

CUE TO FOOD

FOOD DAY

The Delancey Street Restaurant in San Francisco gives people the skills to get back on their feet



PETER DA SILVA — Staff photos

The Delancey Street Restaurant is part of a rehabilitation program to help people get their lives back in order.

NEW BEGINNINGS

By Matthew Surrence
STAFF WRITER

MOST restaurants exist to turn out meals. The Delancey Street Restaurant exists to turn around lives.

The San Francisco restaurant, which opened Oct. 19, is the latest venture of what has been called "the world's greatest halfway house" — the Delancey Street Foundation, a national rehabilitation program that takes in people who have hit bottom and gives them the skills and support they need to succeed in mainstream society.

"People never feel so good about themselves as when they're doing something for somebody else," says Delancey Street spokeswoman Stephanie Muller. For that, a restaurant is the perfect setting, since feeding and serving people are what a restaurant is all about.

Delancey Street had a restaurant on

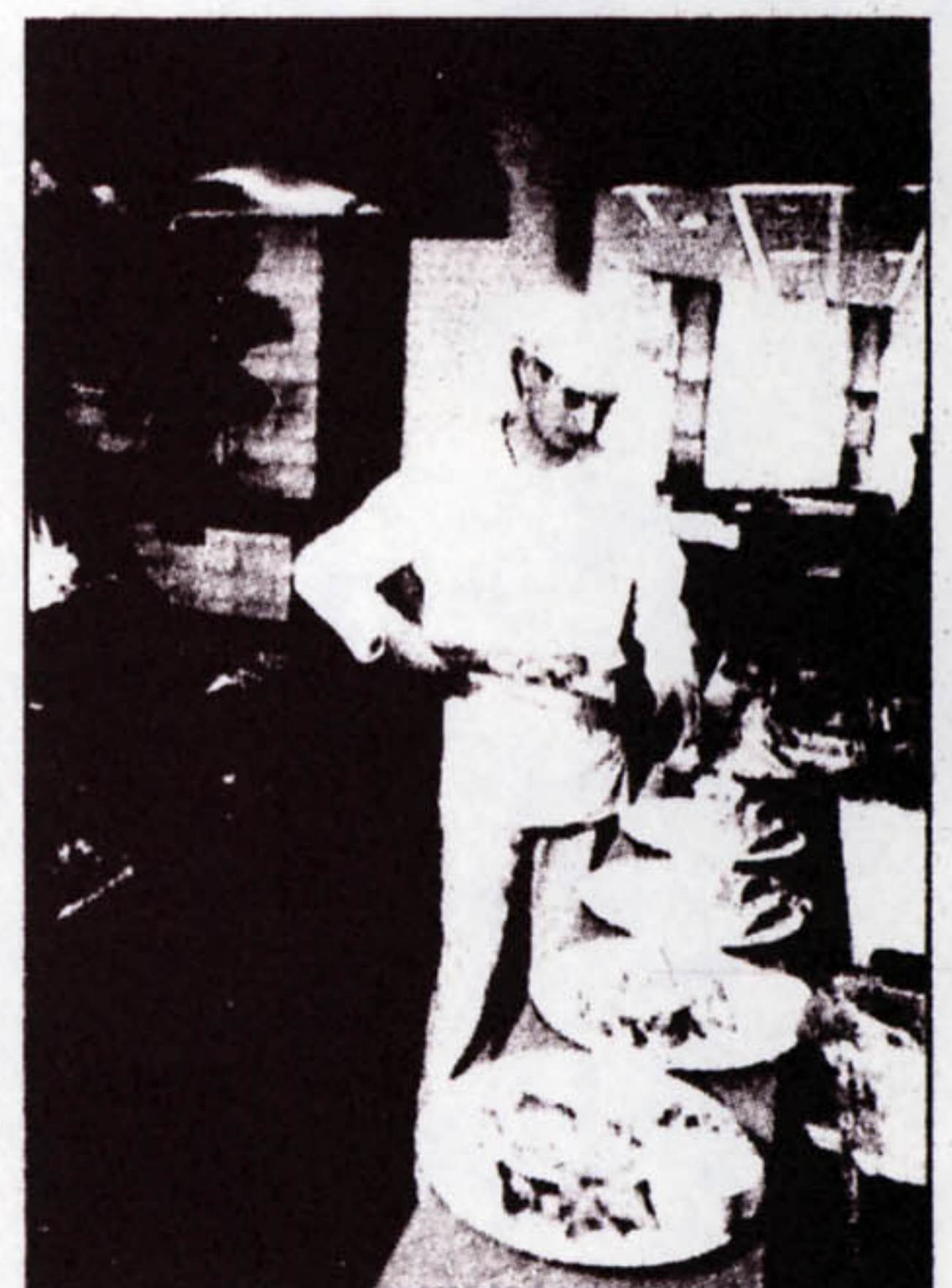
Union Street several years ago, but was forced to close it in 1983 when the building was sold and their rent tripled.

There is no danger of that now, since the Delancey Street Foundation owns the building — a \$30 million, 400,000-square foot four-story residential and retail complex at the triangle where Embarcadero and Brannan Street meet.

The brick-colored stucco building, which a local architecture critic has called "a masterpiece of contemporary social design," is done in a European style. It surrounds a courtyard and sports balconies with black wrought-iron railings and flower boxes.

The ground-floor restaurant is a beautiful study in copper, brass, Philippine mahogany and teal. A back wall holds a rotisserie, and a big, copper-topped espresso counter dominates one side of the room.

A glassed-in patio covered by big



Anthony Baca prepares food for the lunchtime crowd.

Please see **Delancey**, C-2


TO FOOD

Delancey: Chefs give restaurant a hand

Continued from C-1

white parasols offers diners a dramatic view of the Bay Bridge.

The food is what Muller calls "familiar cuisine, food you feel comfortable with." The comfort foods include meat loaf, fettuccine, crab cakes, matzo ball soup and quesadillas.

"It's a big, ethnic melting pot of recipes," says Muller, referring to the philosophy behind the name Delancey Street. The organization was named after the street on Manhattan's Lower East Side where immigrants came at the turn of the century to start new lives.

"We call Delancey Street newcomers 'immigrants,'" says Muller. "They are starting new lives, too."

But the reference also takes in the varied mix of established restaurants that helped the Delancey Street Restaurant get off the ground.

A learning experience

"The chefs from Postrio came

and taught us how to make their side dishes," Muller says. "Tommy Toy's cooks taught us their chicken salad, and people from Perry's showed us how they make burgers."

Abe Irizzary, Delancey Street's maitre d', spent a weekend studying at Square One. Instructors from California Culinary Academy taught baking. People from Roti showed the kitchen staff how to cook on a rotisserie.

"I'd never done any cooking before in my life," said Delancey Street's rotisserie cook John Ridley on a recent afternoon, as he spit-cooked a chicken with rosemary and garlic above an oak wood fire.

"I'm really learning a lot. I didn't have anything before I came here. Delancey Street gave me my life. They've taught me how to walk, how to talk and how to interact with people." He turned back to the fire. "And how to cook chicken, too."

Most of the lunch crowd this afternoon were well-dressed business people, but at one point a big

orange and white bus pulled up, prompting Irizzary to announce, "It's the Freewheelers."

"Our guys go out and pick up people in wheelchairs and take them where they need to go," he explained. "Today, they're taking them to lunch." The bus doors opened and men started helping wheelchair-bound passengers out of the bus and into the restaurant.

The restaurant is managed by Delancey Street's president Mimi Silbert, who also planned and designed the menu.

High rate of success

Delancey Street's rehabilitation success rate is about 90 percent, much of which is credited to the dynamic leadership of Mimi Silbert.

Silbert and Delancey Street have been written up in magazines and newspapers all over the country; she has been profiled on television on "20-20," "60 Minutes" and "This Is Your Life." She has received countless local, state and national commendations and honors.

Delancey Street has branches in upstate New York, North Carolina, New Mexico and Southern California, housing about 700 residents in all, with around 500 in San Francisco.

People aren't sent to Delancey Street against their will; you have to want to get in, and request admission. Some residents come in on parole; others are on probation or are given the choice of Delancey Street or prison.

The foundation provides a home and all services to their residents at no cost either to the residents or the taxpayer. The funds come through donations, or through the foundation's businesses, which include the retail shops in the San Francisco complex as well as the restaurant.

Delancey Street is open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. for lunch and 5:30 to 11 p.m. for dinner Tuesday through Sunday. Lunch entrees range from \$4.50 to \$8.25; dinner entrees from \$6.95 to \$10.50. Call 521-5179 for lunch or dinner reservations.