

Ceremony marks new era for CSI

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"Tomorrow, Willowbrook will be history," according to Henry Wisniewski, director of the Institute for Basic Research.

In its place will blossom "a reconfigured college campus, just like Princeton, with the Ivy growing," said Arthur Webb, commissioner of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD).

Yesterday was the first of three days of ceremonies marking the closing of the Staten Island Developmental Center and the beginning of the development of a new campus for the College of Staten Island.

Under its former name, Willowbrook State School, the center became infamous after mentally retarded patients were discovered living in deplorable conditions. In

the years since the shocking discovery in 1971, the center's population has been trimmed and gradually moved into small group homes. On Tuesday, the last 100 patients were moved out of the center and into group homes located on the SIDC grounds, according to Louis Ganim, public affairs director for OMRDD.

The main event yesterday was the signing of a "memorandum of understanding" between the Institute of Basic Research, which is located on SIDC's 380-acre grounds, and the City University of New York, establishing a Center for Developmental Neurosciences.

CUNY will take over 205 acres of the Willowbrook grounds to build a consolidated campus for the College of Staten Island. Doctoral programs in neurosciences, in which 10 students are already enrolled, will be expanded once

CSI moves into its new quarters in 1992.

"The students in the program will provide continuity and spread the word," Wisniewski said.

The new program will provide students an opportunity to study psychology and neurobiology and also provide training for professionals who work with the mentally retarded and the developmentally disabled. The ultimate goal of the program is to improve the ability to prevent developmental disabilities.

CSI President Edmund Volpe said the idea for the Center for Developmental Neurosciences "started with a conversation in Arthur Webb's office in Albany." To float the plan "we had to do a great deal of selling," Volpe said. "It was a very complex and complicated process."

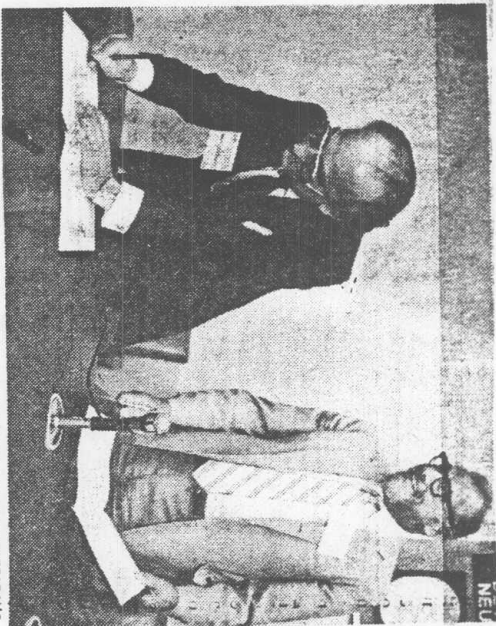
Volpe described yesterday's ceremony as the peak of "an ex-

citement that had been building for three years," Wisniewski concurred, saying, "It is a rare instance indeed when large visions become a reality. Today, we have one of those rare instances."

"We're not closing our doors," Webb said. "We're opening them up. When you can take a symbol of neglect and turn it into a symbol of excellence, that's a remarkable achievement."

Once completed, the present SIDC grounds will be home to CSI, the group homes, the Elizabeth A. Connelly Community Resource Center, which will provide day programs for the group home residents, and the Institute for Basic Research.

CSI plans to use 16 of the existing SIDC buildings. Nine buildings and the major part of a 10th will be demolished. Four architectural firms are designing the new campus, which is expected to cost



ADVANCE PHOTO/STEVE ZAFFARANO
Institute for Basic Research Director Henry Wisniewski signs the memorandum of understanding while CSI President Edmund Volpe looks on.
\$235.2 million and four years to construct.
Volpe said no plans have yet been made for the buildings now used by CSI in St. George or for the school's Sunnyside campus.