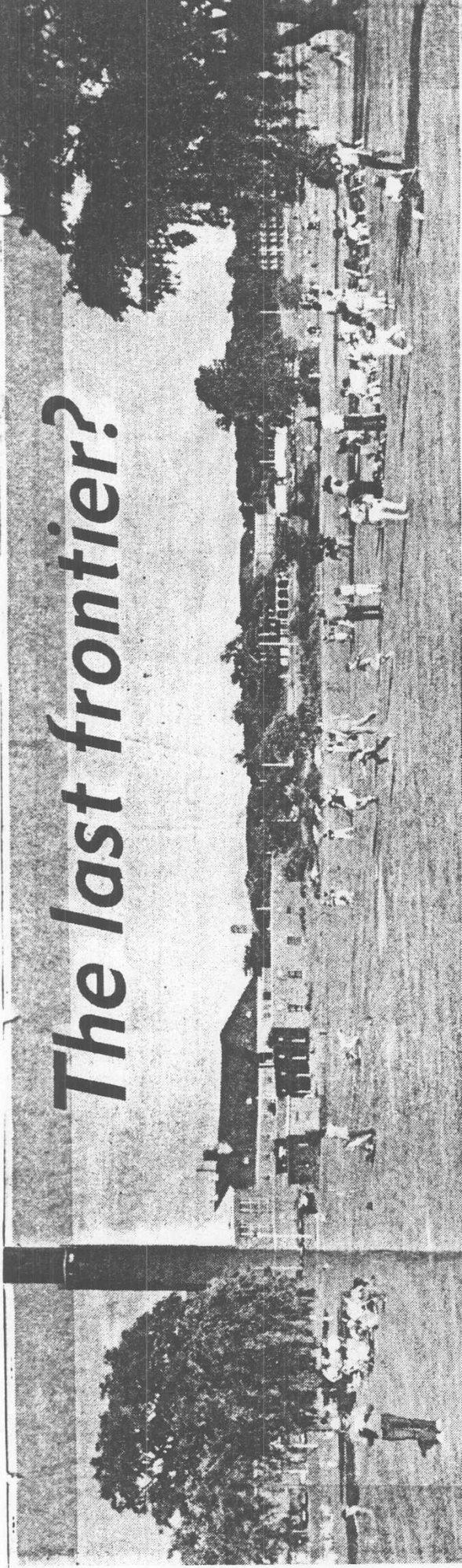


The last frontier?



The wide-open spaces of the Staten Island Developmental Center could be the last hope for new sandlot sports fields on Staten Island.

S.I. Advance Photo by Frank J. Johns

By BILL MARONEY

Staten Island, as everyone knows, is growing. Staten Island's sandlot sports leagues, as everyone involved in them knows, are growing. What isn't growing, as anyone who has tried to obtain a permit or hold an impromptu practice knows, is the number of baseball, softball and soccer fields on Staten Island.

And just when people are beginning to discover relief, in the form of available acreage at the Staten Island Developmental Center, that relief might be taken away. A state-underwritten study to examine alternatives for use of the land could result in the fields being converted for other

State studying Willowbrook fields

uses. But that is down the line. Right now, the problem at the developmental center may be underutilization of fields rather than overcrowding. Even with a baseball, a softball and two soccer fields in use, the potential of the site is far from being realized.

The Staten Island Developmental Center may, in fact, be our borough's last frontier for ballfields. Patchwork fields carved all around the existing fields show the possibility of at least three more official softball diamonds

while a smaller field in the rear of the facility could serve as a practice area. But both the existing and potential fields may be in jeopardy. The SIDC, formerly the Willowbrook State School, is reducing the number of its mentally retarded residents from 900 to 250, a transfer process expected to take 18 months to two years. (An April 1985 deadline has been set by the state.) The SIDC will not need the entire 330-acre, 64-building complex and hopes to have arrived at a decision on the future use of the land by then.

In effort to determine the long-term possibilities of the land, Gruen Associates, a consulting firm hired by the state Office of General Planning, has been conducting a study that will outline a plan of options for use of the area. But until the study is completed (the first of three phases will be released shortly) the issue is up in the air.

"We don't know what will happen," said Thomas Tierney, an SIDC spokesman. "Hopefully, nothing to hinder the community's use of the fields will come about and they can be utilized to

for practice sessions.

The SIDC grounds also house the New Springville Little League, a three-field complex with more than 300 youths participating.

According to Tierney, the parking facilities are "adequate" and all a team needs do to obtain a field permit is submit a written request, although permission must now come from the state offices in Albany, where use of the land is being closely monitored. The "fee": Teams are asked to do something to help the kids, such as holding toy drives and conducting clinics.

"You can go there anytime and see the extensive use it gets," said Tierney. "It's in use five (See WILLOWBROOK, Page S-8)

their fullest potential. "We've had many different organizations requesting use of the land, but we don't have the power to grant permission. We just try to funnel the requests to the study people so that they are aware of the possible uses of the area."

At present, 12 softball leagues, as well as the Staten Island Soccer League, Middle-Island Youth Baseball League, Mid-Island Jewish Group and Staten Island Sports League call the SIDC home while the Snug Harbor and Mid-Island Little Leagues use it

Willowbrook—

(From Page S-1)

days a week and all day Saturday and Sunday.”

As are the rest of the Island's fields. While the older, more established leagues have been using the same fields for years and have little trouble obtaining leases for those fields, expansion has been hampered because there aren't any new fields available. The fields that went unused in the past, when the action wasn't as heavy, are either booked solid now or have disappeared under housing developments.

“All of the old fields that were around years ago are gone now,” said Ben Defibaugh, president of the 80-team Staten Island Slow Pitch League. “I'd expand if I could, and so would the other leagues, but we only have so much to work with.”

The ASA leagues, with 120 teams divided among 15 divisions, has the same problems as

the rest of the leagues, even though it has a four-field complex.

“We turn down 15 to 20 teams a year,” Vince Scamardella, ASA Metro-New York Commissioner and treasurer of the Island's contingent, said. “There's just nowhere to put them. We go seven days a week on all four fields as it is and we lost five nights at Gateway (State Park) to another league.”

There are any number of open spaces on the Island that could be converted into ballfields, but while the SIDC fields won't cure the problem of the lack of fields totally, the transition would be a speedy one because the fields are only a manicure away from respectability.

The SIDC issue cannot be resolved until the study is completed, but the fields are needed now. Unfortunately, the leagues, teams and players must all suffer through the wait.

Page 2 of 2 Pages