

Willowbrook staff faces layoffs, job placement

By BRUCE ALPERT

Another 160 Staten Island Developmental Center workers are slated to be eliminated from the center's payroll on March 2, an administrator said yesterday.

But James Walsh, the facility's deputy director, said he expects between 75 and 80 percent of the workers to find jobs at other developmental centers and psychiatric centers throughout the five boroughs.

The action follows the loss of 129 job slots last fall and is expected to be followed by additional job reductions during the state's new fiscal year, which begins April 1.

The Willowbrook center for the retarded, which housed over 5,000 residents in 1972, now has only 803 residents under state care.

Officials with the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities say the job reductions are necessary as the facility continues to lose residents to community facilities.

Under Gov. Mario M. Cuomo's proposed 1983-84 budget, the center is slated to lose an additional 333 full-time positions between April 1 and March 31, 1984. The center currently has 2,000 employees.

"I think we can live with it (the job cuts) if the placements of residents goes forward as sched-

uled," Walsh said.

Cuomo's budget projects that the center's census will drop from 778 to 619 during the new fiscal year.

John Jackson, president of the Willowbrook chapter of the Civil Service Employees Association, says he expects about 143 of his members to be affected by the March 2 staff reductions. Most of the other workers are represented by the Public Employees Federation.

"For those without any jobs, it will be very rough," Jackson said. "It's rough to find work with today's economy."

Even those offered work at other developmental centers will have difficulty, Jackson said.

"Many of the workers live in New Jersey or Staten Island and it will be a hardship to get to jobs on Wards Island in the Bronx and Queens," Jackson said.

Initially, state officials said, they were going to give most Willowbrook workers the opportunity to replace less-senior workers at the South Beach Psychiatric Center.

But after unions and administrators at South Beach complained, the state significantly limited the amount of Willowbrook workers that could be transferred there.

South Beach administrators had said that it would not be easy for direct-care workers for the mentally retarded to adjust to working with the mentally ill.