annual supplemental budget.

Both Introne and Shea denied union charges that underbudgeting has caused staff shortages. Although the institution was funded for 1980-81 in the expectation that half the employees still there now would be transferred out, "This is an end of the year cash flow problem. It's not a factor now," Introne said.

"The system's very tight," he added. "Without action on the supplemental budget, we will have a very serious problem at this institution." The Legislature is expected to vote in September on requests from state agencies for supplemental budget funds.

"Introne has decided to run down this place whether the patients are here or not," King said yesterday. "All the state's energy is going into community-based programs. It is discriminating against patients remaining in the institution.

"You want to give decent care," he added. "But how can you give it when you don't have the tools?"

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