

## CITY

# Home for Mentally Ill Is Evicting People, Residents Say

By SHAILA K. DEWAN

Amid a host of financial problems and repeated citations for unsanitary conditions and inadequate care, Pacific House, a nonprofit home for the mentally ill in Brooklyn, is closing its doors after nine years.

Its residents, high-functioning individuals who live with a measure of independence, say the home's director has told them to leave by today, nearly two months before they are scheduled to move to new homes.

Aramis Suarez, 42, one of about 30 residents who have yet to leave, has lived in Pacific House, at 1140 Pacific Street in Bedford-Stuyvesant, for four years. He said he had no place to go. "Them doing this, it's torturing the residents," he said.

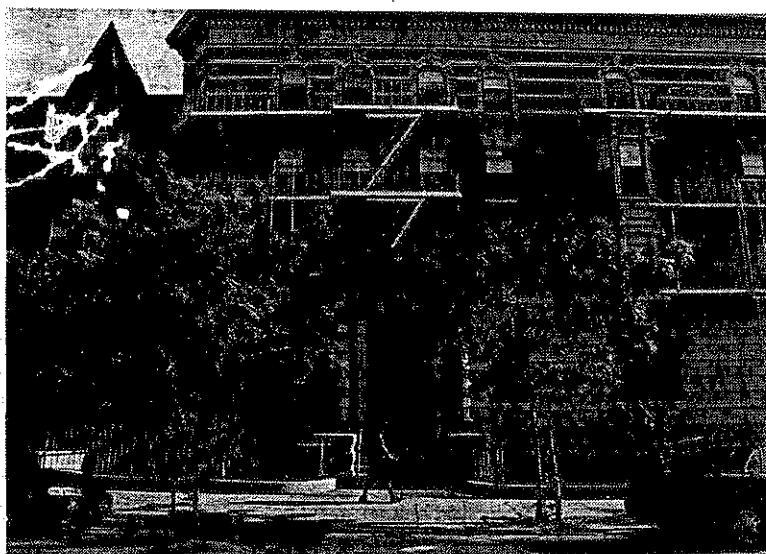
With its less than ideal conditions, Pacific House may not seem like such a difficult place to leave.

In the recreation room, the pool and Ping-Pong tables have no balls, paddles or cues. On the floor lies a puddle of coffee so old its edges have dried into a ring of scum. There are no cups for the water dispenser, but it is probably just as well. Cockroaches have been found floating in the water tank.

But lawyers for the residents say their clients are being intimidated and forced to move to more restrictive group homes that serve lower-functioning patients. A handful of the 40 residents who have left have already found their way to the streets, said Jeanette Zelhof, a lawyer with MFY Legal Services Inc., a nonprofit legal aid organization.

"Legally, they shouldn't be closing by tomorrow," said Robert Kenny, a State Health Department spokesman. He said the home had not submitted a closure plan for approval.

In mid-1999, the state, citing concerns about patient safety, began the



Nicole Bengiveno/The New York Times

Pacific House, a home for the mentally ill, is being kept open by a court order until July 7, but residents say they were told to leave by today.

process of closing Pacific House. In March, according to court documents, James Frederick, the center's director, told residents they had to leave within 90 days.

MFY objected, saying that it was not clear that family members and caseworkers would be consulted in the relocation process, and that the haste of the closing threatened residents' legal rights to treatment and shelter. In a letter, the State Department of Health assured MFY that the wishes and needs of the residents would be met.

The Health Department ordered Pacific House to find appropriate homes for residents and to surrender its operating certificate by Aug. 25, Mr. Kenny said.

After a meeting last week in which residents said they were told to be

out by today, the legal aid group obtained a temporary restraining order to keep the house open until July 7, but last night, residents said they were afraid of what the morning would bring.

Ms. Zelhof said that many had been given garbage bags for packing their things and were told that the electricity and food service would be cut off today.

Gwen Jones, a supervisor at the center, confirmed that Pacific House would close on July 7, but referred all other questions to Mr. Frederick. He did not return a call to Pacific House yesterday afternoon.

As Health Department officials and Pacific House caseworkers scrambled to find beds for their clients, Ms. Zelhof said that there would still not be enough time for a thor-

ough evaluation of patients' needs.

"These kinds of haphazard, perfunctory assessments of people with complicated disabilities result in Andrew Goldsteins," she said, referring to the schizophrenic man convicted of pushing a woman off a subway platform to her death.

Ms. Zelhof was in the Pacific House lobby yesterday to ensure that none of her 18 clients were removed against their will. Visiting representatives from group homes tried to recruit the residents, she said.

There are only two or three other residence homes like Pacific House created for high-functioning patients, in the New York City area, Ms. Zelhof said.

Mr. Kenny said that Pacific House was supposed to submit a written plan to the Health Department before moving any residents from the 80-bed home, but that it had not done so.

Pacific House was founded by the Rev. Clarence Norman Sr., the father of the Brooklyn Democratic chairman, to help alleviate the problem of homelessness among the mentally ill. It opened in 1991 with the help of \$4.6 million in state and city loans.

Its revenues came in the form of residents' public assistance checks, said Lisa R. Green, an MFY lawyer. At capacity, the residence could take in more than \$65,000 a month.

But there never seemed to be enough money to pay off loans or correct serious problems, which were first reported in The Village Voice on Tuesday. The center was repeatedly cited for those problems beginning in 1993. The Voice also reported that two deaths that occurred at the residence were being investigated by the state's Commission on Quality of Care for the Mentally Disabled.