

But Dr. Ella Curry, the center's director, said the survey forms clearly indicated that they would be used to determine which workers would be moved to other facilities when staff reductions at the Island center occurred.

The Public Employees Federation, the union that represents the center's professional employees, is challenging the legality of the layoffs in state Supreme Court, Albany. A hearing on the suit is scheduled to begin on Monday before Judge Harold Hughes.

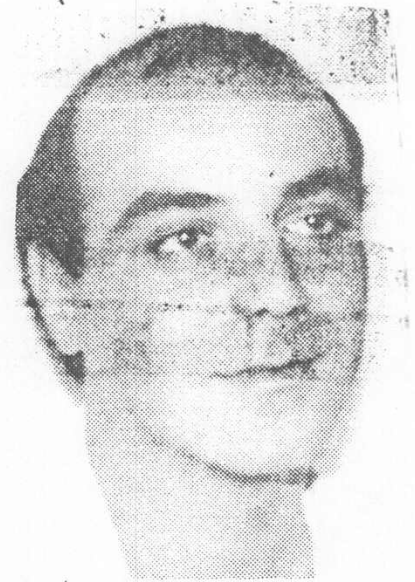
If it succeeds, the layoff would be a short one. But state officials contend that there is little chance the layoff notices will be successfully challenged.

Many of the laid-off workers met yesterday with state officials to discuss the status of their employee benefits. Some are concerned about retirement benefits, unemployment insurance and the status of seniority gained at the Willowbrook center.

Teacher Jackie Gale of West Brighton, who is pregnant and expects to give birth next week, wondered whether she will receive maternity benefits now that she is being laid off. Nor-



Donald Desmond



Arthur Trani

mally, she said, an employee on maternity leave is entitled to half of her regular pay for six weeks.

"Now, I might get nothing," Ms. Gale said. "I can't seem to get a straight answer."

Some employees said they were offered jobs at other centers, only to lose them when workers with more seniority turned up.

"At this point, I'm just fed up," said Maria Steinheber, a teacher with 11 years experience at Willowbrook. "First, I have a job and then I don't. I just don't know if I could take getting another job, only to be bumped again."



Geri Powder



Marie Steinheber