

# 37 foster grandparents feted by S.I. center



JIM ROMANO DAILY NEWS

Foster grandparent Mary Martin feeds child at the Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook yesterday.

By MARY ENGELS

Thirty-seven foster grandparents and nine senior companions who serve at Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook were honored at a recognition dinner held last night at the Staaten Restaurant in West Brighton.

Singled out for special honors were Marguerite Blake, 64, of Great Kills, and Ramon Burgos, 66, of Stapleton, who received awards as Outstanding Foster Grandparent and Outstanding Senior Companion, respectively.

Nettie Evans, coordinator of the Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion Program at the center, said, "It is the first time such an award was given."

"We wanted to thank those whose performance is clearly exceptional in our program by exceeding the requirements of their assignments," she added. "We hope it will be the beginning of many such awards in the future."

**BLAKE SAID, "I can't tell you how much I appreciate the honor. I feel like I've accomplished a lot working with the developmentally disabled but I never expected to be rewarded for it. I just love the job."**

Burgos said that he has found his work as a senior companion "a reward in itself."

"I feel like I am earning a college degree, learning how to react with the residents who are developmentally dis-

abled," he said. "It gives you a wonderful sense of accomplishment."

Evans explained that the difference between a foster grandparent and a senior companion is that "the grandparents take care of those under 21 and the companions with those over that age."

**BOTH PROGRAMS** are sponsored by the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities in Albany. They are designed to promote retired persons over 60 with a meaningful part-time volunteer experience working with children and adults with special needs.

Because of this program, 125 children and adults at the Staten Island Developmental Center benefit from the love and demonstrated concern of a grandparent.

After 40 hours of training the Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions spend four hours a day, five days a week, divided usually between two children. They receive a nontaxable stipend of \$2 per hour, paid vacation, sick and personal leave, a daily meal and transportation to and from their homes.

However, because of some guidelines, volunteers are hard to come by, noted Evans.

"At present we only have about 50 and we could do with many more," she explained.

Anyone interested in joining the program should contact her at the center between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. Telephone (212) 698-1440, Ext. 8632.