

## ***Jerry Gavin, 56, leader in Willowbrook rights fight***

A funeral service for Jerry Gavin 56, a leader in the battle to improve the plight of retarded residents at the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, was held last week in Los Angeles.

Mr. Gavin, 56, who had lived on Cebra Ave., Stapleton, died Oct. 31 in the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital, Clifton.

He was born in Los Angeles, where he lived for 25 years. He lived in Manhattan for 20 years before moving to Stapleton in 1971.

In 1971 Mr. Gavin, then a newcomer to Staten Island, joined Dr. William Bronston, a physician at the Willowbrook institution, in an effort to prod the state into improving conditions at what had become an overcrowded and understaffed center for the retarded.

After a three-year legal battle ended in 1975 with the signing of the Willowbrook Consent Decree, Mr. Gavin was named a staff member of the Willowbrook Review Panel. The panel was charged with monitoring compliance of the consent decree for the federal courts.

He remained a key panel staff member until last spring, when the state Legislature cut off the panel's funding.

"If it wasn't for Jerry and his niece (Kathy Sexton) along with some of the parents, it (improvements at the Willowbrook center) just wouldn't have happened," said Kattie McKaig, former director of Willowbrook's Consumer Advisory

Council.

"A lot of people faded away after the early efforts," Mrs. McKaig said. "But Jerry was one of the few who stayed with us until the end."

In addition to his official duties on the review panel, Mr. Gavin served as an unofficial mediator between the various factions involved in setting retardation policy.

"He seemed to be able to maintain conduct with all of the different factions — parents, professionals, the review panel, etc. — and often was the only one able to bring all of the sides together," Mrs. McKaig said.

Since the review panel staff was disbanded, friends said that Mr. Gavin had agonized over who would assume the role of monitoring state care of the retarded. The review panel continues to operate, but has been badly crippled by the loss of Mr. Gavin and other paid employees.

Before his involvement with the mentally retarded, Mr. Gavin worked as a travel consultant for American Airlines and a New York travel agency.

He also wrote songs, including several jingles that were featured on television and radio commercials for such companies as State Farm Insurance.

Mr. Gavin is survived by eight brothers and sisters.

The funeral was held Nov. 4 in the Callanan Mortuary, Los Angeles. Burial was in Holy Cross Cemetery, also Los Angeles.