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ty to manage its ambitious growth and sudden wealth.

The state Office for Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities recently retained a private auditor, Deloitte, Haskins & Sells, to conduct the first comprehensive audit of United Cerebral Palsy's operations.

Schonhorn described the boutique as a progressive step, an improvement on the "traveling store" that once supplied the mentally retarded residents of state-run institutions with clothing.

"The traveling store was a man who goes out and buys a job-lot of sweaters, regardless of sizes, regardless of your needs," he said. "With the boutique, you get clothing that is stylish and that fits, and you don't look retarded because of the clothes you wear."

But critics say the boutique enforces a rigid and centralized system of dispensing clothes that betrays the concept of normal, independent living in the community promised to the mentally retarded by the Willowbrook Consent Decree, a 1975 federal court ruling.

While 327 of the people under the agency's care have been moved from socially isolated institutions into apartments in neighborhoods throughout the city, they too are required to patronize the boutique.

"Not only is that not teaching people how to do anything on their own, I don't know if it's constitutional in terms of people's rights," said Bob Domina, a former case manager for the apartments operated by United Cerebral Palsy.

The Nina Eaton Boutique, named after a member of the agency's board of directors, resembles a military post exchange. Government regulations prohibit it from earning a profit, but it is supposed to recoup operating costs from a minimal markup on the sale of merchandise. Boutique employees are hired by United Cerebral Palsy, and the entire operation, from purchasing to

sales, is controlled by the agency.

Floria Antell, the agency's director of institutional and community services, sent a memo to all employees Feb. 2 reminding them of the policy to purchase strictly through the boutique, which she defended as the most economical system possible.

But other knowledgeable employees angrily dispute both the economy and the efficiency of the clothing store.

Several employees cited the boutique's arrangement with Tirone's Shoe Store, a retail outlet in Port Richmond that supplies the agency with a half-dozen pairs of sneakers and leather shoes in an average week, according to Joseph L. Tirone, the store's owner.

Instead of ordering directly from the boutique, the mentally retarded clients visit Tirone's to be fitted when their shoes wear out, accompanied by therapy aides from their residential facilities.

The majority of clients shod by Tirone's live in the Karl D. Warner Center, a 450-bed facility operated by United Cerebral Palsy in Willowbrook.

But when the customers walk out of Tirone's shop, they leave their new footwear behind. "I have to deliver the shoes, and two original copies of each receipt, to the boutique," Tirone explained, "unless it's an emergency."

The detour via the boutique, where shoes are labeled and receipts processed, sometimes more than doubles the price of the merchandise, according to financial records obtained by the Advance.

While Schonhorn, the agency's executive director, agreed there was a markup, he said it amounted to no more than 22 percent.

Records kept by supervisors at the Karl D. Warner Center in March indicate, however, that the boutique billed 55 to 94 percent more than Tirone's price for shoes. Tirone charged United Cerebral Palsy 20 percent off retail value, tax-free, meaning the boutique charged customers 25 to 74 percent more than retail.

Samples from a list of varying styles and prices included: sneakers supplied by Tirone's for \$14.39, subsequently marked up to \$27.88 in the boutique, and sneakers sold at \$15.99, marked up to \$24.78.

To cover the cost of clothing, the state has assigned a Medicaid rate, paid with state and federal taxpayer dollars, to United Cerebral Palsy. As a personal stipend, or pocket money, most patients also receive \$25 a month in Supplemental Security Income (SSI) from the government.

United Cerebral Palsy generally acts as the "representative payee,"

or manager, of the personal funds, depositing them in interest-bearing bank accounts.

Schonhorn initially denied the agency withdrew personal funds to pay boutique bills, saying the annual Medicaid rate of \$275 per patient served that purpose. Occasionally "specialized items — camping clothes, camping equipment, things of that nature," were bought using personal funds, he said.

But computerized financial ledgers obtained by the Advance show the agency transferred thousands of dollars from personal bank accounts to the boutique between December 1980 and last March. The ledgers, tracking the bank accounts of Warner Center patients, revealed average withdrawals by the boutique of more than \$100, ranging as high as \$425.74 for one patient.

Asked to explain the ledgers, which did not itemize the boutique's bills, Schonhorn agreed to break down purchases for three patients. His list consisted of mundane clothing such as underwear, dungarees, and shirts.

Conceding the items did not qualify as "specialized," he said the agency's Medicaid rate apparently was inadequate, adding, "I really don't know why."

The Willowbrook Benevolent Society, a group of parents of the men-