

## Long requiem for Willowbrook

By MARY ENGELS

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Willowbrook's Staten Island Developmental Center, once called "a snake pit" by then Sen. Robert Kennedy, will officially close this week with a series of programs and a special ceremony on Thursday presided over by Gov. Cuomo.

The center, which once housed more than 6,000 mentally retarded and developmentally disabled persons, recently made headlines with the discovery of the body of the missing 12-year-old Downs Syndrome girl, Jennifer Schweiger, buried on the grounds.

James Walsh, executive director of the development center, commented: "It was a shame a place with such a tragic history also had to end in such a tragic manner."

In its place will be the Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Services Office.

"It will be the first of its type in the state," said Walsh.

"It will cover all of Staten Island including those who live in group homes or independently, and will provide a wide range of continuum care for the developmentally disabled," he said.

Walsh noted "My responsibility will be to ascertain what is needed for the clients in the cachement area and to insure those services, if not by the state, then by the voluntary agencies that serve the developmentally disabled."



**ROOMY** kitchen and dining area at Willowbrook's new Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Services center. JAMES HUGHES DAILY NEWS