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# Brooklyn

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## Mental facility faces test

By RANDY DIAMOND

The modern group of buildings is hidden by the swamps, weeds and dump land that surround it. Even many people who live nearby don't know where to find the Brooklyn Developmental Center.

Construction of the ultra-modern, 33-acre, six-building campus in an isolated section of southeastern Brooklyn was finished in mid-1972. It was a place where the retarded were supposed to get the best and most modern care available.

To Tom Shirtz, the center's executive director, the Brooklyn Developmental Center has more than lived up to its goal.

"It's the best institution in the country for the retarded," the 60-ish director

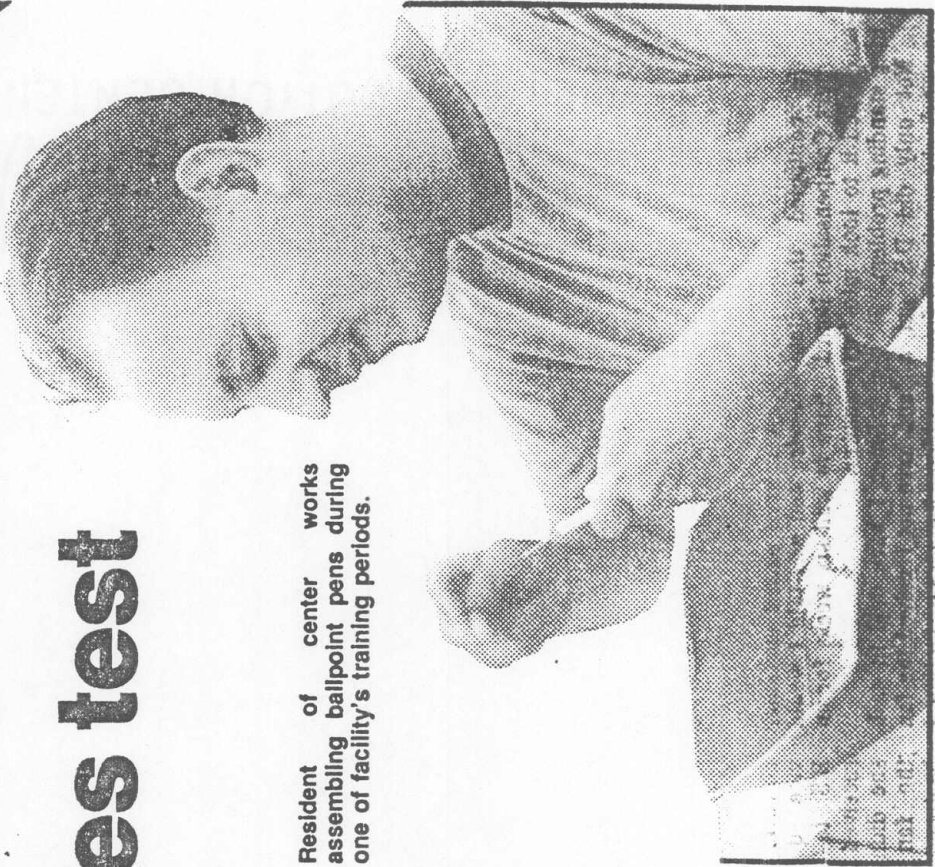
tor said, bluntly.

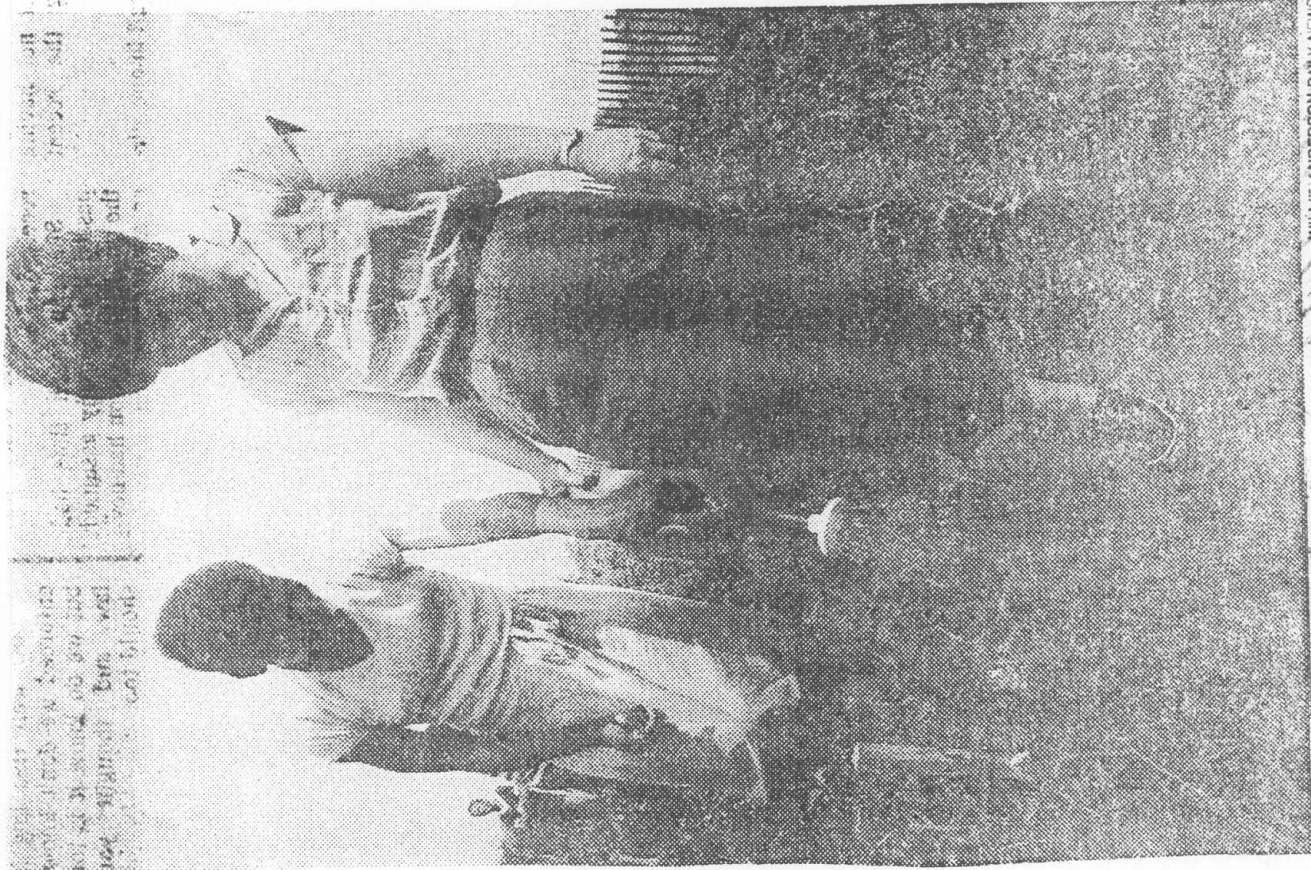
But to Chris Hanson, a lawyer with the New York Civil Liberties Union, the Brooklyn Developmental Center is nowhere near the top of the list. In fact, Hanson believes it is near the bottom—a modern-day chamber of horrors akin to the old Willowbrook on Staten Island.

"IT WAS supposed to replace the terrible conditions at Willowbrook, but it has become a striking example of the fact that large institutions for the retarded don't work," Hanson said.

Sixty-five per cent of the 636 residents at the center are from Willowbrook, now re-named the Staten Island Developmental Center, where national attention was focused in the early 1970s when the media brought to light the horrendous conditions in the 6,500-person institution.

Resident of center works assembling ballpoint pens during one of facility's training periods.





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instructor and student walk through garden on watering expedition.

Residents there were left unattended and neglected, living in unsanitary conditions with little programming or recreational activities. Some residents were beaten and abused by staff members.

In 1975, the state agreed to a federal judge's consent order to de-institutionalize Willowbrook and reduce its population to 250 by March 1981.

Willowbrook residents were supposed to be placed in the least restrictive setting possible, such as group homes, and were supposed to receive six hours of programmed therapeutic activities each weekday and two hours of recreation daily, as well as such things as an adequate supply of clean clothes and staff ratios of one staff member to every four retarded residents.

A FEDERAL judge ruled in April 1982 that the state had violated the consent agreement following more litigation by the plaintiffs, who were represented by the New York Civil Liberties Union.

They had argued that conditions in the Brooklyn Developmental Center and the Staten Island Developmental Center, and in the three other developmental centers in New York City, were violating the consent agreement, and that the state was not moving fast enough to create group homes and get the retarded people once and for all into a family-like setting.

Consultants for the plaintiffs toured the Brooklyn Developmental Center in the fall of 1981 and what they found made the developmental center sound more like the Willowbrook of old.

According to their report, residents

were seen wearing torn and ill-fitting clothes as well as being only partially dressed in public areas of the institution, such as the day room. Bits of paper and rubbish were found littered all over the institution's grounds, and bathrooms were found to have roaches and lack toilet paper.

ONE CONSULTANT testified that the center was enveloped in "a ripe kind of stale smell," and that he "had never been so taken aback by the setting of an institution before."

The state's own audit in 1980 said that residents were not receiving the daily six hours of formal structured programs; that the needs of patients were not evaluated properly; and that training programs, such as in toilet and bathing skills, were lacking. The same situation existed on a follow-up visit there in 1981.

"There have been 100 staff layoffs since 1981," said Hanson, who admitted he has not visited the center since then. "You can't tell me conditions are any better. They could have only gotten worse."

Just two weeks ago, state Controller Edward Regan released a report citing major deficiencies in the management of the center, including staff sleeping while on duty and overpayment to employees because of careless payroll practices.

But Shirtz still maintains he runs the best facility in the country. And very shortly, his words will be put to the test of an independent monitoring team.

Tomorrow—The Daily News visits the Brooklyn Developmental Center, where its director defends the facility.

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