

# Unsolved cases haunt Willowbrook

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If the notorious past of the old Willowbrook State School had begun to fade in recent years, the Jennifer Schweiger murder has resurrected some ghosts on the campus.

The arrest of Andre Rand, the accused kidnapper of the 12-year-old Westerleigh girl, has led police to dredge up more than 30 unsolved cases of mysterious deaths and disappearances, a

number on the grounds of the Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC), the former state school for the mentally retarded.

Jennifer's body was unearthed there on Aug. 12, only 50 yards from Rand's wooded campsite. Her July 9 disappearance triggered a massive police and volunteer search that often focused on the Willowbrook grounds, where the Down's syndrome child was last seen walking with Rand.

The case has triggered some observers, including Community

Board 2, to criticize SIDC security. But James Walsh, center director, said that with 382 acres, "there's no way of securing it unless you put up a barbed-wire fence with 24-hour guards patrolling, and turn it into a prison. We have no intention of doing that."

Abandoned buildings on the site evoke the "snakepit" and "chamber of horrors" images tagged to the school in the early 1960s, when more than 6,000 patients were crammed into the facility de-

signed for 4,500.

During that decade, Rand played a bit part in the school's history. Under one of several aliases he has used, he worked as a temporary physical-therapy aide from 1966 to 1968.

More recently, he was known to sit on a set of bleachers on the grounds and have coffee and a doughnut almost every morning. The balding man on his bicycle was a normal part of the scenery around the center. And his campsite among the trees across from

Building 27 could be pointed out by a number of SIDC workers, who also knew that he sometimes slept in one of the former kitchen buildings.

Walsh said that "we didn't know he was living here," and that there were instances where guards "escorted him off the grounds."

He could not answer why the workers who saw Rand with Jennifer did not intervene to get her away from the transient.

"That is a Police Department matter and I will not get in-

involved," Walsh said. "I don't know the circumstances."

The 43-year-old Rand, who is undergoing psychiatric evaluation in Kings County Hospital in Brooklyn, was arrested Aug. 4 and charged with Jennifer's kidnapping. No one has yet been charged with the girl's murder.

Rand is to return to Stapleton Criminal Court on Friday for his first appearance on the kidnapping charge.

Since Jennifer's disappearance,

the parents of SIDC's 149 clients "have never once called my office" with complaints or questions, Walsh said.

As SIDC prepares to close in a few weeks, 26 patients will be transferred to group homes throughout New York state and New Jersey, but the remaining 123 clients with severe developmental disabilities will continue to be cared for at the facility, he said. The state has created a Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Services Office to take over the center's work.

SIDC's closing is meant to be another step away from the specter of Willowbrook's infamous past.

But there are some pieces from that haunted history that have not been put to rest.

The following is a chronological look at cases involving disappearances from or deaths at the institution. Walsh and his staff provided any updated information available.

● Sept. 28, 1970 — Roland Ortiz, a 20-year-old deaf mute patient at the Willowbrook school, disappeared that afternoon from the institution. Ortiz returned several days later, apparently unharmed, Walsh said. What happened to the patient for those few days is still a mystery.