

SIDC to lose 1,400 jobs in next two years

By JULIE MACK
Advance Staff Writer

The workforce at Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) will be reduced by almost 80 percent over the next two years, with a loss of more than 1,400 jobs, the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) disclosed last night.

The job reduction will be accomplished through layoffs beginning May 22 and attrition,

Louis Ganim, an OMRDD spokesman, told the Advance. Officials for the Civil Service Employees Association and the Public Employees Federation, which represent the SIDC workers, were briefed on the layoffs yesterday and today, Ganim said.

The layoffs are necessary because of the institution's dwindling client population. Once housing more than 6,000 mentally retarded residents, SIDC

now has 696 clients, and that number is expected to drop to 250 by April 1986. The institution is scheduled to close by the end of 1987, and the remaining residents will be transferred to the proposed Richmond Complex on the SIDC campus, which will house 148 clients.

Ganim noted that although the client census has been dropping dramatically at SIDC — there were more than 1,000 clients in early 1984 — there have been no

layoffs for two years. "The layoffs have been lagging behind the census reduction," he said.

While the announcement of layoffs did not come as a surprise, union officials said they were shocked to learn that 80 percent of the workforce would be gone in two years.

"Frankly, I didn't think the layoffs would be that large," said Tyrone Daniels, president of the SIDC local of the Civil Service Employees Association,

which represents the non-professional staff. "It's a devastating thing. People who have been here 25, 30 years are going to lose their jobs."

He noted that 40 percent of his membership are the sole supporters of their families. About 75 percent of his membership lives on Staten Island, he added.

The SIDC has 1,832 workers, according to Ganim, who said 699 employee positions will be eliminated in the 1985-86 fiscal

year and 734 positions will be eliminated in 1986-87. The remaining 399 employees eventually will be assigned to jobs in the Richmond Complex.

Ganim added that some of the laid-off employees may obtain jobs at other state facilities for the mentally retarded and mentally ill in the metropolitan area. "We are trying to find as many jobs as we-possible can,"

(See LAYOFFS, Page A 6)

Layoffs

(From Page 1)

Ganim said. "We will begin to establish a placement roster so the people laid off at SIDC will be the first to get positions which open at the other facilities."

One problem in transferring SIDC employees, he said, is that "the development of community residences is shifting upstate, so that's where new jobs are."

The job reduction in the upcoming fiscal year will be accomplished by laying off an estimated 250 permanent employees, while another 450 positions will be eliminated by laying off temporary employees and through attrition, Ganim said.

An estimated 165 of the temporary workers who will lose their jobs are currently employed at the Karl Warner Complex, a section of the SIDC campus which was once operated by United Cerebral Palsy of New York State. The state took control of the Warner Complex in early 1984 after UCP ran into financial difficulties; while the UCP employees at Warner were retained by the state, they were never made part of the permanent workforce.

The layoff schedule for permanent employees for the upcoming fiscal year, as announced yesterday, is: May 22, elimination of 62 positions; Sept. 26, 80 positions; March 26, 1986, 105 positions. The schedule for reducing the workforce through attrition and laying off temporary employees is: 180 positions to be eliminated by May 22; 169 by Sept. 26, and 95 by March 26, 1986.

Ganim said 554 permanent employees will be laid off in 1986-87, and another 180 positions will be eliminated through

attrition and by laying off permanent employees.

SIDC is the only OMRDD institution where layoffs have been proposed, Ganim said, although layoffs will occur at other institutions once their client census starts to drop significantly.

SIDC is leading the state's policy to moved transfer clients from the institutions because of the Willowbrook Consent Decree, signed by then-Gov. Hugh Carey in 1975 to settle a class-action lawsuit charging the state with neglecting SIDC residents.

As a result of the consent judgment, reforms were implemented at the institution and the state promised to eventually transfer all but 250 of its clients into community residences. Last year, Gov. Mario Cuomo announced that the institution would close and that all past and present SIDC residents will be moved into the community.

"Layoffs have been inevitable since the consent decree was signed," Ganim said. "Unfortunately, it can't be done any other way."

However, union officials charged yesterday that OMRDD's implementation of the consent decree was a sham because SIDC clients are being transferred to other state institutions rather than placed in community residences.

Willamay Thompson, council leader of the SIDC local of the Public Employees Federation, which represents the professional staff, charged that Cuomo wants to close SIDC as fast as possible because of its "stigma." But she said Cuomo overlooked that fact that SIDC has improved greatly since the institution's squalid conditions were the subject of media attention in the 1970s.

In fact, she said, as a result of the consent decree, SIDC has been "the model" for state institutions, and she argued that clients should be left at the facility until group homes are built.

"If the state was moving them (the clients) into proper programs, proper community residences, I could truly understand why the institution would have to close," she said. "But this is mass dumping that is happening."

"What they are doing is very, very upsetting. It's really impacting on the clients even more than us. Most of these clients are moving into other facilities that do not uphold the standards of the consent decree. Our studies have shown that the other facilities do not have the enriched staffing, the programs that are required by the consent decree and that we have here," Ms. Thompson said.

"The professionals at Willowbrook, of course we are concerned about them, but they will find other jobs. The clients will be hurt the most."

Page 2 of 2 10900