

Gala

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"... 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."

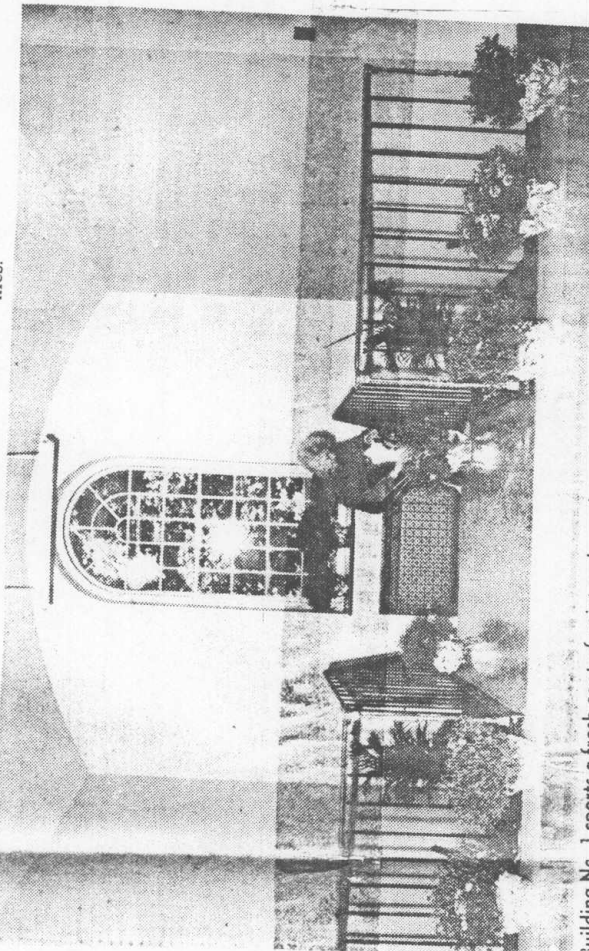
McKaig and other private activists for the mentally retarded have protested the state's policy of building so-called "single-residence units" on the grounds of developmental centers.

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.

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