

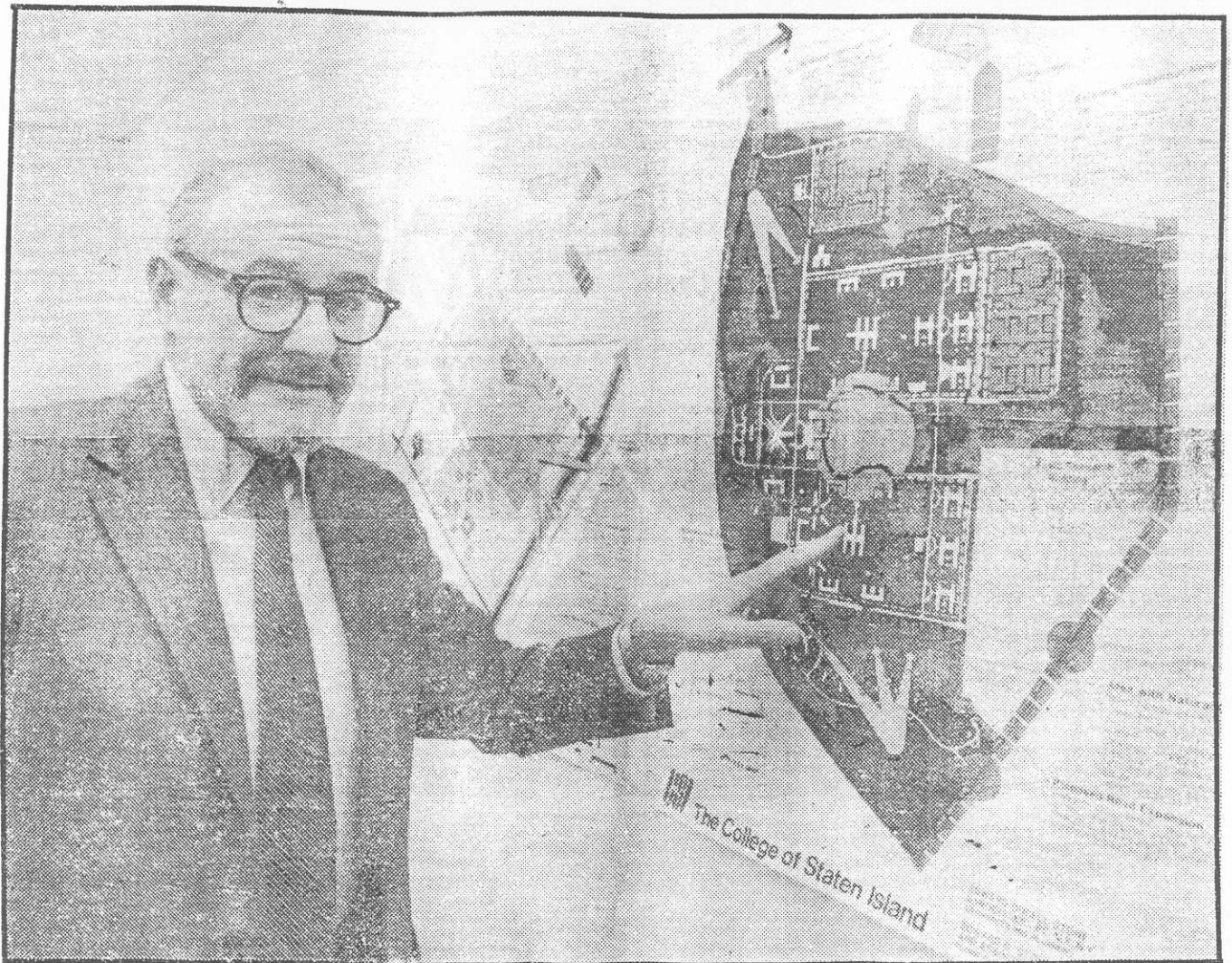
College eyes

Willowbrook

Staten Island

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IN THIS SECTION

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JIM HUGHES DAILY NEWS

College President Edmund Volpe points out sections of Willowbrook grounds and buildings college would use.

Willowbrook eyed for college campus

By MARY ENGELS

WILLOWBROOK, a name once linked to scandalous treatment of the retarded, is the favored site for a new consolidated campus of the College of Staten Island.

A major portion of the grounds of the former Willowbrook State School (now the Staten Island Developmental Center) has been rated "highly acceptable and recommended for consolidation" by the college's site planners.

Given that stamp of approval, movement is now under way to get all the other necessary clearances to relocate the college from its present downtown St. George location to a wooded "Ivy League" setting at the Willowbrook site.

Recently, Edmund Volpe, president of the college, announced that Willowbrook "was far, far ahead of the other sites," and that it had been unanimously approved by the Facilities and Finance Committee of the City University of New York. He noted that final approval by the full board of the City University was

'Ivy League' setting impresses planners as move is started to get clearances

expected on Jan. 28. After that, formal application for the land must be presented to the owners, the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmentally Disabled.

"We will be requesting 180 acres of the 380 acres of the property where the Staten Island Developmental Center is now located," said Volpe.

Most prized by the site selection committee are the same, still sturdy, huge brick structures that once housed thousands of retarded youth for many years.

"That was one of the factors that turned the tide in favor of Willowbrook," Volpe said. "The good condition of the buildings, a majority of which can be rehabilitated and

reused." Present plans include using about "eight to 12 of the buildings," with the rest being razed.

The study, some 178 pages, was undertaken by Edward Durell Stone Associates, architects and planners, at a cost of \$500,000.

The other sites considered for consolidation included the present St. George and Sunnyside campuses and the Ocean Breeze site at South Beach, which is owned by the college.

VOLPE SAID THAT when he first took over as president of the then Richmond College in St. George back in 1974 "we were instrumental in getting the South Beach property to be used for an expanded Richmond College.

"However, when the fiscal pressures caused Richmond to merge with Staten Island College in 1975-76, and the two became the College of Staten Island, the need for consolidation was even greater."

After almost a decade of fighting for consolidation, Volpe said he was delighted "to finally see the light at the end of the tunnel." Community

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reaction was noted in the college study as being "highly acceptable."

The study said that the general area "has a vast amount of land committed to governmental use, such as Willowbrook Park, which is 157 acres of park land operated by the city."

Volpe said that he had found the buildings "to have an Ivy League quality about them and the woods around the complex add to the overall aesthetic quality of the place, including a natural quadrangle."

ALTHOUGH HE said he would be limited to 8,000 students initially, "We have the kind of space that we can utilize for other things, such as athletic fields, parking and the like."

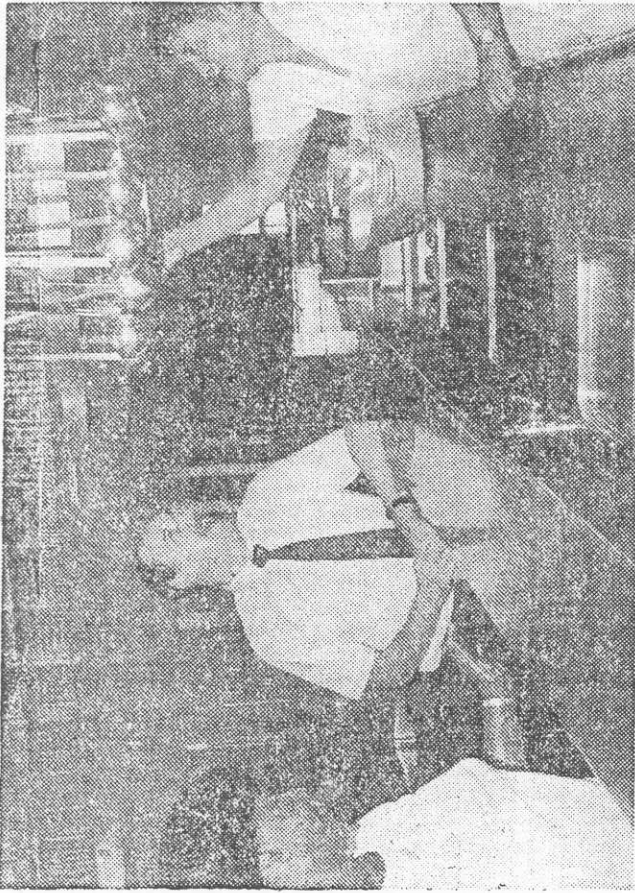
Volpe added that the college could "co-exist with the present plans the Staten Island Developmental Center has to construct four group homes for the present (handicapped) patients, to be located on the adjacent land.

"That will leave about 100 acres remaining for a decision by the Willowbrook Task Force (formed to find future use for the prime land) as to what to do with the rest of the property."

Many of the members of the task force have been anxious to reconvene in order to decide on proposals of how best to utilize the property.

John Egan, state commissioner of the Office of General Services and head of the task force, had indicated that a meeting would take place at the end of the month. However, sources now indicate that the task force will reconvene after the college formally presents its application for the land to the state.

James Walsh, director of the Staten Island Developmental Center, said he wasn't surprised "at the college's decision to relocate to Willow-



STATEN ISLAND DEVELOPMENTAL CENTER DIRECTOR JAMES WALSH IN CENTER'S KITCHEN.
EDWARD MOLINARI DAILY NEWS

brook. I see them as very good neighbors, and I don't foresee any problems in their cohabitating with the handicapped. However, I will support the remaining use of the property for handicapped patients," he said, referring to the Staten Island Regional Retardation and Disabilities Council proposal for the establishment on the property of a recreational complex for the handicapped. It would include a day camp and other residential facilities.

VOLPE NOTED that if all approvals are "obtained fairly quickly and we get the funding approved in the state's expense budget to get the architectural planning under way, we could see a new college there within four years."

He also anticipated that the three properties presently owned by the college could "bring about \$40 million when sold" and contribute to the funding of the new facility.

'Snake pit' image of past

THE NAME Willowbrook still stirs horrid memories for the families of retarded children and for those who read about and viewed on television its one-time filth and squalor.

In 1965, the late Sen. Robert F. Kennedy visited the institution and was so upset with the sights, sounds and smells that he called it a snake pit. Its name conjured thoughts of the callous and inhuman treatment of the mentally retarded.

In 1972, the parents of children of the Willowbrook State School filed a federal suit against the state, demanding that the institutionalized children be given decent treatment that is guaranteed by the Constitution.

The suit ended in 1975 when then Gov. Hugh Carey signed the Willowbrook consent decree, a sweeping

agreement by the state on the standards for the care of the mentally retarded.

Later that year, a federal judge ordered the state to ameliorate what he called the "inhumane and shocking conditions," there and reduce the number of residents at the complex to 250 by April 1981. That deadline, however, has been extended until April 1985.

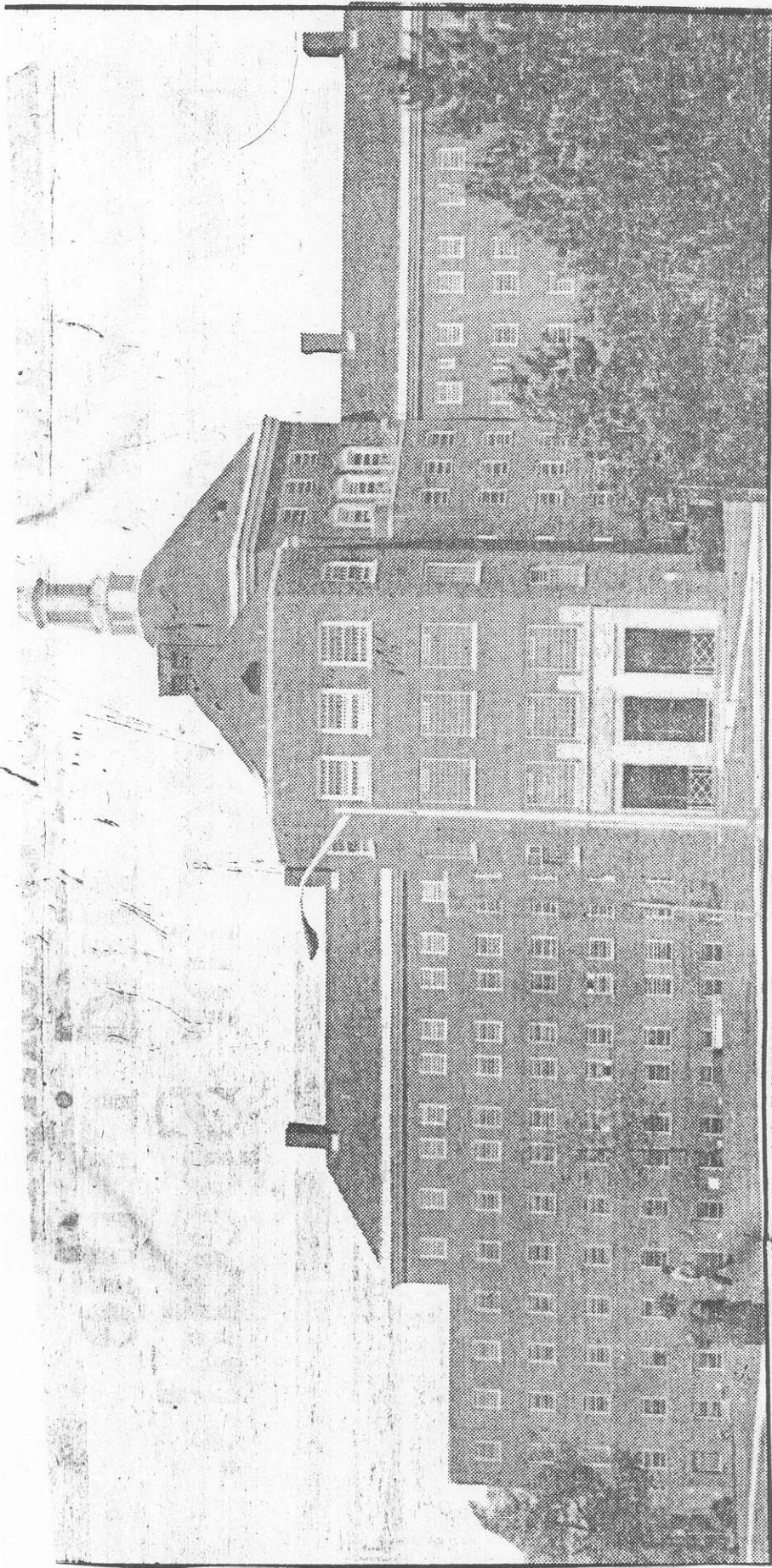
To rid itself of the Willowbrook stigma, the 50-year-old facility is now known as the Staten Island Developmental Center, and it has a larger and better trained staff. It is no longer overcrowded with the more than 5,000 patients it once held when the public got its first glimpse of the shocking conditions that existed there. About 1,000 patients are housed at the facility, including some

who have been there since the 1950s. One quarter are cared for in units run by United Cerebral Palsy. But reducing the population to 250, even now, seems a long way off.

LAST YEAR, DR. Arthur Y. Webb, Commissioner of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, said, "the idea is to move away from institutions to community residences."

Webb, whose agency is charged with devising a plan to phase out Willowbrook and place its residents in smaller facilities, added: "But it's going to be damned difficult." He even predicted that the last residents will not leave some of the original buildings until 1987.

—Henry Machitella



One of the many sturdy brick Willowbrook buildings which could be rehabilitated for use by the College of Staten Island.

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