

# Ground broken at

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# Willowbrook CSI campus

## Cuomo calls it New York's 'most attractive, exciting'

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Gov. Mario M. Cuomo exorcised ghosts of Willowbrook State School as he turned the first spade of earth at the College of Staten Island's new home yesterday.

Cuomo, Mayor Edward I. Koch, Borough President Ralph Lamberti, state Sen. John Marchi and other state and city officials gathered just yards from one of the buildings of a facility that had come to symbolize the mistreatment of the nation's mentally retarded.

But Cuomo concentrated on the ground's future, saying the state was committed to helping expand higher education to the point where a college education will be available to any qualified person.

The governor called the new CSI campus the "highlight" of a \$1.3 billion building program for the City University of New York (CUNY).

The new campus, which will permit CSI to consolidate its operations, is slated to cost \$399 million.

Cuomo boasted of the state's financial backing.

"The president has given only \$300 million for all the state's needs for the war on drugs," he said. "It's more money than the

federal government is giving all the cities. Even Poland is only getting \$100 million."

When completed, he said, "it will be one of New York's most exciting and attractive campuses.

It will certainly be the largest, in terms of acreage.

Using 204 of the 300 acres that made up the Willowbrook State School and later the Staten Island Developmental Center, it will have more land, although not classroom space, than any other of CUNY's 19 two- and four-year colleges.

The size of the school served as another bragging point, this time for Koch. "No other borough has this much space to devote for a single use," he said.

The mayor, appearing relaxed after losing the Democratic primary a little more than a week ago, reminded the crowd of almost 1,000 people that he declared Staten Island the center of universe during ceremonies opening the Teleport several years back.

"Well, now I'm going to add to that. I hereby declare the College of Staten Island the center of CUNY," Koch said to ringing applause.

But getting to this point hasn't always been easy, said CSI President Edmond L. Volpe.

Volpe likened his struggle to that of Sisyphus, a figure in Greek mythology condemned to roll a heavy stone up hill for eternity. "Sometimes I thought that should be the logo of the college," he said.

Indeed, the story of the search and construction of a new home has been one of delay and confusion.

CSI has held classes and housed administrative offices at two campuses — in St. George and Sunnyside — since Richmond College and Staten Island Community College merged in 1976 into a single four-year college.

Almost from the moment of its founding, college officials began searching for space for a consolidated campus.

Originally, the campus was to be located in Ocean Breeze on a 110-acre tract condemned by the state more than 20 years ago. The state Dormitory Authority, which is footing the bill for renovation of 14 buildings and construction of four new structures, went as far as acquiring the grounds.

But in 1985 the state Office of General Services recommended the school move to the Willowbrook site.

At least part of the reasoning was the savings from renovating existing buildings as opposed to constructing a new campus.

Since plans were announced for the campus, the start of construction has been delayed and costs have doubled. The groundbreaking held yesterday was originally expected in 1987.

Nevertheless, elected and appointed officials yesterday praised the apparent beginning of a final spurt of activity leading to the school's move beginning in 1992.