

Drug raid nets 10 at S.I. home for the retarded

By RUBEN ROSARIO and STUART MARQUES
With Thomas Raftery and Mary Engels

Ten workers at a Staten Island center for the mentally retarded were arrested yesterday for selling heroin, cocaine and LSD to co-workers and customers who slipped through security posts.

Police said the workers—including a supervisor—apparently did not sell drugs to patients of the facility, the Staten Island Developmental Center at 2760 Victory Blvd. The center was formerly known as Willowbrook State School.

"People would just drive up to the place and buy drugs," one cop said.

Capt. Charles McGuire of the Brooklyn South narcotics squad said the suspects were "independent operators" who sold the drugs in amounts ranging from \$10 to \$30.

Nine of the suspects were arrested as they arrived for work yesterday morning. The other was nabbed at home. Cops said one of the suspects

was carrying \$300 worth of drugs when arrested.

ALL WERE CHARGED with felony sale of narcotics.

Eight of the suspects are from Staten Island. They are: Gordon James, 28, of 51 Arnold St., a supervisor; Peter Etheridge, 40, and Penny Chavis, 25, of 178 Loughlin Ave; Theodore Handy, 40, of 175 Trantor Place; Ida Rodriguez, 25, of 197 Gordon St.; Jacob Gibens, 35, of 50 N. Burger Ave.; Herman Mickens, 40, of 1030 Post Ave.,

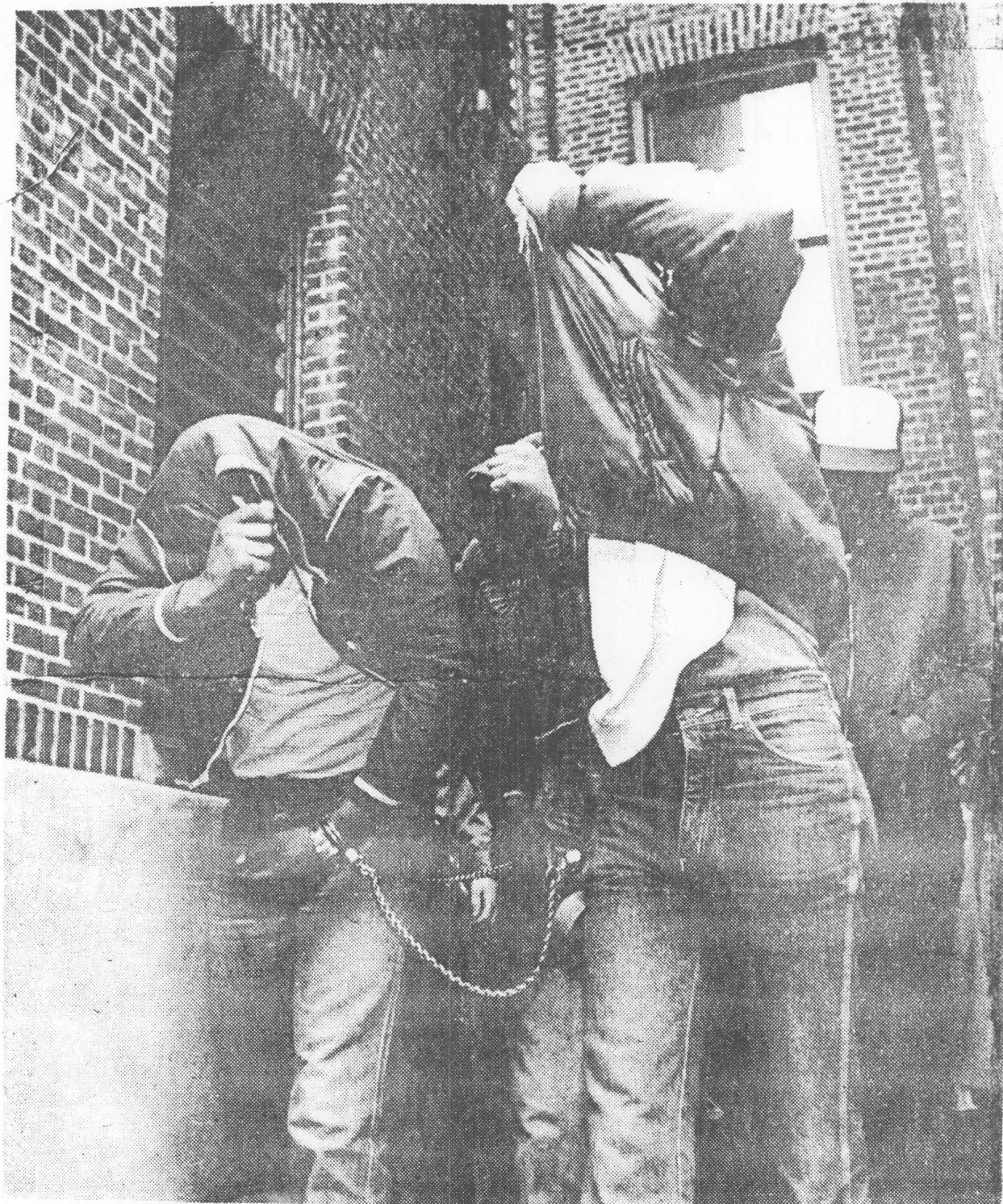


Dr. Ella Curry

and Maurice Valentine, 30, of 91 Wayne Terrace.

The others are from New Jersey. They were identified as James Ward, 38, of Newark, and Laverine Leverage, 35, of Bayonne.

The center's director, Dr. Ella Curry, said that although security at the center had been beefed up, it was impossible to keep track of everyone who comes onto the grounds.



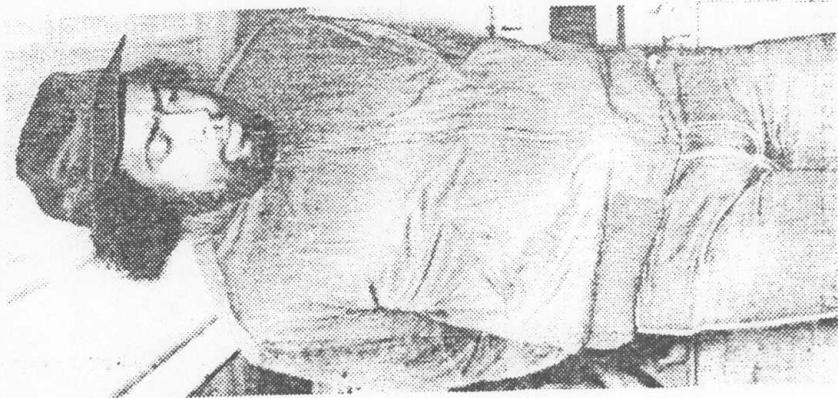
Staten Island Developmental Center workers cover their heads after they were netted in a drug sweep. Here they arrive at the 120 Precinct stationhouse, St. George.

S.I. Advance Photo by Steve Zaffarano

Page 2 of 4 pages

West Brighton, a mental health therapist, a mental health therapist, Herman Mickens, 40, of 1030 Post Ave., Port Richmond, a mental health therapist; Maurice Valentine, 30, of 91 Wayne Terr., West Brighton, a mental health therapist; Helen Chavis, 25, a mental health therapist, and Peter Etheridge, 40, a mental health aide, both of 178 Lockman Ave., Mariners Harbor.

Two Newark, N.J., residents — Laverne Leverage, 35, and James



Drug suspect James Ward, a mental health therapist, inside the 120 Precinct stationhouse.

Ward, 38, both of whom were mental health therapists at the center — were also arrested.

All 10 were charged with sale of narcotics, while Ms. Chavis and Handy were also charged with drug possession. Police said Handy had nine tins of cocaine and 27 packets of heroin, all worth a total of \$310, in his possession.

Lt. William McNeice of the Brooklyn South-Staten Island Narcotics squad, which investigated the incident, said he expected "several more arrests within the next few days," but declined to speculate on the number. He added that it was "an ongoing investigation."

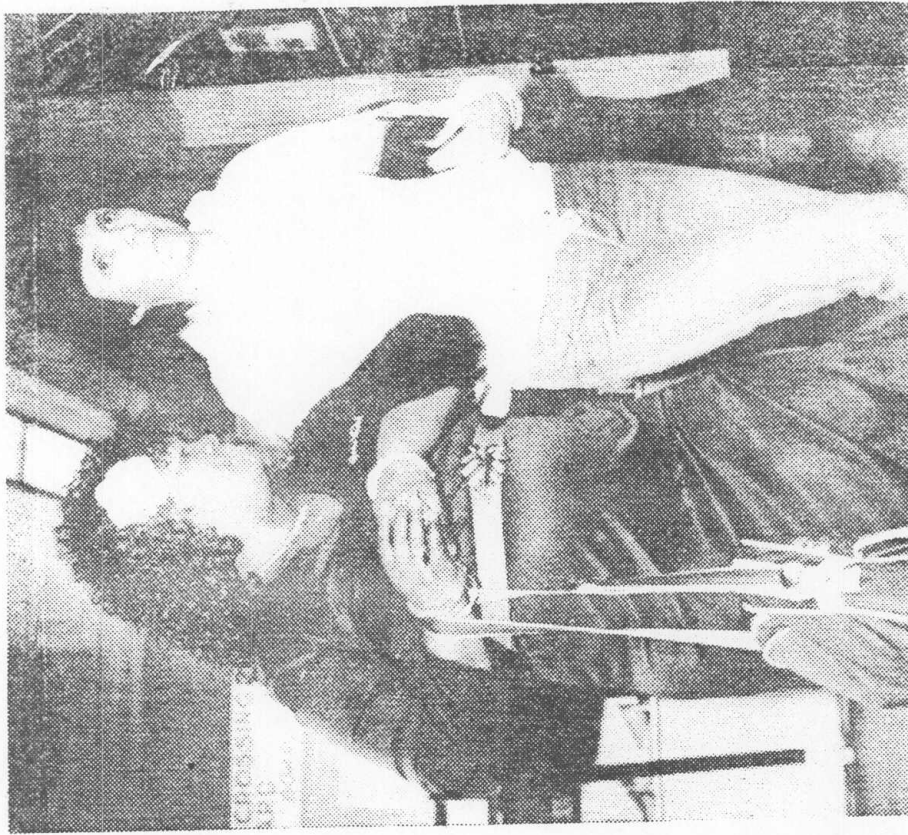
All but one of the defendants, most of whom had no prior criminal records, were released without bail by Judge Royal Radin following their arraignment yesterday afternoon in Criminal Court, Stapleton. Ms. Chavis had bail set at \$2,500 bond because of a prior drug conviction.

Radin ordered that a grand jury hear the evidence against the defendants and decide if indictments are warranted.

McNeice said each of the dealers sold between \$200 and \$300 worth of drugs a day.

Sgt. Dennis Gill, leader of the five-month-long probe and the principal arresting officer, said 60 percent of the drugs sold involved heroin.

"I had no difficulty whatever in obtaining any illegal substances. The drug dealings at the center were quite open — the grounds were not patrolled by regular police officers, but security guards instead because it is



Laverne Leverage, left, a mental health therapist, is led from the stationhouse by a police officer.

S.I. Advance Photos by Steve Zaffarano

state property. This created a climate where the employees felt free to buy or exchange various kinds of drugs without hiding them," he explained.

"It's not quite the same situation you'd have on the average street in Staten Island, where most people would be afraid of being seen in the open by the police.

He said that there was "no one particular supplier" for the alleged drug dealers. "They dealt with many different sources of supply in Staten Island, Manhattan and Brooklyn," Gill added.

The detective said there were "certain buildings, particularly on the night shift" in the 62-structure complex where frequent liquor parties would be conducted.

Page 3 of 4



Peter Etheridge, a mental health therapist at the Staten Island Developmental Center, walks from the St. George stationhouse after his arrest.

Page
4
of
64