



A former Willowbrook resident greets Gov. Mario Cuomo after the ceremonies. ADVANCE PHOTO/STEVE ZAFFRANO

6 more centers to follow SIDC into oblivion

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Gov. Mario Cuomo said yesterday that six developmental centers across the state will be closed by 1991 as the state continues to make good on a promise made more than a decade ago.

Speaking at the official closing ceremony for the Staten Island Developmental Center, Cuomo said, "governors don't often celebrate the closings of institutions. We spend most of our time cutting ribbons at opening ceremonies. What we actually celebrate today is the opening of a whole new era."

After the remaining developmental centers are closed, following the mandate of the landmark 1975 Willowbrook Consent Decree, the approximately 1,100 former residents of the Staten Island Developmental Center who are still living in metropolitan area institutions will be placed in group homes according to Lou Ganim, director of public affairs

for the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

Yesterday's ceremony, which was also attended by former Gov. Hugh Carey, marked the official transfer of ownership of 205 acres on the Willowbrook grounds to the City University of New York, which will build a consolidated campus for the College of Staten Island.

Most of the day yesterday was devoted to congratulating and thanking those responsible for closing SIDC, which was formerly known as the Willowbrook State School. One of those thanked by Cuomo was Jane Kurthin, a former Advance reporter who was the first to break the story about the inhumane conditions in which Willowbrook's 6,000 mentally retarded children lived.

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