

Services to mentally disabled to be expanded

By **JULIE MACK**
Advance Staff Writer

Proclaiming that this should be a building year for a long-term agenda, Commissioner Arthur Y. Webb of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) outlined yesterday on Staten Island his agency's plans for expansion of services.

Those plans include the growth of community residences, addressing the needs of the "aging out" population, an increase in family support services and the development of a more cohesive care system.

"We have a good budget for this year; from some perspectives, an excellent one," Webb said, noting Gov. Mario M. Cuomo's budget recommendation that OMRDD's funding be increased by 12.4 percent to \$993.4 million. "It allows us to continue a multiyear commitment to serving the disabled."

Staten Island should play a pivotal role in that commitment, through the proposed closing of Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) and the work of scientists at the Institute for Basic Research in Mental Retardation, Willowbrook, Webb's senior aides said.

Webb and his aides visited the Island yesterday afternoon to tour the institute, located on the grounds of SIDC, the first time he has seen the facility since he became commissioner seven months ago.

The commissioner also at-

tended a reception at the institute for about 200 state and voluntary agency officials from the downstate area.

Guests of honor at the reception were two newly appointed OMRDD officials — Hollis W. Shaw, deputy commissioner for program operations, and Elin M. Howe, associate commissioner of the New York State County Service Group. Mrs. Howe is a former director of the Staten Island Developmental Center. She left that post in 1980 to become associate commissioner of the Southeastern County Service Group.

Susan Morse, Webb's assistant, said that the Institute for Basic Research was selected as the site for the reception because "it's a jewel for OMRDD. We're real proud of it." She noted that the research facility has taken a leading role in the nation in the study of both Alzheimer's disease and fetal alcohol syndrome.

Before the tour and reception, Webb took time to meet with the media and talk about OMRDD's plans for 1984 and his proposal for the phase-out of SIDC, which was announced last month by Cuomo.

Webb said he encouraged Cuomo on the decision to close down SIDC, which at one time was the state's largest institution for the retarded. Wracked by scandals involving patient neglect in the early 1970s, and ordered by a federal court judge to reduce patient population to 250

by April 1985, SIDC now houses about 1,000 persons.

Based on separate studies by two independent consultants last year, Webb said he deduced that SIDC would need \$16 million in innovations to maintain a 250-bed facility at the site.

"I told the governor that we could live with a 250-bed facility at Willowbrook," Webb said. "But we believe that for fewer capital dollars, we could service the clients better in community-based facilities.

"The governor said that for economic reasons, historical reasons and program reasons, he agreed and concurred and told us to go to it."

Webb's tentative proposal is to close down SIDC within the next several years — 1987 would be the earliest, he said — and move the patients left on that campus to group homes or intensive care facilities in their "borough of origin."

Three 24-bed intensive care facilities, which are specially designed for persons who are physically handicapped as well as retarded, will be built on the SIDC campus, Webb said. Those facilities will house some of the 100 SIDC patients who are Staten Island natives, and others who have no designated "borough of origin."

Webb said that the Institute for Basic Research will not be affected by the closing of SIDC, and that some buildings now used by SIDC may be converted to use for community programs

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for the mentally retarded.

A formal plan for the phase-out will be delivered to the governor's office within the next few weeks, Webb said.

In addition to starting the final phase-out of SIDC, Webb said he hopes to spend this year dealing with problems faced by community clients, those retarded persons who have never been institutionalized. Advocates have complained in the past that this population has been ignored.

Webb said that his agency must be sensitive to the needs of families who have "struggled and sacrificed" to keep their children out of state institutions.

OMRDD plans to open 1,442 beds in community residences statewide this year. Webb said, and 625 are allocated for community clients. Of the 1,750 beds scheduled to open next year, Webb said that 900 should be open for community clients.

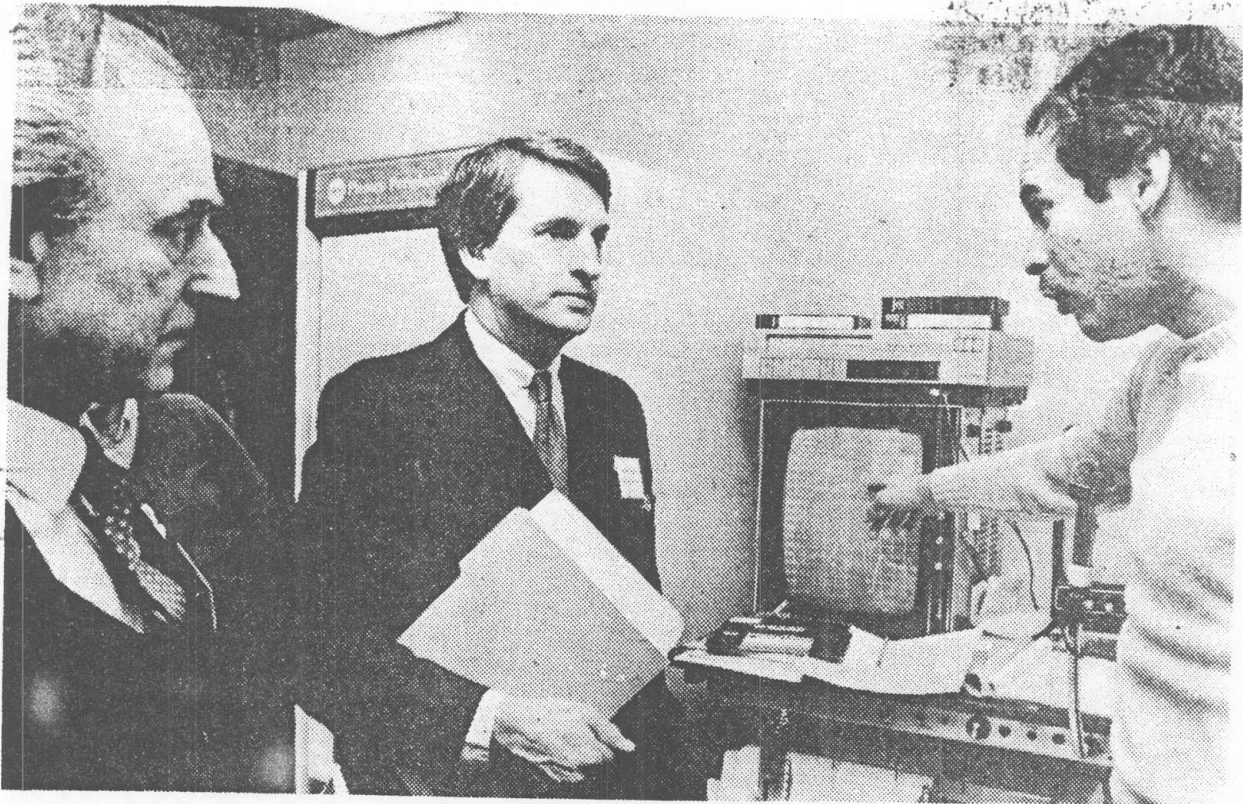
Webb said he also hopes to increase respite and homemaker services for families with retarded children at home, and that OMRDD will work this year with other state agencies to coordinate those kind of services for state residents.

"What the governor is saying is that we need to strengthen and improve our system so we can keep people at home for as long as appropriate and possible," Webb said.

"What we have before us is a major undertaking," Webb said. "But I am confident and I am optimistic."



Elin Howe, associate commissioner of the Southeastern County Service Group, gets help with a corsage from Commissioner Arthur Y. Webb of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.



Representatives of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities outline the group's future plans. From left are Dr. Henry J. Wisniewski, director of the Institute for Basic Research, Arthur Y. Webb, commissioner of the OMRDD, and Glenn Heaney, research scientist.



Examining a set of X-rays are from left, Dr. Henry J. Wisniewski, Commissioner Arthur Y. Webb, Joseph French, and Hollis Shaw.

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