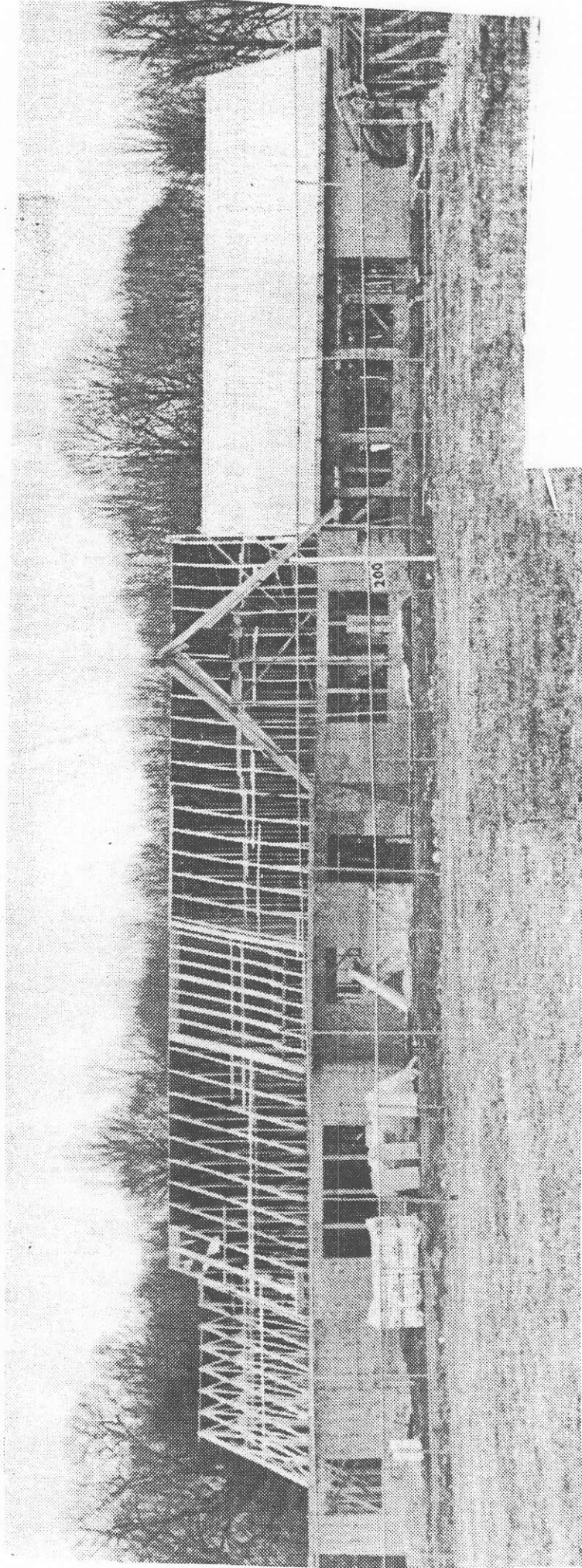


SUNDAY, MARCH 15, 1987

Staten Island Sunday Advance

Lifestyle



ADVANCE PHOTOS/FRANK J. JOHNS
The last Staten Island Developmental Center residents will move into group homes now under construction by the end of the year. The abandoned buildings left behind (at right) may become part of a new college campus.

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New group homes mark beginning of end at SIDC

By ANNE SILVERSTEIN
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

Staten Island Developmental Center residents will begin moving into one of three new group homes now under construction on SIDC's property by the end of April.

"The first one is about 90 percent finished, the other two are about 70 to 75 percent finished," said James Walsh, SIDC director, yesterday.

The new group homes are part of the Richmond Complex, 13 residential group homes and one respite and drop-in service building, that should create a more home-like atmosphere for the mentally retarded and developmentally disabled who now or will live

there.

SIDC, which now has about 130 residents, will close sometime toward the end of the year. Half of the residents will move to group homes off-Island, primarily to Long Island, Westchester and throughout the metropolitan area. The rest will move into group homes on or near Executive Way off Forest Hill Road.

Construction work on the Richmond Complex also included renovating an existing building; the remaining 10 needed little or no work. Street work on Executive Way brought the total project cost to about \$5 million.

Clients began moving into the group homes in November, Walsh said, and nine are now occupied.

Clients will move into the three new homes at the end of April, the end of July and the end of September.

So far, the clients are enjoying their new homes. "They love it," Walsh said. The majority — he estimates about 95 percent — behave better, he said, than they did while living in SIDC.

"There's a marked change in their behavior. They seem happier. The staff is happier. It's a cleaner, nicer environment. It's pleasant. Everybody benefits," he said.

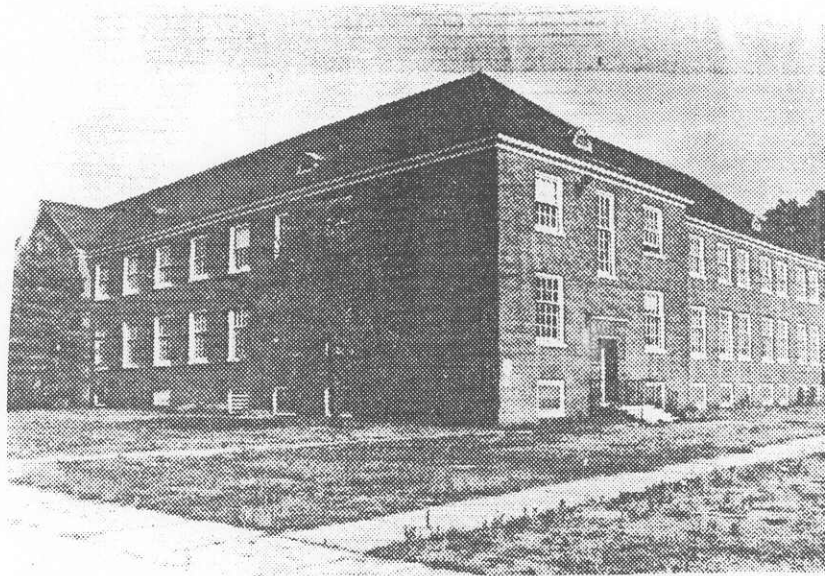
"You can see them forming bonds between each other," more so than before, Walsh said. "It's almost like a family. They (the staff) take pride in what they do.

They cook the meals, they clean the house, they drive the clients around."

Construction was delayed between a week and 10 days, he said, primarily because of rain this winter. The state Facilities Development Corp., which is responsible for the group homes' construction, has been moving quickly. "It's one of their critical projects," he said.

About 125 clients — all adults 21 or older — will live in the 13 group homes that range in size from six to 24 beds; seven of the homes will have eight beds and two will 12 beds. Of the nine now operating, two are run by private groups, Staten Island Aid and the Association for the Health of Retarded

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Citizens.

The state originally planned to build four new houses in Corson's Brook Woods but was forced to change its mind when Gov. Mario Cuomo stepped in on behalf of outraged environmentalists. The buildings were placed near the New Springville Little League fields.

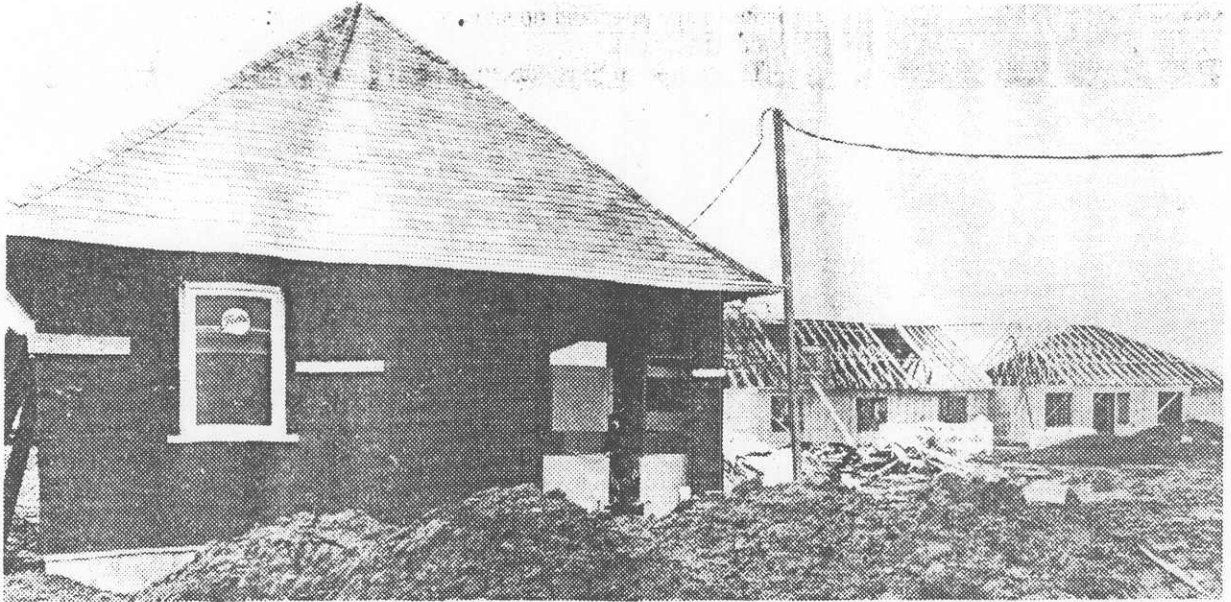
Walsh said the state delayed building the fourth group home because "I decided the concentration of four brand new homes would be too dense and would not be a good clinical decision." If the fourth home, a 24-bed facility, had been built, "before you know it, you have a mini-institution," Walsh said.

Some opponents to clustering

group homes on SIDC property have said in the past that building homes together "segregates" the residents from communities, which conflicts with the intent of community group homes.

But OMRDD officials responded by saying the houses will be home-like and they will be a vast improvement over institution living.

Walsh said he and the state soon will be accepting proposals from private agencies for the development of another group home somewhere on the Island. Eventually, in between 18 and 30 months, about 48 news beds will be built here. If no group presents an acceptable proposal, the state will develop them itself.



The new Richmond Complex will contain **13** residential group homes and a more home-like atmosphere.



The complex is served by a new roadway and was located to avoid the nearby Corson's Brook Woods area.