

# Staten Island

A NEW ERA FOR THE FORMER WILLOWBROOK SITE

## Ground broken on care facility

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After more than 18 months of delays, including a court battle with environmentalists over where to put the site, a groundbreaking ceremony for the new Richmond Complex Intermediate Care Facilities, on the grounds of the Staten Island Developmental Center, finally took place yesterday.

The project, which involves the construction of three residential sites—one to house a 24-bed unit and the other two 12-bed units—is situated on Executive Way, where Willowbrook Hospital once stood.

James Walsh, director of the Staten Island Borough Developmental Services Office and the last director of the Staten Island Developmental Center, called the ceremony "the final chapter in the closing of what was once the tragedy of Willowbrook."

Walsh said, "It was the parents, the advocates of this

Webb said that when completed it will be a model campus that will encompass almost 200 acres.

"With the College of Staten Island providing medical and psychological internships in the developmental facilities and the Institute for Basic Research, which is unique in this nation for its work on mental retardation, the overall facility will be one that doesn't exist anywhere else in the world."

The population of the former Willowbrook complex, which once exceeded more than 5,000 clients, has now dwindled to 197.

A special surprise came to Anthony Pinto, president of the Benevolent Society and parent of an early Willowbrook patient, who died there, when Walsh stated that the first residential building would be named after him. Pinto, 73, at a loss for words, could only say "thank you" to the audience that cheered his recognition. Walsh noted, "Pinto has done more to help change the system than almost anyone present."



**JAMES WALSH** at yesterday's Richmond Complex groundbreaking ceremony.  
JAMES HUGHES/DAILY NEWS

place that serves the developmentally disabled, who provided the impetus for the changes that have taken place over the years."

Arthur Webb, commissioner of the state's Office of Mental Retardation and Developmentally Disabled, noted that in addition to the

residential units, which will be supervised by the Services Office, "there will also be a multipurpose community treatment center to provide a range of day and recreational programs—including a therapeutic pool—in both state and voluntary provider residences."