

Building named for Connelly

By BRUCE ALPERT

The state mental retardation hierarchy yesterday dedicated a remodeled dormitory at Staten Island Developmental Center as the Elizabeth A. Connelly Program Center.

The two-story building, freshly painted with bright colors, will offer specialized programs for about 130 residents of the Willowbrook institution and should accept its first clients within two weeks, according to Harold Brandwein, acting deputy direc-

tor of treatment services at the center.

Mrs. Connelly, chairwoman of the Assembly Mental Health Committee, said she hopes the building — once one of the institution's most notorious examples of poor care for the retarded —

will serve as a "positive signal to make the Staten Island Developmental Center a name we can be proud of."

The lawmaker, who said she was overwhelmed by the honor of having a building named for her "while I'm still alive," was praised as an untiring advocate for the disabled during an outdoor ceremony attended by 200 people, including Zygmund L. Slezak, acting commissioner of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

Dr. Ella A. Curry, director of the Willowbrook center, said the new program building will offer retarded patients an opportunity to receive specialized training in small groups — a sharp contrast to the wide-open program areas to which they have become accustomed.

"Many of them have not developed as we had hoped," Dr. Curry said, "and the hope is they will progress here in these new settings."

The center, which was remodeled by state workers at a cost of \$90,000, features small program areas, and brightly colored orange, blue and white stripes. Each room offers clients training in specific skills, ranging from body awareness to personal hygiene.

Debbie Finnerty, who designed the building for the state, said she tried to create a setting that would be "visually stimulating" for the retarded, far different than the usual drab institutional blue and gray.



Dr. Ella A. Curry, right, director of the Staten Island Developmental Center, presents Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly with a plaque at the dedication yesterday of a new program center named after the West Brighton lawmaker.

S.I. Advance Photos by Frank J. Johns

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