

# AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGIC FOUNDATION

## MENDING BROKEN LIVES

**W**hen Shirley LaMarr dropped out of the junior high because she was pregnant, she began a life of drugs, crime, and street living. She was addicted to heroin, fell into prostitution, and was arrested often for theft and drug possession. When she was jailed for her last time, at about age 40, she sent a letter to the Delancey Street Foundation in San Francisco. She was at the bottom, with little choice but to make a new start or die. Over a period of more than three years in residence at Delancey, Ms. Lamar kicked her drug habit, earned a high-school-equivalency diploma, and learned for the first time how to be a role model for her children. With her training, she became manager of the Ridge Hotel in Oakland.

A remarkable comeback story, but not an entirely uncommon one for Delancey Street. This summer, at the APA annual convention, the Foundation, together with APA Division 27 (Society for Community Research and Action; SCRA) will honor this remarkable institution and its courageous and tenacious founder, Dr. Mimi Silbert, with the 2001 Harry V. McNeill Memorial Award, which recognizes the best in innovative programs and individuals in community mental health.

Delancey Street is a self-help, residential-education center for recovering substance abusers and ex-

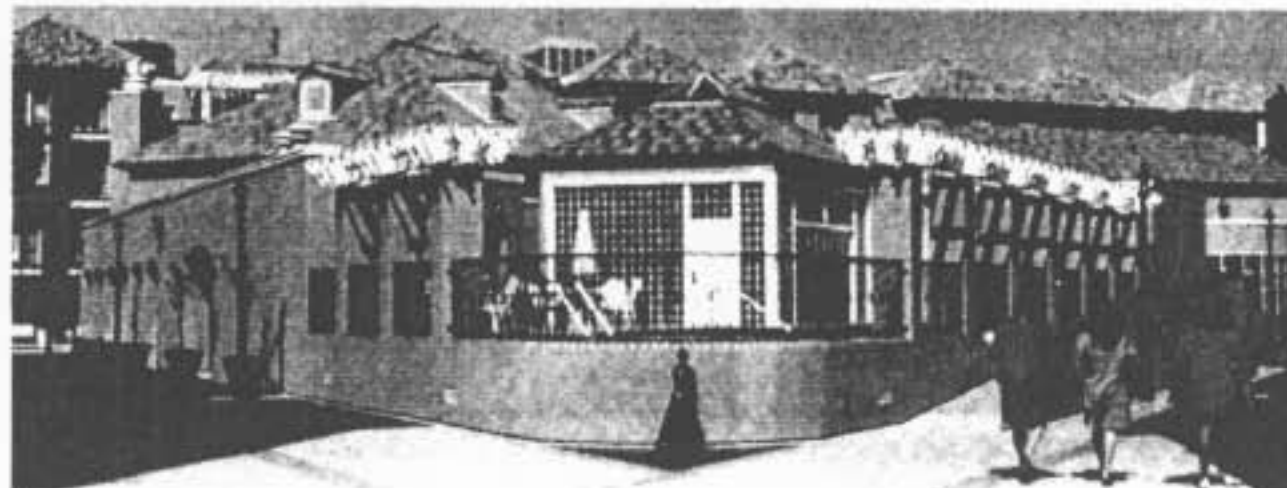
convicts that is based on the principles of accountability and community. Located in the Embarcadero Triangle of San Francisco, a three-acre complex of low-rise residential buildings and retail and recreation facilities, built almost entirely by the residents, serves as Delancey headquarters. The complex, which opened in 1990, was hailed by architectural critic Alan Temko as "a masterpiece of social architecture." Four other facilities have sprung up—in Los Angeles; San Juan Pueblo, New Mexico; Brewster, New York; and Greensboro, North Carolina—since Delancey San Francisco was founded almost thirty years ago.

The population at the San Francisco center ranges in age from 18-68, of whom approximately one-quarter are women, one-third African-American, one-third Hispanic, and one-third Anglo. The average resident has been a hard-core drug addict for 10 years and has been in prison four times. Many have been gang members and have been trapped in poverty for several generations. The courts refer approximately 70%, and about 30% have been homeless prior to entering the center. Despite the violent and criminal backgrounds of the residents, there has never been one arrest in all the years that the center has been in operation.

Although the average resident is functionally illiterate and unskilled when entering, all receive a high-school equivalency certificate and are trained in marketable skills before graduating. During the minimum stay of two years (the average stay is four), residents learn not only academic and vocational skills, but also the interpersonal, social survival skills, and the attitudes,



DELANCEY STREET FOUNDATION



values, and sense of responsibility and self-reliance necessary to live in the mainstream of society drug-free, successfully, and legitimately. "Over 11,000 men and women have graduated into society as taxpaying citizens who lead successful lives," notes Silbert, "including lawyers, truck drivers, sales people, realtors, mechanics, contractors, and even a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, a president of the San Francisco Housing Commission, a deputy coroner, and a deputy sheriff."

All of these achievements are accomplished at no cost to the taxpayer or the client, and Delancey Street has never accepted any government funds. The residents run the entire operation, and Delancey Street supports itself primarily through a number of training schools that provide vocational skills to all the residents and that also generate the organization's income through pooling the monies earned. Training schools include a moving and trucking school, a restaurant and catering service, a print and copy shop, paratransit services, and an automotive center, among others. Together, the Delancey Street businesses net some \$3 million a year and keep the program almost entirely self-sufficient.

Dr. Silbert is a criminal justice planner and evaluator who has directed the evaluation of over 100 projects through such agencies as NIMH, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, and the John D. Rockefeller Foundation. For 28 years, she has designed curricula and provided training for over 50 police, sheriff's, and probation departments. As a result of her pioneering work in rehabilitation and substance abuse, she was appointed to the National Institute of Justice by President Carter, to the California State Board of Corrections by Governors Deukmejian and Gray, and to the Blue Ribbon Commission on Inmate Population Management.

SCRA will present the McNeill Award to Dr. Silbert and the Delancey Street Foundation in a special ceremony on August 24, during the APA convention, at the Embarcadero complex.