

Chesterfield Walker, a resident of Bridgeview who met Burt at the West Brighton Senior Center, said he advised Burt not to get agitated about the wait. "He did not know what to think," Walker recalled.

"He went through all the emotions," agreed Migna Morales, a direct care provider for Volunteers of America. "He was happy, he was frustrated."

When the day finally came for

the move, the couple came home to find staff members packing their belongings. Ms. Morales said Burt wanted to leave so quickly he told them simply to throw everything away.

The move was made on Valentine's Day, Ms. Marson recalled.

The couple has settled into their bright, sunny, one-bedroom apartment.

Burt said when they first moved in he didn't like the curtains, so he told the staff members to remove them. But they have redecorated, he proudly reported. "Now, you wouldn't know the place!" he said.

Their wedding picture stands prominently on top of a dresser in their bedroom. Knickknacks and pictures of cats adorn the living room. They have been able to make a comfortable home.

"I don't want to go back there!" Burt said, somewhat alarmed,

when asked if he liked the new apartment better than the Arlington Houses.

Barbara agreed. "It's a good neighborhood," she said. "They're all senior citizens here."

Most of the residents of the apartment complex have welcomed their new neighbors. Ann McDonnell, president of the Bridgeview Tenants Association, said many, including herself, knew them from the West Brighton Senior Center.

"We kept saying, when are they coming in?" she said of the delays.

Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly (D-North Shore), who was on hand for the party yesterday, said the move represents an accomplishment not only for Burt and Barbara.

"What it does is fulfill the dream that everybody had, and the belief that everybody here had, that

people could live in the community with some support," she said.

"Certainly Burt and Barbara are very deserving," Mrs. Connelly added. "And he is his own best advocate."

"This was a dream," agreed Kathy Kennedy, director of the Staten Island division of Volunteers of America. She credited a group of people and agencies, including Richard Reetz, executive director of the Community Agency for Senior Citizens, for supporting the effort to get the new apartment.

The Rev. Joseph Bruno of El-Bethel Assembly of God, where the couple attends services, said a housewarming blessing in the apartment during the party.

Walker, now a neighbor of Burt and Barbara's, summed up the mood of the entire group. "This is a love place," he said. "It's a very nice place to be."



ADVANCE PHOTO ■ JAN SOMMA

Barbara and Burt Petrone, at left, are welcomed to the Bridgeview Apartments complex by a friend, Phil Orbach.