

the buildings to make them more comfortable and more attractive. But soon I realized that no matter how many pictures I put on the wall or how fancy the bedspreads go, it was never going to be enough to give that place a homey feeling."

Walsh and Levy agree that the gloominess doesn't affect just the clients. "No question, it affects the employees, and if it affects them, it affects their treatment of the clients," Walsh says.

Levy is more succinct: "The same environment that dehumanizes the clients also dehumanizes the staff."

Walsh says it would cost up to \$50 million to renovate the buildings to create the kind of atmosphere he would like to see. But the state budget office is understandably reluctant to spend any kind of big money on a facility scheduled to close in two years.

Another issue is the staff. SIDC has traditionally experienced high absenteeism and, until recently, high turnover. As for morale, many employees say it's the pits — it's not easy to work at a facility that has been

degraded by the media and by courts for the past 13 years.

Layoffs at SIDC — it was recently announced that 80 percent of the staff will lose their jobs over the next two years, as the institution phases out its operation — have further eroded morale. "We're asking everyone to give 110 percent, but it's tough," said one supervisor.

There is another factor. The salaries paid by SIDC are not great by New York City standards, and working with such severely disabled clients is both physically and emotionally demanding. Considering the salary and the nature of the work, it is not surprising that SIDC — along with developmental centers in elsewhere in New York City — have had difficulty attracting highly skilled, motivated workers.

Yet, Walsh says: "The services

we offer now are adequate. And I do think we have certain sections that are good, sections that show we are capable of providing quality care."

Saperstein, who has reviewed federal audits of SIDC for more than 10 years, says he is baffled and frustrated by the facility's apparent inability to improve to what Saperstein considers acceptable levels.

"I've met with Jim Walsh and he seems to be a real dedicated spirit. I would guess that what he is going through is the worst kind of frustration you can experience in a bureaucracy. I know he has union problems. I know he has staffing problems. Yet I also now that he feels gratified over the improvements that he feels have occurred," Saperstein said. "But they still haven't come up to federal standards."

The question now is how much the institution can be upgraded before its closing in two years. Walsh says that improvement will occur as the client census continues to decline, allowing for more personalized care. But he adds that the real solution to the problem is shutting down SIDC as quickly as possible. "I took this job with that understanding. I said I wouldn't take it otherwise," Walsh says.

"One problem is that the situation here is so protracted; it's such a slow-death," says Gannon of the Consumer Advisory Board. "The best for SIDC is for it to close."

(This is the fifth in a six-part series on the Staten Island Development Center and what has happened to it since the consent decree was issued 10 years ago.)