

# PEOPLES' JOURNALS

Everybody's Newspaper

Sunday, November 8, 1992 (Manila)

P3.00

## THE MIRACLE WORKER OF SAN FRANCISCO

DOLORES was a street prostitute and heroin addict from age 12 to 22. She is now an accountant. They served 12 years in prison for burglaries, robberies and drugs. He is now a plumbing contractor with a wife and two children. Billy was a school dropout, drug addict and car thief. He is now an attorney.

The leaflet on the Delancey Street Foundation stops at three but could have gone on and on to cover the 10,000 "graduates" whose lives the San Francisco,

California-based rehabilitation center has transformed.

Sunday PJ met Dr. Mimi Silbert, the miracle worker, via a USIS-sponsored electronic live program last week at the Thomas Jefferson Cultural Center.

Across the trans-Pacific cables, her voice came loud and clear. But more than the timbre, she exuded warmth and passion for the work she is doing for drug addicts, violent felons, and people who have hit bottom.

"Electrifying" was

**Lourdes Gutierrez**

PJI Corporate Affairs Manager

how Manila Vice-Mayor Lito Atienza described the two-hour dialogue with the multi-awarded psychologist and criminologist who candidly answered questions raised by local drug experts.

Appointed to the California Board of Corrections, Silbert thinks imprisoning criminals "at some one else's expense, providing

all their food and lodging and letting them sit there with no responsibility, is absurd."

To provide an alternative, she built the \$30-million Delancey Street complex from scratch. A state tidelands law written by a good friend, Assemblyman John Burton, allowed her to build on a piece of land bordering First and

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# SUNDAY PJ

THE STORIES BEHIND THE NEWS

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# The Miracle Worker of San Francisco

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Brannan Streets and the Embarcadero in San Francisco.

She persuaded the Bank of America to give a \$10-million unsecured loan.

Developer Al Wilsey gave the projects its first \$100,000.

Mimi drew her plumbers, electricians and pile drivers from the first clients she took in. They had experience mostly as thieves, murderers and unskilled dope fiends.

Her foreman Abe Irizarry did have some construction experience: he helped pour the concrete for the handball court at San Quentin.

“How do you get funding for your operations,” asked Philippine Council for NGOs against Drug and Substance Abuse president Nellie Mercado,

“since you claim you don’t get a cent from the government?”

“We believe in teaching self-help,” Mimi replied. “We also teach people the skills and values they need to live in society legitimately and successfully. Discipline, dignity, self-respect, service to others, hard work and a can-do confidence are key concepts in the Delancey Street building process.”

Delancey Street clients are tutored to receive a high school education and have a choice of attending classes in bookkeeping, credit union management, catering, culinary arts, construction trades, moving and trucking, handcrafted furniture, automotive repair, printing, graphic arts, computer programming, warehousing, and specialty sales.

The rehabilitation center runs various enterprises to be self-sufficient, including a restaurant, a moving company, stained glass, woodwork, college logo items and Christmas giveaways.

“Have you had violent incidents at Delancey?” the executive director of the Asean Training Center for Preventive Drug Education, Dr. Evelyn Mejillano, wanted to know.

“Never an incident of violence,” Mimi answered. “Never an arrest.”

At the end of the program moderated by Assistant Cultural Officer Carol Harlow, the Filipino panelists felt that they had much to learn from Mimi Silbert.