

Carousel at Willowbrook spinning toward restoration

By SHERRY BOSCHERT
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

A dilapidated carousel that once brought joy to retarded residents of the former Willowbrook State School spun for the first time in years this week.

"I thought I was going to have a coronary (attack) on Saturday getting that bucket of rust to move," said Glenn Kramer, a New Springville businessman who has volunteered to help repair the ride for the state Developmental Disabilities Services Office (DDSO).

Located on the grounds of the former Staten Island Develop-

mental Center, which succeeded the state school, the carousel has been still for at least three years while SIDC was closed down and most of the land transferred to the College of Staten Island.

The college has said the carousel must be moved by Sept. 7, said Atanas Kobryn, business officer for the DDSO, lending an urgency to discussions on whether or not it could be salvaged.

Kramer said he had been following accounts in the Advance on the fate of the carousel and the DDSO's search for someone to estimate the repair costs. A restoration businessman who owns Nicole Amusements, he examined the machine and said he could get it repaired for the 100 residents and other daytime clients at the DDSO's Richmond Complex in Willowbrook.

"I don't want to see this thing torn down. It'll be used," he said. He met with other volunteers at the carousel Wednesday to discuss plans.

Kobryn said he is trying to get bids on the cost of moving the ride onto the 175 acres retained by the

state in order to get approval for funds to relocate it.

Kramer would then help rebuild the engine and floorboards and refurbish the parts. "I'm not looking to do this for money," he said. He believes he also can get local merchants to volunteer their time in the effort.

Another local carousel buff, Lisa Pisano of Huguenot, has volunteered to repaint the horses.

Kramer estimated it will take close to two years before the carousel will be fully restored and ready for use.

"The biggest job is just tearing it down. It's very heavy," he said. A carnival-type ride, the carousel is designed to be dismantled and reassembled, he added. "With six men you can tear the thing down in six hours and put it back up in 10."

Research by Kramer has brought to light

details of the carousel's history, some of which vary from previous accounts.

It was donated in 1977 by the late Richard Ferrante of King George, Va., a carnival operator who bought and sold rides. He donated it in exchange for a larger, fancier carousel that had fallen into disrepair and been vandalized, Kramer said. Worth \$14,950 when it was built in 1958, the present carousel would cost \$132,000 to replace today, he added.

The merry-go-round it replaced had not just horses but sea monsters, camels, a lion, three giraffes and an elephant, riding three abreast instead of in pairs. Those figures, bigger than the present ones and made of wood instead of aluminum, would be worth from \$3,000 to \$6,000 apiece today.

"It's no wonder the guy jumped at it," Kramer said.

The origin of the first carousel is a matter of dispute. According to members of the Benevo-

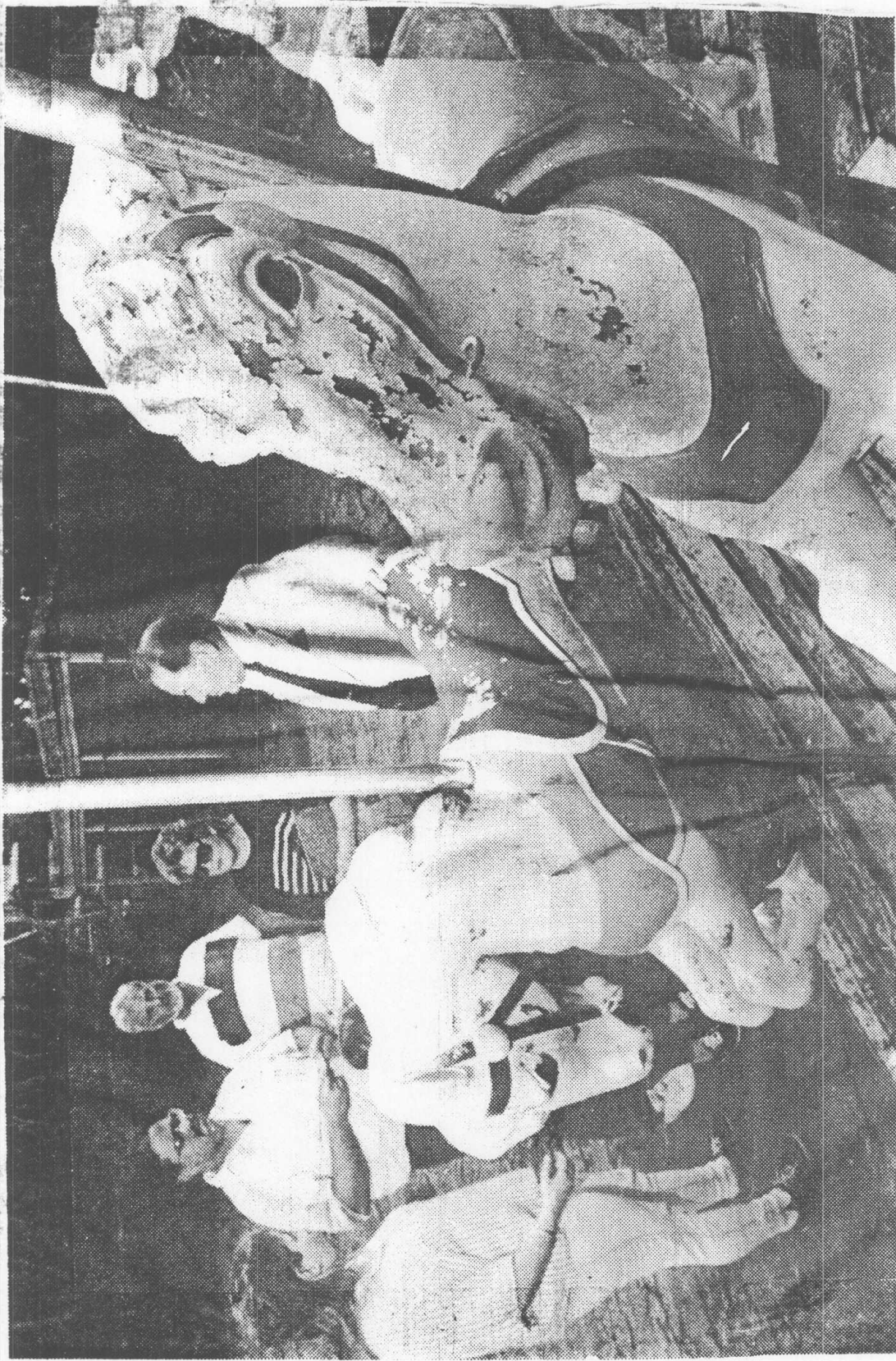
lent Society for Retarded Children, a parents advocacy group, it was bought in 1954 by the Society for \$25,000 and donated to the state.

A plaque on the fence at the site, however, says it was donated to the Benevolent Society in 1959 by the late Miriam Nunley. She was the wife of the late William Nunley, according to Kramer's research, who owned South Beach Amusement Park and other amusement parks in downstate New York.

The original carousel, worth \$25,000 at the time, was donated by the Nunleys from Broad Channel Amusement Park in Queens, according to Kramer.

Whatever its origin, traces of that first carousel can still be found on Staten Island. Kramer said he recently tracked down one of the handpainted, German-made horses.

"It was lying on the floor of some kid's bedroom," he said.



ADVANCE PHOTO/MIKE FALCO

Volunteers and staff from the state Developmental Disabilities Services Office discuss plans to restore the weather-beaten carousel.

Page 2 of 2