

# 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

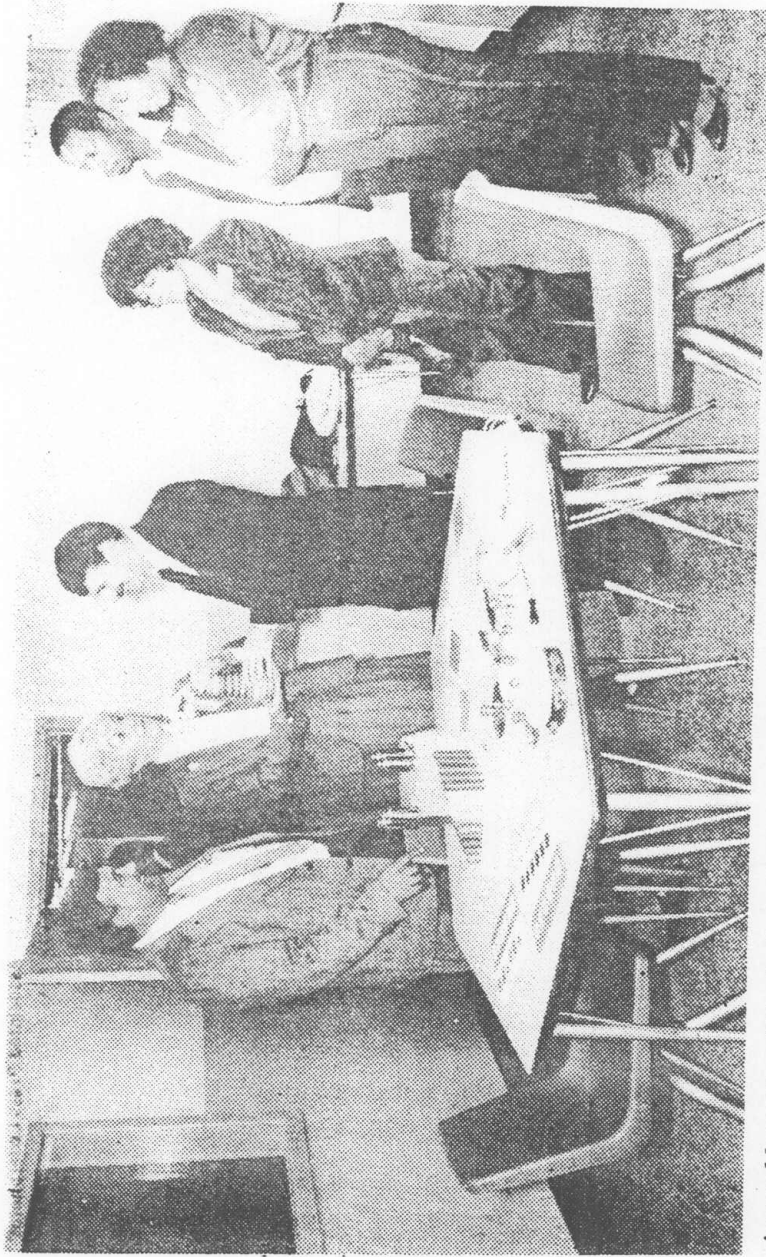
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Following the ceremony and tour of the building, Mrs. Connelly, a West Brighton Democrat who has her district offices at the developmental center, expressed support for a tentative out-of-court settlement reached last week to modify the Willowbrook Consent Decree.

The agreement, which still must be ratified by Gov. Carey and plaintiffs who brought the original suit resulting in the signing of the 1975 decree, calls for a federal court to appoint a special monitor to review care of the mentally retarded. In addition, it would allow the state to set up 24-bed group homes in the community, subject to the monitor's consent. Currently, the consent decree imposes a 10-bed maximum on such facilities.

While saying she was not completely happy with the proposal, Mrs. Connelly said it is apparent that the New York Civil Liberties Union, which represented the plaintiffs, had made significant concessions.

She noted that at one point Civil Liberties had sought a master to take over administration of programs for Willowbrook class members — residents of the Island center when the suit to improve conditions there was filed in 1972. A monitor, she said, is far preferable to a master.



Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly examines some of the equipment available at the new program center that bears her name. Looking on, from left to right, are Zygmund L. Sleszak, acting commissioner of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities; James M. Walsh, deputy director of institution administration at the Staten Island Developmental Center, and three center employees.