

Ex - Con a Success as Rehabilitator

S.F.'s Delancey Street May Open L.A. Branch

BY WILLIAM OVEREND
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SAN FRANCISCO—John Maher, who spent his childhood in the South Bronx robbing old people and shooting heroin, has become a folk hero to many in this town. He is in the business of helping other people restructure their lives now, and the best way to describe him is that he is a controversial blend of hoodlum and saint who'd probably pistol-whip you if it would help knock some sense in your head.

Maher is a phenomenon in what has come to be a profession overcrowded with well-intentioned incompetents. Seven years ago he let a junkie stay in his apartment to

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help him kick his heroin habit. It was the beginning of the Delancey Street Foundation, now one of the most famous and successful rehabilitation programs in the country for ex-addicts, ex-convicts, alcoholics and others who simply feel their lives have had no purpose.

Today there are 360 residents of Delancey Street, struggling to confront and overcome the problems they once could only run from. They live in mansions in the best



JOHN MAHER

"... you have to toughen 'em up."

neighborhoods in town, and they run businesses that gross hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. There were tough problems in the beginning. Some of Maher's wealthy neighbors were terrified at the prospect of living next door to a mob of criminals, but those fears eased once the fantasies of rape and pillage failed to materialize. "Delancey Street has never caused us any police problems," says San Francisco Police Chief Charles Gain. "I feel very good about them. They are an asset and a benefit to the community."

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ON THE MOVE—About 100 residents of Delancey Street, soon to branch out in Los Angeles, pose in front of their San Francisco clubhouse. John Maher, the founder of the rehabilitation program, stands by Mimi Silbert, the copresident, in front row at center.

Times photos by Christopher Springmann



Mimi Silbert

Times photo