

# Doctor cites community watchdogs

By DENISE RINALDO

Advance Staff Writer

When the lid was blown off of Willowbrook 10 years ago, the defenders of the mentally retarded were vocal but few.

One of the major changes that came out of the revelations and the resulting consent decree was the creation of a large "constituency" whose goal is to protect the rights of the mentally re-

tarded, Dr. David J. Rothman, co-author of "The Willowbrook Wars," said yesterday.

"The absence of a constituency on behalf of the developmentally disabled had most profound effects," Dr. Rothman said, adding, however, that "one of the leading villains in the piece was the state Legislature."

In the early 1970s, Willowbrook and other institutions for

the retarded "were very, very far down on the appropriations list. . . . Recognizing to some degree that the absence of constituencies played a critical role, the state itself had not seen fit to do its job," he said.

It was the coming together of a number of events — a winning lawsuit in federal court, the state's belated allocation of funds for services and the new

involvement of community groups in caring for the mentally retarded — that has convinced Dr. Rothman that "it cannot go back to where it was.

"Not because I trust legislatures, and, in this day and age, with the post-Ronald Reagan changing of the federal courts, it's doubtful that the courts will be able to play the catalyst role that they once did."

But Dr. Rothman said he believes the groups who have become involved with the welfare of the mentally retarded will act as watchdogs over a state that will continue to cut as many corners as is politically expedient.

"I find myself far more comfortable and far more optimistic when I can find in a community a series of constituencies whose