

Officials hope carousel at former SIDC can be saved

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Seen from a distance, the 18 brightly painted horses stand out so distinctly, they seem ready to jump over the chain-link fence surrounding the carousel on the grounds of the former Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC), Willowbrook.

Up close, however, one sees chipped paint on the weathered metal. Rust coats the edges of the merry-go-round's frame, tall weeds push up through the center and light sockets are bare.

Immense, empty buildings loom nearby. They are memories of another era when as many as 6,000 mentally retarded people were warehoused in what was the Willowbrook State School. Until media investigations in the 1970s sparked moves to dissolve the center, people passing by saw only outer calm and the cheery sight of the carousel going round and round.

The carousel has been still for

at least three years as SIDC has been closed down and most of the land transferred to the College of Staten Island.

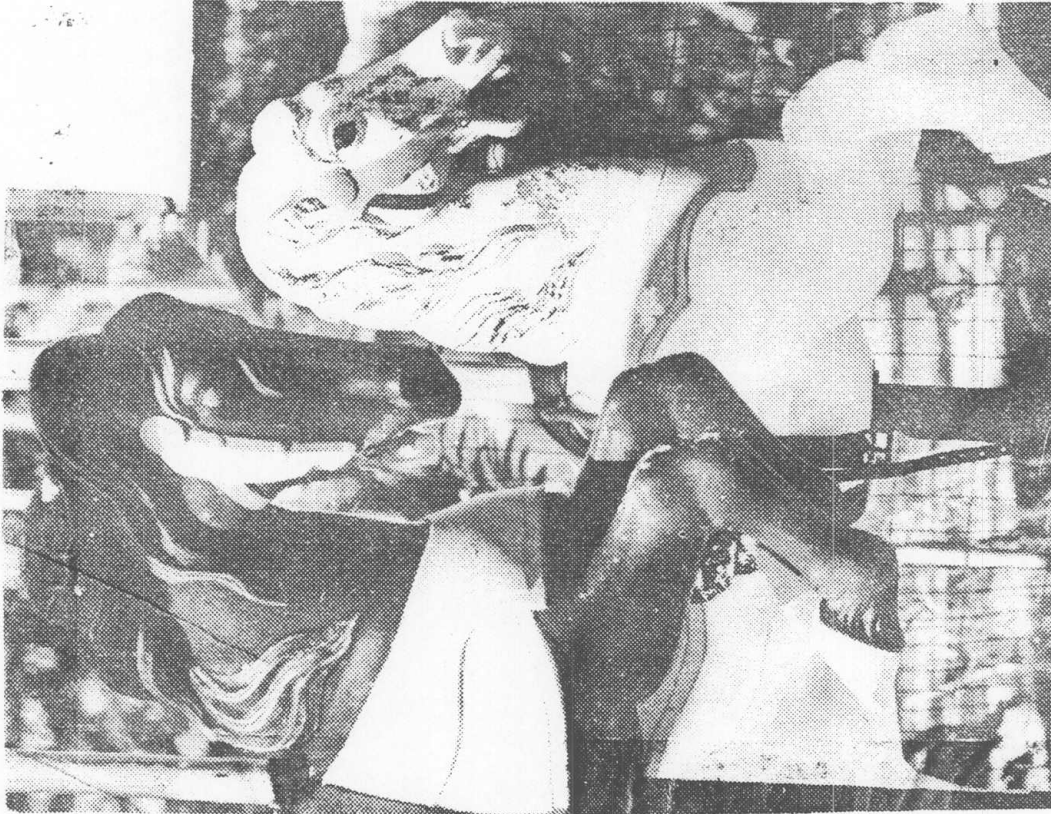
But there may be life in the old horses yet.

The state Developmental Disabilities Services Office (DDSO) still owns the carousel and will be inspecting it to see if it's in working order or repairable. It could be moved to a site on the 175 acres retained by the DDSO as its Richmond Complex, where small group homes and a resource center still serve the mentally retarded.

"I'm hoping by the middle of July I'll have figured out if we can utilize it," director Robert Witkowsky said. "I think I will definitely find a place for it, if it's in working condition."

Witkowsky said several upstate DDSOs have requested taking the carousel for use by their clients, but shipping the machine that far

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The paint is peeling off the horses in the carousel at the former Staten Island Developmental Center.