

# San Francisco Chronicle

THURSDAY, JUNE 10, 2004

## Rising from the ashes



Photos by MARK COSTANTINI / The Chronicle

**Delancey Street Foundation residents** (from right) Todd Terway, John Pavao, Anita Jackson, Robert Bernardo and Carl Hall.

### Recovered addicts earn college degrees

By Tanya Schevitz  
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Like many others in this year's sea of 7,500 graduates in purple gowns at San Francisco State's commencement ceremonies, Carl Hall has big plans and dreams.

He's going to graduate school and wants to become a counselor to help steer troubled children right.

But he is far from being your average student. He was raised on a hardscrabble Indian reservation on the Olympic Peninsula in



**Carl Hall works** at a catering job at Delancey Street, where he took classes and earned his bachelor's degree.

Washington and started drinking by age 11, eventually joining most of the adults on the reservation as an alcoholic. What followed was

years of drugs, alcohol and incarceration.

Now he hopes to return to his tribe someday to work with trou-

bled kids.

Hall, 43, is among the first nine former drug and alcohol abusers to complete an unusual bachelor's degree program run at the self-help residential program of San Francisco's Delancey Street Foundation. The program allowed the students to take classes in urban studies at their home — a residential and commercial complex near the Giants' ballpark — while they worked to turn their lives around.

For all of them, it was the culmination of a long journey. Most had been in and out of prison for years. Many had been homeless. Some were nearly illiterate when they arrived at Delancey Street.

The new graduates went through formal commencement ceremonies at San Francisco State at the end of May and will cele-

► **GRADUATES:** Page B7



# Delancey Street boasts college graduates

## ► GRADUATES

From Page B1

brate their achievement with a private party at Delancey Street today. "I had known for a long time that a college degree would be an opportunity for me to advance in life but it was never as important as getting loaded until I got to Delancey Street," Hall said.

"As I went through the program, I realized that the degree was not just about me," Hall said. "If I could achieve this degree, it would show anybody walking in the door at Delancey Street that they could achieve it too, that the only limits we have are the ones we put on ourselves."

Hall said he started drinking as a youngster because that's what he saw around him growing up on the Makah Indian reservation in Washington where there was a 60 to 70 percent unemployment rate and an 80 to 85 percent alcoholism rate. He said he thought there was little better out there for him.

The world was set up as the "haves" and the "have nots," as he saw it then, believing he was among the latter and always would be.

He soon fell into a spiral fueled by drugs and alcohol, marrying early and then abandoning his wife and three daughters and leaving the reservation in shame for embezzling money from the reservation planning department, where he worked in community development. Between 1985 and 1996, he was behind bars 14 times for various crimes such as assault and theft. Drug and alcohol abuse landed him in five different rehabilitation centers, none successful for him.

Finally, after serving 18 months in jail in Carson City, Nev., in connection with a bar brawl, he realized that if he didn't change he was going to die an alcoholic as his grandfather had.

He entered the Delancey Street program in 1997 and learned to take responsibility for himself and to set his own path. Now, with a



MARK COSTANTINI / The Chronicle

**Anita Jackson** says she wants to "give back to the community" now that she has her degree.

college education, his view of the world has changed.

"I realized that in this world today it is all about personal decisions," he said, "... that I could be a 'have.'"

He has re-established a relationship with his daughters and is entering the School of Counseling at San Francisco State to get a master of science degree in marriage and family therapy. He wants to create programs for youth on Indian reservations to help steer them away from taking the same devastating path as generations before them.

The special degree program, which began in spring 2000, was developed after Mimi Silbert, president and chief executive officer of the Delancey Street Foundation, approached San Francisco State President Robert Corrigan with the idea. The foundation has long provided its residents with classes taught by their peers at the center. But Silbert wanted to offer her residents the legitimacy that could come only from a college de-

gree.

"The outcome of this wonderful program — Delancey Street folks joining others walking across the SFSU's stage to receive a bachelor of arts degree in urban studies — is a dream come true for our residents, many of whom felt that years in prison and the streets had made such dreams impossible," Silbert said.

Although the curriculum is the same as for students on the main campus on 19th Avenue, the classes for the Delancey Street residents were offered for free and taught on-site by volunteers, such as state Senate President Pro Tem John Burton, D-San Francisco.

The students all have several jobs at Delancey Street helping to run the self-supporting foundation's many businesses, from a restaurant to a moving company and a Christmas tree lot, and had to juggle their time to fit classes and homework in around 12- to 15-hour workdays.

Not all the graduates of the spe-

cial program know exactly what they will do with the urban planning degree but most know they want to help others who are struggling with the same problems they have overcome.

Anita Jackson, 47, who got into alcohol, drugs and crime after growing up on Chicago's south side with a single mother who was working three jobs, said that the issues brought up during her classes, such as homelessness and community services, intrigued her.

"I hope I can help the world now. I have to give back to the community," Jackson said. "There are so many issues you learned about in college that you can't turn your back on."

The other graduates are Desi Rutherford, Kimberly DaRosa, John Pavao, Robert Bernardo, Robert Mansfield, Todd Terwey and Diana Sanders.

E-mail Tanya Schevitz at [tshevitz@sfchronicle.com](mailto:tshevitz@sfchronicle.com).