

# Trees, plant life at Willowbrook must be preserved

By TOM ANDERSEN

On a recent afternoon, several naturalists examined the woods that comprise much of the Staten Island Developmental Center's 382 acres to determine if the woods supported species which should be included in the next edition of the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences' "Flora of Staten Island."

Those interested in the preservation of the Greenbelt will view the findings as both fascinating and significant. They confirm what informal surveys had suggested: The center's woods are unique on Staten Island; they have been flourishing with little

disturbance for more than 100 years.

The discrete tracts are located in the southwest section of the center grounds, and their unique characteristics provide three arguments — practical, aesthetic and idealistic — on which to base preservation efforts.

Five species were found which grow naturally nowhere else on Staten Island. They are the wild leek (allium tricocum), the bladder nut tree (Staphylea trifolia), the American sycamore tree (Platanus occidentalis), the zigzag goldenrod (Solidago flexicaulis) and a natural hybrid of Goldie's fern of the genus Dryopteris.

Surrounding these were other plants and trees only slightly less rare. A stand of sugar maples, hundreds in all including saplings, was discovered; the Island's only other stand, in Blood Root Valley, has about two dozen trees. Also discovered was false hellebore, a tall, green-flowered plant, which thrives in moist woods; High Rock Park is its only other Island home. Yards of wild ginger, a low plant sensitive to human encroachment, comprised much of the understory.

Several specimens of Indian cucumber tree spotted American basswood trees grew throughout. Sweet cicely, blue

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