

Rehab with a touch of class

By Eunice Trotter
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SAN FRANCISCO — Clear-eyed waiters wearing bow ties and crisp white shirts bustle about in the restaurant of the \$30 million Mediterranean-style complex. Chefs prepare their specialties in a spotless kitchen. The maitre d' greets customers as he watches the staff's every move.

This is Delancey Street Restaurant, place of employment for murderers, pimps, thieves and prostitutes formerly addicted to drugs and criminal lifestyles but now trying to change their lives. The restaurant is one of several enterprises operated by the Delancey Street Foundation.

Hailed by President Clinton as a model for rehabilitating criminals and drug abusers nationwide, Delancey Street Foundation also is a model for New Directions, a 1-year-old San Joaquin County drug rehabilitation program in French Camp.

The idea of Delancey Street is simple: Make legitimate entrepreneurs out of recovering addicts to pay the cost of rehabilitation programs, sparing taxpayers the expense. In its 20-year history, Delancey Street has helped more than 10,000 addicts and criminals.

Even though none of Delancey Street's current 500 residents receives a paycheck for working in the restaurant or the other foundation multi-million-dollar businesses, there's no loafing on the job. Delancey



Record photos by CLIFFORD OTO

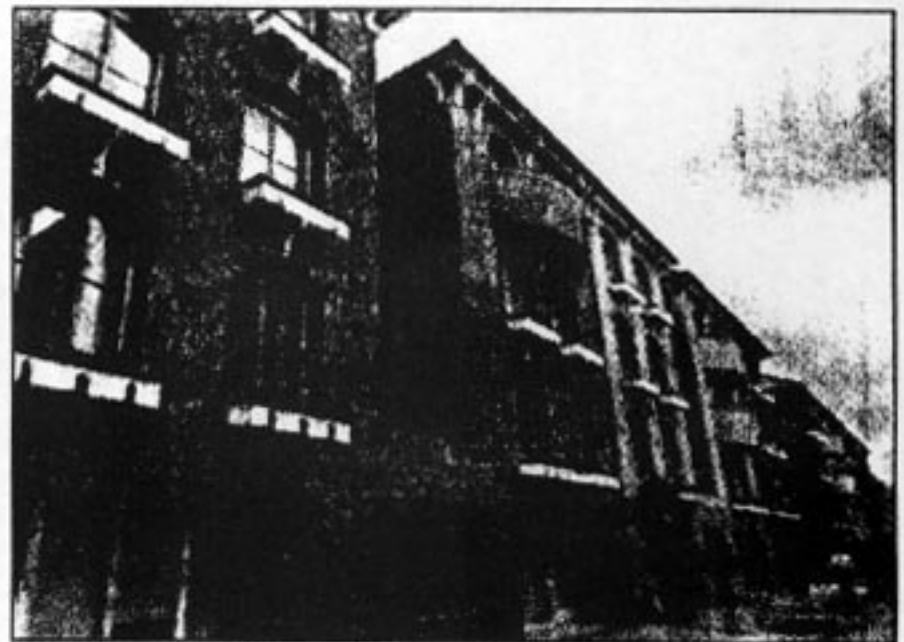
SPOTLESS: Waiter Eddie Valadez of Stockton checks a glass for cleanliness at San Francisco's Delancey Street Restaurant, which is staffed by residents of the drug rehabilitation project.

Street residents are taught a strict work ethic.

Delancey Street takes the hardest and most violent criminals and drug addicts but not people who need intensive psychiatric services, child molesters or arsonists. The program counts lawyers, politicians and business executives as former residents.

Residents do everything but pay nothing to live there while they receive job skills, values and self-esteem, and change their lives permanently, said Abe Irizarry, restaurant maitre d'.

"This is done without taxpayer money by people with very little education. People who have spent an average of 10



A JEWEL: The Delancey Street drug rehab center in San Francisco has been called a model for the nation by President Clinton.

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years in prison. ... People who have picked themselves up," said Irizarry, a former drug addict and Delancey Street resident since the 1970s.

At lunchtime the restaurant is full of people dining and taking in the view of the Bay Bridge. The area used to be the hangout for the homeless, drug addicts and derelicts.

Today it's the site of the restaurant, three multi-story modern apartment buildings and other businesses, all built and operated by residents.

Recovering addict Eddie Valadez, 25, a waiter and Delancey Street resident for four years, has worked his way through the ranks at Delancey Street. Residents themselves decide by vote in their "tribes" when it is time for a resident to advance to a new position.

A Stockton native, Valadez started out mopping floors, washing dishes, cleaning and learning skills he could use in life outside. Since then he's been promoted through the ranks.

Like all Delancey Street residents, Valadez must learn at least three trades. He also has to learn morals and values, coping skills and other life lessons. He could go into construction, work in the Delancey Street theater, study to become an accountant or work as an auto mechanic.

"It's been great for me here," Valadez said, who used to be more focused on committing crimes in Stockton to feed his heroin habit.

Delancey Street was founded by the late John Maher, who started the program on the premise that nobody was too down and out to be rehabilitated, and San Francisco prison psychologist Mimi Silbert, who was fed up with the revolving door prison system.

It was named for the Lower Eastside New York neighborhood where countless immigrants moved upon arriving at Ellis Island. In addition to Delancey Street in San Francisco, there are also Delancey Streets in Los Angeles, New York, New Mexico and North Carolina.

In San Joaquin County, New Directions wants to duplicate some of Delancey Street's successes.

New Directions started out a year ago in the former women's jail as a 90- to 120-day residential drug rehabilitation program. It accepts only people in jail or prison on drug charges referred by the courts or parole officers, said executive director Dale Benner.

The state pays New Directions \$225,000 a year to use 15 of its 32 beds for parolees of the California Department of Corrections. Other New Directions funds come from donations, fund-raising events and resident payments, bringing the budget to approximately \$360,000 a year.

Benner said he looks forward to being self-sufficient like Delancey Street.

A carpentry shop was started recently. Residents plan to make items such as curio cabinets or computer tables to sell, with profits to benefit New Directions, Benner said. There's already a computer class, a living class and classes preparing residents for the general diploma test.

"We're hoping to one day soon open our own kitchen and set up a culinary arts school," said Harvey Edelliant, program director.

Benner was among a group of Stockton residents who toured Delancey Street recently and came back with ideas for New Directions.

One idea was to increase the minimum amount of time a resident stays at the treatment center to six months. New Directions had to get tougher, he said, because more than 50 percent of participants were returning to drugs after leaving the program.

At Delancey Street, residents stay an average of four years.

While New Directions uses Delancey Street as a model in many respects, administrators say there are fundamental differences between the two programs.

Delancey Street is not an alternative to prison. Only people who want to change are admitted after interviews by other Delancey Street residents.

New Directions resident Mark B. Berry, 28, of Stockton said he tried to get admitted into Delancey Street.

"First they went through my pockets and found my drugs. Threw them in the toilet. Then they found my court slip. They told me to do my time first then come back. I didn't."

Irizarry said Delancey Street works because people are not placed there to free up prison space.

"They're here because they want to be. They're here because they want to change. No court sent them here," he said. "Here, you are responsible. You have a chance. Somebody trusts you, gives you a chance. Makes you feel important. Here, You're pushed to be a doer — a participant," Irizarry said.

Officials expect it will take 10 years before New Directions can operate like Delancey Street.

Already, positive results are being seen. Several New Directions residents have completed the program or have enrolled at San Joaquin Delta Community College.

Michael Ohanesian, 35, is a New Directions resident and Delta College student.

"When I came here I didn't have any self-esteem whatsoever. Now I feel good about myself," he said.