

Pressure mounts to move carousel off former SIDC grounds

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With pressure mounting to move a dilapidated carousel off the former Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) grounds in Willowbrook, the fate of the 18-horse ride remains unsettled.

Three months ago, it seemed the old carousel was about to come back to life. A volunteer had offered to move the state-owned ride off the land now owned by the College of Staten Island (CSI) and onto adjacent property still owned by the state Developmental Disabilities Services Office (DDSO).

But the Sept. 7 deadline for moving passed with volunteers nowhere in sight, and the DDSO asked the college for an extension while it scrambled to find a way to preserve the merry-go-round.

This week, the DDSO received an affordable firm bid to relocate the ride, according to Diane Johnson, special projects coordinator.

The dilapidated carousel once brought joy to the retarded residents of the former Willowbrook State School, which was succeeded by the SIDC. The ride has been still for at least three years while the SIDC was closed down and the land transferred to CSI, which will consolidate its two Staten Island campuses there.

Atanas Kobryn, business officer for the DDSO, said that if the carousel isn't moved by early November, "we're liable to be in trouble, because they'll start digging. Right now, they're still working on asbestos removal."

Given the limited resources of the state, DDSO officials were pleased when Glenn Kramer, a New Springville businessman, volunteered in August to move and repair the merry-go-round. But Kramer ignored pleas to submit a written estimate of the cost of the project, and eventually dropped contact, according to Kobryn.

The DDSO sought bids from the few carousel restoration companies across the country. Fabricon Inc. of Glendale, N.Y., has offered to dismantle the ride, number its parts and put it in storage for \$2,500, Kobryn said.

His office is trying to keep each stage of the project at a cost of less than \$5,000 to avoid the lengthy state approval process required for larger amounts. "I'm even going to ask Fabricon if they'll come down to \$2,495, because it simplifies the process even more," Ms. Johnson said.

The DDSO would like to restore the carousel for use by retarded clients at the Elizabeth A. Connelly Resource Center on its Willowbrook grounds. But moving the ride is only the first step. The cost of renovation must be investigated, and contract bids sought.

"One of the vendors gave us a bid of \$100,000 for restoration. That was well, well above what we could afford at this time, especially in the fiscal crunch that we're going through," said Robert Witkowsky, director of the DDSO.

But officials are pleased the first step, at least, seems close. "I think this is a really good sign," Ms. Johnson said.