

Staten Island

IN THE YEAR 2000 the Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook will have a new face and address.

Visitors will enter the grounds of the center that will house about 250 mentally retarded patients at Forest Hills Road and see a security building and then a complex of six to seven buildings, many of which will provide a series of innovative programs for the patients.

It will be a far cry from what the center looks like today with its 27 buildings scattered over a few hundred acres, but it is definitely what Dr. Ella Curry, the center's director, expects it to become.

"I'M HOPING BY THAT time with the new address that people will stamp out the old Willowbrook, Victory Blvd., syndrome once and for all," said Curry in her office recently.

Curry is still angry at the recent charge by federal Judge John Bartels that conditions at Willowbrook have worsened since 1975 when Willowbrook officials agreed to improve services, reduce the number of patients and allow an outside master to oversee the operations. Curry called the charge shortsighted and disheartening.

"I was extremely devastated because of his lack of attention to the programs and vast improvements that have been made here and the total dedication of our staff," she said.

When the judge made his surprise visit last winter, she said, he had asked one of the plaintiffs to show him the filthy conditions. The plaintiff could not show him any such conditions at the center.

BARTELS, IN HIS report of the tour, said, however, that he found the place was filthy and infested with

New look comes to Willowbrook

By MARY ENGELS

rodents and roaches. He also said that residents sometimes lie naked in their own excrement, bedrooms smelled of urine, floors are dirty and food is stored in temperatures that permit spoilage.

In contrast, a recent visit to the facility by American Medical News showed that patients "were found to be

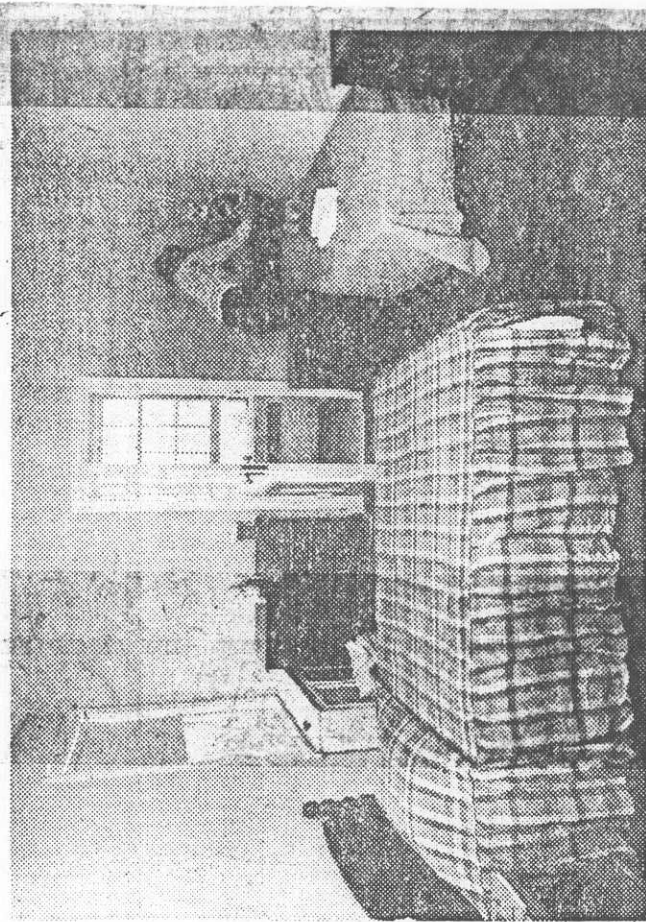
content, healthy and well cared for. Their quarters sparse, but colorful and clean. Equipment for their education and physical development, modern and well-used and those in need of medical attention were in the care of a nurse or physician. There were no overt signs of abuse or overcrowding."

Curry said that the state plans to



JIM HUGHES DAILY NEWS

Dr. Ella Curry, director of the Staten Island Developmental Center, stands in front house that will be home for six clients.



A typical room at center appears to be as neat as a pin.



Instructor Mary Alice Clark teaches youngsters animal identification.

appeal what she called "this unbalanced, inaccurate account of conditions at the center."

"Unfortunately, it comes at a bad time when we are trying to win community support for placement of our clients in group homes and apartments. It has been a tough uphill battle and the community backlash every time we find a home or site has gotten to the point of the ridiculous," she said.

"IN THE CASE OF one recent building we chose, some members of the community suggested we turn the building around so it wouldn't face their neighborhood. At the same time we are being asked to phase out the client population, which is currently 749, and get it down to the 250-bed complement."

The center is also being cut back on funding while being asked to provide community services.

Recently, it started a new program that deals with sub-acute residential treatment services. "Since the establishment of the transitional living unit and the community readiness unit at the center, experience has shown that there is a group of clients with chronic mental disabilities who have been underserved."

This group includes those who are not acutely psychotic or dangerous but remain in need of a well-structured, habilitative service program within a residential treatment setting.

THE PROGRAM IS housed in an attractive house, formerly the home of a faculty member, located in the rear of the grounds. It houses six patients and a resident supervisor.

According to Curry, the patients will remain for a period of nine months or until they are able to return to the community-services population. ■

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