

# Staten Island Advance

Vol. 102, No. 22,447 66 Pages  
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Wednesday, September 16, 1987

25 Cents  
Home-delivered daily and Sunday, \$1.45 a week

## 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.

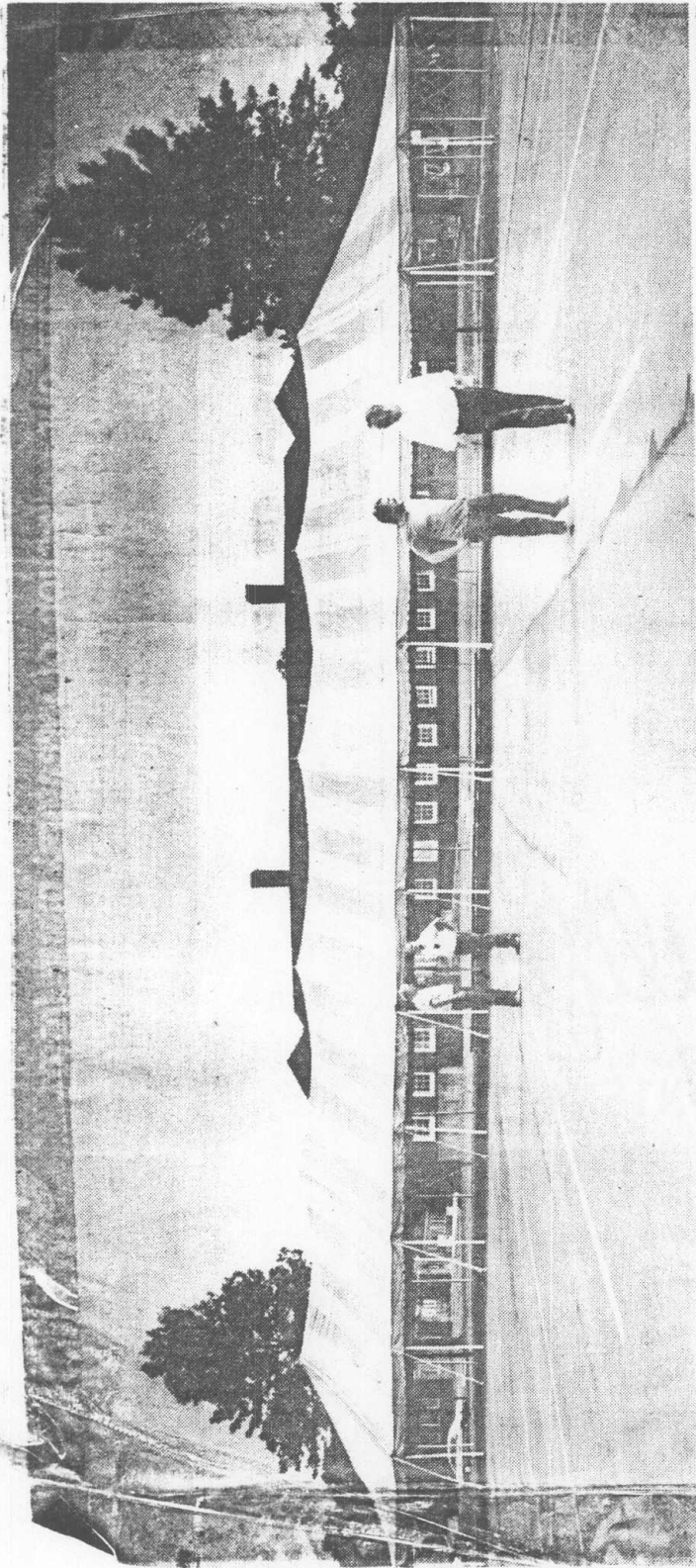
Special costs include the construction of a huge outdoor tent to shelter the ceremonies, preparation of a temporary "museum" and a bronze plaque for permanent display on the new college campus.

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.

(See GALA, Page A 12)

Page 1 of 3



ADVANCE PHOTOS/TONY GARAMINANTE

A large tent has been set up in a parking area as preparations for closing ceremonies for the Staten Island Developmental Center near completion.

Page 2 of 3

# Gala

(From Page 1)

"... The main thing was the bathrooms, which we felt were in no condition to ask people to go into," Ganim said.

"Paint was peeling off the walls. It was either that or rent

Porta-johns, and we also wanted them handicapped accessible and Porta-johns wouldn't do it."

Private landscaping and excavation trucks, hired by the state, also have been seen working intensively on the grounds lately and reportedly have received

overtime payments to finish in time for this week's ceremony.

Sources at the facility said that by itself, the cost of the landscaping and road-widening could run into scores of thousands of dollars to private contractors, including the Vanbro and O'Connor companies.

But Ganim argued these should be considered permanent changes at the facility, with landscaping and road widening occurring along Executive Way, where special housing for the retarded has been built.

For example, plans paid for by the state have gone into the area will remain on the grounds after the ceremony, Ganim said. Some of those invited who chose not to go questioned not only the state's spending on the event, but the purpose itself.

Kathleen McKaig, who directed one of the court-appointed monitoring boards to help improve services, cited the state's failure to meet earlier goals for housing the retarded.

"The issue is that at the end of the ceremony, there will still be thousands incarcerated" in developmental centers, McKaig said.

"At best, it's in poor taste. At worst, it's a sham," said McKaig, who is employed by an organization that seeks to help care for the

retarded who live with their families. "There are still people in those buildings."

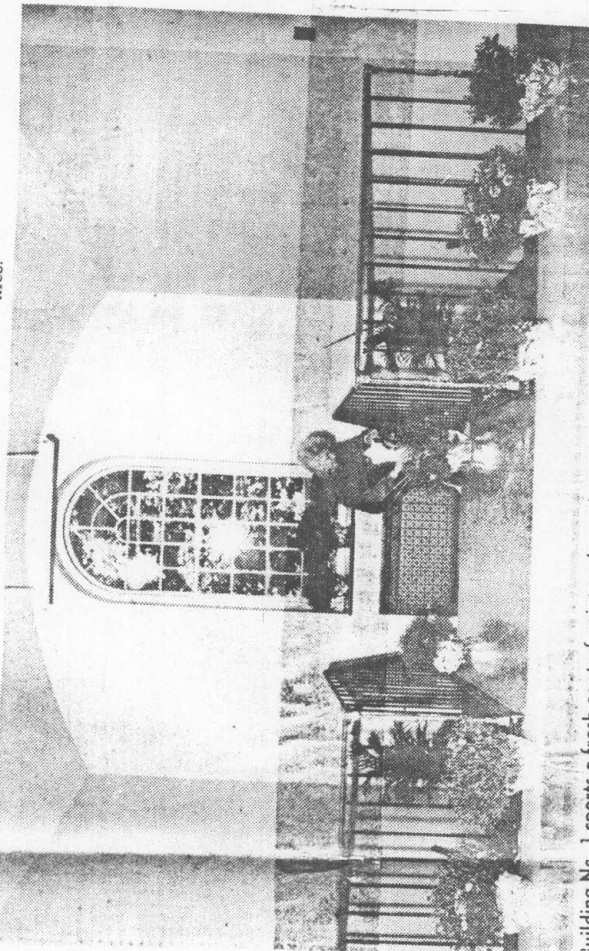
McKaig and other private activists for the mentally retarded have protested the state's policy of building so-called "single-residence units" on the grounds of developmental centers.

They consistently complained Cuomo and his budget division have overseen a decline in services to the retarded and developmentally disabled.

"This is a fraud," said Murray Schneps, former vice chairman of the court-appointed Willowbrook Review Panel, bitterly.

"Cuomo didn't fulfill anybody's promise... Under him, the (residences) have gone to bigger sizes. You can't get a placement in the community. Mario Cuomo is a phony — all talk and no action."

In 1975, the state was ordered to phase out operations at Willowbrook and other large institutions throughout New York, as one step toward more individual service for the clients.



Building No. 1 sports a fresh coat of paint and a variety of potted plants for tomorrow's ceremonies.

Page 3 of 3