

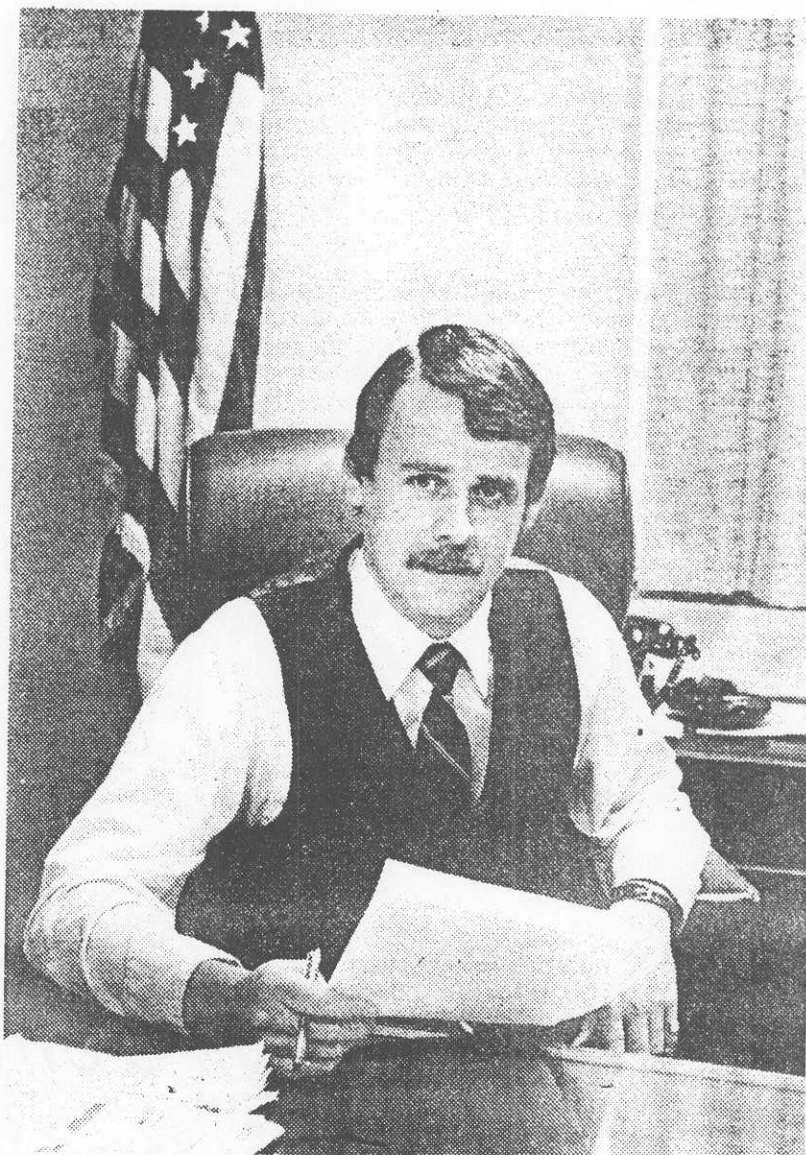
gradual, he said. "I think what changed me where the clients themselves, and seeing how well they could function in the community."

As Walsh reached upper management at Willowbrook — he has been director since 1983, and he was assistant director before that — the institution was no longer the horror it once was. "Their clothing, their hygiene, their environment has changed. Their dignity — that has been the biggest change," he said.

"I still complain now about how bad it is here. I think about where we've come from — and it's a long way — but it's still not enough," he said. "Now the real work is putting the clients into the community and that's a long process."

And so, the director of the state's most infamous institution, a man who has spent his entire professional life at Willowbrook, is now one of the strongest advocates for shutting it down.

"To me," Walsh said, "my job is to set up enough support services and enough resources to ensure that every mentally retarded person is afforded the right not to be put into a institution."



James Walsh, director of Staten Island Developmental Center, works in his office.