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SIDC gala to cost taxpayers big \$\$

By DAN JANISON
ADVANCE ALBANY BUREAU

ALBANY — "A Promise fulfilled," as state officials call tomorrow's gala closing ceremonies for the Staten Island Developmental Center, promises to cost taxpayers scores of thousands of dollars.

More than 100 officials from the state agency that serves the mentally retarded will fly into the city at public expense from around the state for the VIP function, which is slated to feature appearances by Gov. Mario Cuomo and former Gov. Hugh Carey.

Overlooking objections from a few invitees who snubbed the event as in bad taste, bureaucrats prepared today to commend progress in care for the retarded since the mid-1970s when SIDC, then called the Willowbrook State School, first became a scan-

dalous symbol of neglect.

In all, more than 400 special guests are expected to attend. Exact costs have yet to be calculated.

But officials confirmed that just for the event, they ordered special paint jobs in at least two SIDC buildings — structures whose final fate will remain unknown until after the College of Staten Island takes over the grounds for a new campus.

For out-of-towners, the Holiday Inn in Graniteville alone reported that guests of the SIDC event had reserved 65 rooms. Due to the big volume, a hotel spokesman said these guests would get a discount rate of \$64 per night.

Aside from thousands in hotel tabs, the state also will pay for a special buffet dinner tonight at the Staaten Restaurant.

Jack LiGreci, manager of the West Brighton establishment, said the state would be charged \$26 for each of the estimated 100 invitation-only guests, plus \$60 for a bartender and tax.

To transport the guests around the spacious campus, the state is leasing four Transit Authority buses, at \$30 per hour, for nine hours each, state officials said.

Lou Ganim, the public affairs director for the Office for the Mentally Retarded and Developmentally Disabled, said as the event's organizer he was working off a "shoestring budget."

But Ganim conceded the costs tied strictly to the event are expected to ultimately exceed an OMRDD estimate of \$20,000. In addition, some permanent work at the facility was reported accelerated for the

ceremony.

Special costs include the construction of a huge outdoor tent to shelter the ceremonies, preparation of a temporary "museum" and a bronze plaque for permanent display on the new college campus.

Though it's also part of the cost, Ganim told the Advance he could not guess how much it cost in man-hours for the state to assign a team of OMRDD staffers who have worked on the preparations for several weeks.

The museum will go in SIDC's administration building, which received a paint job for the occasion estimated at costing more than \$1,500. And, Ganim said painting was done for two other buildings where bathrooms were going to be used for the ceremonies.

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