

SIDC employee charged in rape of patient

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A former resident of Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC), now employed as a cleaner at the institution, was arrested yesterday and charged with raping a profoundly retarded and physically disabled woman at the center a year ago.

Robert Bennett, 53, of 1440 Richmond Terr., West Brighton, was taken into custody at about 10:30 a.m. after questioning at the 122nd Precinct stationhouse in New Dorp. At his arraignment yesterday afternoon in Criminal Court in Stapleton, Bennett was charged with first-degree sexual abuse. He is being held on \$2,500

bail. Bennett is not accused of acting forcibly in the incident, but of having sex with a woman physically unable to resist or give consent, a spokesman in the district attorney's office said. He could face prison term of up to 25 years.

The arrest ended a 5½-month investigation of the rape, which was discovered last November when the victim was found to be seven months pregnant. She gave birth Jan. 10 to a healthy, 6-pound 5-ounce boy in St. Vincent's Medical Center.

The woman, a 31-year-old quadriplegic, is mute and profoundly retarded, SIDC officials said her serious disabilities hindered discovery of the pregnancy, which was found by a doctor who thought the patient had tumorous growths in her stomach. X-rays revealed a fully formed fetus.

The date of the rape is undetermined, although, based on the pregnancy, officials said it prob-

ably occurred the first two weeks of last May.

Lt. William Quinn, of the Staten Island Crimes Against Persons Squad, said Bennett was arrested based on a "lengthy and very difficult investigation" that centered on interviews with SIDC employees and patients.

"We kept on investigating and interviewing people at the developmental center, and we were able to narrow it down and then narrow it down again, until we were finally left with this person," Quinn said.

Quinn would not reveal specific details of the case against Bennett, although he said the arrest was made on the basis of statements Bennett made about his "movements around that time, which correlated with our information."

Bennett has been employed as a cleaner at SIDC for the past 12 years, according to SIDC Director James Walsh. Citing patient confidentiality laws, Walsh would not say when Bennett was a patient at the institution.

However, Quinn said that Bennett is married and has been living outside of the institution for at least several years.

The arrest was somewhat of a surprise to SIDC officials. Their own investigation, concluded earlier this year, reported "no solid lead as to the identity of the rapist were developed... every investigative resource at our disposal was utilized, every avenue of inquiry explored, without success."

"We are cooperating with the police and district attorney's office," Walsh said, admitting, "I was surprised (by the arrest) because of the length of time involved."

Bennett's case was adjointed until Tuesday. The defendant is being represented by Joseph Lasky of the Legal Aid Society.