

STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE, Saturday, June 29, 1985

Eaton center for disabled celebrates 10th anniversary

By JULIE MACK
Advance Staff Writer

The 10th anniversary of the Nina Eaton Center was celebrated yesterday, with its founders noting that the center was a pioneer in providing quality care for the severely retarded and multi-handicapped.

"Those of us involved in the creation of the Nina Eaton Center are just as proud now as we were 10 years ago," said Robert Schonhorn, executive director of United Cerebral Palsy of New York State, which operates the center. The facility, which currently houses 68 people, is located on the grounds of South Beach Psychiatric Center in Ocean Breeze.

At a gathering of staff and supporters at the center, Schonhorn and others recalled how the Nina Eaton Center was formed as part of the state's attempt to relieve severe overcrowding at Staten Island Developmental Center. Indeed, the center opened only two months after state officials signed a consent decree promis-

ing to transfer SIDC clients out of the institution and into community residences.

As the state was trying to develop plans for the transfer of clients, "UCP, Bob Schonhorn and Nina Eaton (then president of UCP's board) came forth and said 'give us your most difficult clients and we'll show you what we can do' — and they did," recalled Edward Jennings, associate commissioner of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

"This was during a time when nobody else was even thinking about clients like this ... many, many people believed that there was no place for the more disabled clients outside the institution," Jennings said.

A guest of honor at yesterday's celebration was Nina Eaton herself, now a 70-year-old resident of Cedarhurst, L.I.

"I think I'm prouder than anyone in this whole room, and I have a right to be," she said. "To have a program like this bearing my name — I can't tell you how

happy that makes me."

She ticked off the accomplishments of the center: Its 50 original clients were people with multiple disabilities who had lived at SIDC for a minimum of 16 years, "people who spent their days in the institution lying in bed or sitting on the floor," she said. "The things we did with them turned them back into human beings."

Of the 50 original clients, she said, 23 are now living in the community. Of the 124 residents who have lived in the center over the past 10 years, a total of 42 have been placed in the community, "and only one came back," Mrs. Eaton said.

Center employee Rosa Rhodes told that audience that the center staff "has succeeded in turning non-functioning clients into functioning people with some measure of independence and dignity ... Our job has not been a burden, but a labor of love."

The ceremony included awards to staffers with five and 10 years of service at the center.



At the Nina Eaton Center's anniversary reception are, from the left, Audrey Sander, director; Robert Schonhorn, executive director of United Cerebral Palsy of New York State; Nina Eaton, for whom the center is named, and Edward Jennings, assistant commissioner for the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

S.I. Advance Photo by Irving Silverstein