

A 6 Local news

Psychiatric center reclaiming ward from UCP agency

By ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

The South Beach Psychiatric Center, which has been troubled by overcrowding for several years, plans to reclaim a ward that is occupied by a private agency for handicapped children.

Ira Kleinman, a spokesman for the state-run mental hospital in Ocean Breeze, said state officials had been trying since 1975 to persuade the private agency to find other quarters.

"We have been tight on our space," Kleinman said. The ward is used as an educational center by United Cerebral Palsy of New York City, a private nonprofit agency.

South Beach, which has 350 inpatient beds, was denied full accreditation for about two years because of overcrowded wards and bedrooms.

The accreditation was fully restored by the Chicago-based Joint Commission on Hospital Accreditation earlier this month.

UCP has been granted permission by the Board of Education to move its program to the third floor of PS 57 in Clifton.

Larry Ambrosino, principal of PS 57, said UCP would be renting the entire floor for 90 handicapped clients during the school year that begins next September.

"I'm happy to get these kids," Ambrosino said. "They deserve the best shot we can give them."

The top floor has remained mostly vacant since the school was built about seven years ago, Ambrosino said. The surrounding

neighborhood has not grown as quickly as anticipated, and the school now has an enrollment of 410 students in kindergarten through the fifth grade, he said.

The principal said PS 57 is equipped with ramps and elevators for the large number of UCP clients who need wheelchairs. He said he would offer the clients access to the school gymnasium and the auditorium.

UCP will provide its own teachers, so the Board of Education will be involved primarily as a landlord, according to Ambrosino.

He said the PTA also approved of the UCP program.

The third floor has eight classrooms, four small study rooms, two toilets and two offices. The Board of Education approved a lease that would cost UCP \$4 a square foot, for 8,500 square feet of space.

For several years, UCP officials have said they want to move some programs into the former Garber's department store in Port Richmond. But the agency has not yet renovated that building.

Norman Kimball, a spokesman for UCP, said that "as of today, the Garber building is still in the game plan."

UCP of New York City is separate from United Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State. The statewide nonprofit agency runs a 50-bed residential facility for mentally retarded clients, the Naha Eaton Center, on the South Beach grounds.