

Ward "E" To Remain Open At Oteen

WASHINGTON — Faced by a solid wall of congressional opposition, the Veterans Administration Thursday relaxed its determination to close Ward "E" at Oteen Hospital by the announced deadline of June, 1969.

Instead, VA Administrator William J. Driver told Rep. Roy A. Taylor and other members of the North Carolina congressional delegation that if there is a need to keep the nursing care unit in operation after that date, it will be kept open.

Driver listened for more than an hour while the congressmen and more than a dozen representatives of the state's veterans organizations cited reasons why the some 145 patients presently assigned to the unit should not be transferred to other places, as proposed by the VA.

"The veterans in North Carolina are more upset over this situation than they have been over any other happening since I became a member of Congress seven years ago," Rep. Taylor declared.

The disagreement arose a few weeks ago when the VA announced that after completion of the new 500-bed Oteen Hospital, it would phase out Ward "E", a part of the old facility, and transfer its patients to other VA hospitals or private nursing homes.

The announcement brought immediate protest from Congressman Taylor, veterans organizations, and other Tar Heel congressmen, especially those with VA hospitals in their districts where the VA proposed to send some of the Oteen patients.

These congressmen told Driver Thursday that the hospitals in their districts are badly over-

crowded and cited figures showing the number of waiting lists.

Under questioning by Rep. Taylor, who called the meeting, Driver agreed to abandon efforts to close the unit by a fixed deadline and promised to "review the situation" and to meet the needs of the aging veterans.

"The Veterans Administration is not infallible," Driver said, and assured the congressmen he would keep the Oteen situation under close study.

Experimental Communications Project Announced

SPRUCE PINE — The W. A. M. Y. Board of Directors April 25 approved a request for funds from the Office of Economic Opportunity in Washington to finance an experimental communications project for low-income residents of the four W.A.M.Y. counties.

The project would provide a weekly newspaper for about 8,000 families in the four counties and also feature up to an hour a day in radio programming over local stations. It is designed to test whether it is cheaper to use mass communications or staff workers to inform low-income residents of opportunities and services available, and of the responsibilities of citizens.

The W.A.M.Y. Board approved the request after a long debate over the cost of the project and

its effect on the local image of W.A.M.Y.

The Board also agreed to ask the North Carolina Fund for additional money over the next few months to make improvements in the W.A.M.Y. programs. Included in these requests will be money to help finance a community center at the old Toe River School in Avery County, and a large expansion of the Incentive Grants Program which helps finance community projects.

W.A.M.Y. staff members told the Board the communications project was an experiment, and that the Office of Economic Opportunity had asked W.A.M.Y. to submit the project.

"If we had our choice, we would spend the money on job training," W. A. M. Y. Director Ernest Eppley told the Board. "But we have no choice in the matter. If we don't want the communications project, some other will get it."

Several agency heads on the Board, including Dr. Mary Michal of the Watauga County Health Department and Dorothy Thomas of the Tri-County Regional Library, said the work of their agencies was hampered by poor communications with many people in the four counties.

W.A.M.Y. staff members pointed out that fewer than one-third of the families in the four counties subscribe to any of the local newspapers.

The initial budget for the project totaled about \$179,000. The Board agreed to approve the request for money by a vote of 15-5.

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Crafts Market To Expand In This Area

The market for handmade products of craftsmen in this area is about to start a rapid expansion, according to a crafts expert working for the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D. C.

Ralph Rinzler, a nationally-known authority on American culture, Monday completed his second buying trip this year to the W.A.M.Y. Crafts program.

He is purchasing crafts for both display in the museum and for sale at the museum's crafts shops in Washington. Orders for the museum are expected to bring in more than three thousand dollars for local craftsmen by the beginning of summer.

"The Smithsonian has recently changed the policies of its shops" Rinzler said. "From now on, the shops, which sell to tourists, will feature authentic hand-made crafts instead of reproductions made at the museum. I expect the demand for crafts items made in this area will jump dramatically when the museum's summer tourist season gets under way."

Rinzler also pointed to a recent exhibit in a New York City store where American-made crafts products were displayed for the first time.

"George Jensen's is the most sophisticated crafts store in New York," Rinzler explained. "Now that they are pushing American Crafts Products, a lot of the little stores will do it too." The products of several W. A. M. Y. craftsmen were on display at the exhibit.

Rinzler also praised the local crafts program, and called it one of the outstanding crafts training programs in the country.

"Janice Whitener has done a tremendous job here as coordinator of the W.A.M.Y. Crafts program," Rinzler said. "She is using local craftsmen to train other persons in the production of traditional local products. Most programs try to impose some kind of outside product on local people which has no relation to the traditions of the area. Mrs. Whitener rejected this approach and decided to use the talents that were already here."

Rinzler also praised the idea of a marketing cooperative for crafts products produced in the W.A.M.Y. area. The coop held its first organizational meeting in Newland April 27.

"A coop will help the sale of crafts products," Rinzler said, "because it will be able to put one label into all crafts products produced in the area. Labelling will have the same effect as a brand name; people will begin to recognize the name and depend on the label name as a guarantee of quality."



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