

Love finds a home

■ **Developmentally disabled couple celebrate move into the dwelling of their dreams**

By **EILEEN AJ CONNELLY**
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

It was the most heartwarming of housewarmings.

Burton and Barbara Petrone yesterday celebrated their move into a Port Richmond senior citizen's complex that is a long way from the former Willowbrook State School where the developmentally disabled couple both once lived.

The party in the community room of the Bridgeview Apartments, a 38-apartment complex operated by the Community Agency for Senior Citizens, brought together other residents of the complex, representatives from various organizations that worked to make the move possible and other developmentally disabled adults who receive services from Volunteers of America of Greater New York.

About 35 people were on hand to join the festivities, which included a rendition by Petrone of the "Star-Spangled Banner" on a portable keyboard.

If the party marked the end of a road, however, the beginning was in the former Willowbrook State School.

Both Burt, 78, and Barbara, 60, lived at the notorious facility. When it closed, they were transferred to separate facilities operated by Volunteers of America: Burt to a supported apartment and Barbara to a group home at Arlington Terrace Apartments, Mariners Harbor.

The two met when they were both members of sheltered workshop programs. They fell in love riding the same bus together to and from work each day, and Burt asked that they be allowed to live in the same facility. They were married in 1985.

Speaking at a program last December that highlighted the achievements of developmentally disabled people, Burt called his marriage to "my beautiful wife" Barbara his greatest achievement.

The couple lived in a supported apartment in the Arlington Terrace complex for more than a decade, receiving services from Volunteers of America. But a combination of factors made a move desirable.

The couple is aging, and Burt's eyesight is failing. Volunteers of America thought those facts, combined with a persistent crime problem at Arlington, made it necessary to find a new home for the couple, explained Juliana Marson, director of community residents for Volunteers of America.

Burt learned of the plans in October and was ecstatic. But required paperwork had to be processed through the state Office of Developmental Disabilities and Mental Retardation and other

details needed to be handled.

*found to R
Debbie
T. also
4-7-98*