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The Delancey Street headquarters in San Francisco includes housing, commercial and recreational space in one complex. The complex includes sports facilities, an auto repair shop, group dining rooms, conference rooms and administrative offices.

Each one teaches one

Organizations discuss bringing Delancey Street model to Tiffin

By Matt Suman
Staff Writer

The Seneca County Chaplains Corps and the Tiffin Area Chamber of Commerce are looking into bringing a program to Tiffin that develops education and job skills to help individuals overcome social problems.

Delancey Street began in San Francisco in 1971 with four residents, \$1,000 loan and a dream to turn around the lives of substance abusers, former felons and others by empowering people with problems to become their own solution. More than 14,000 people have graduated from facilities in New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, and Los Angeles and the San Francisco headquarters. They have become successful tax paying citizens who lead productive lives.

Its core principle is that people catch on best by learning job skills and getting an education. Delancey Street has developed more than 20 enterprises run by formerly unskilled people using the "each-one-teach-one" philosophy.



The business include the Delancey Street Restaurant, Crossroads Café, private driving, bookstores and others. Major Tracy Elder, of the Seneca County Chaplain Corps, said the program is about turning lives around.

A Tiffin model would be on a smaller scale than the San Francisco Delancey Street. Elder said it would have a twist because Seneca county is more rural.

"You're investing in the people," she said. "We would have to find the needs that fit Tiffin. My goal is to help 100 people within our county. I've been wanting to do this for ten years."

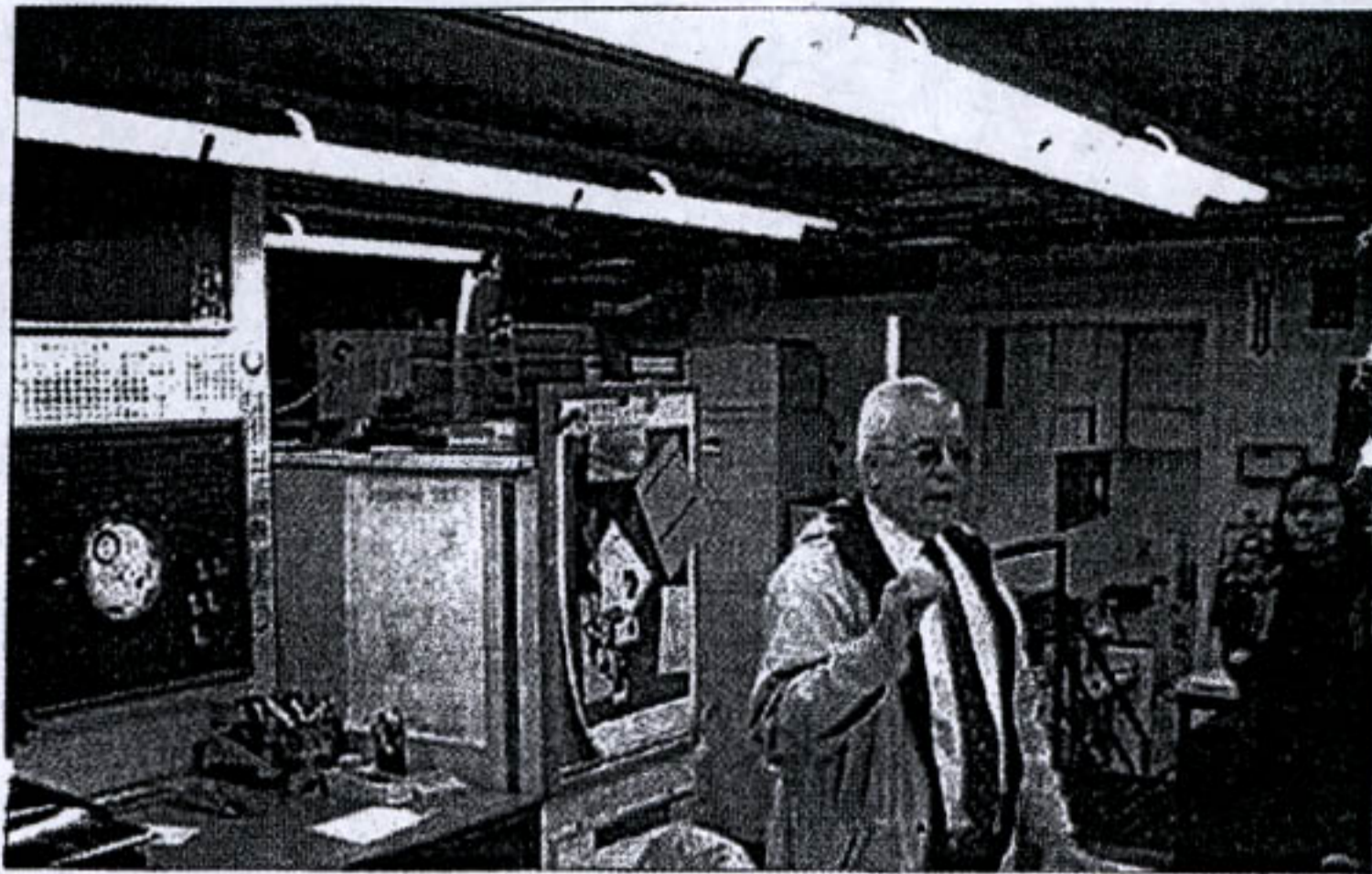
A building to house residents, grant money and small business owners to teach

skills are three main things needed to get the program running.

Some accomplishments of the Delancey Street Foundation include:

- More than 10,000 formerly illiterate people have received high school equivalency degrees.
- More than 1,000 people have graduated with a diploma from their state-accredited Post-Secondary Vocational Academy, a three-year program taught by residents.
- Residents have built and/or remodeled more than 1,500 units of very low-income housing.
- They have moved more than 2,000 homeless people into permanent housing.
- They have developed more than 20 enterprises run formerly unskilled people.
- They have received more than 100 commendations and awards from elected officials and business groups.

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Its three core rules, Elder said, are: no violence, no threat of violence and no drugs or alcohol. She said since Findlay is known as a retail community, her objective is to make Tiffin known as "a community that heals."

The program would help people of all ages — the under-educated, the unemployable, homeless and individuals addicted to drugs or alcohol.

Elder said she thinks Seneca County is a community that truly does care about its citizens. The old East Junior High building, and other vacant downtown buildings are among the sites considered during preliminary discussions.

Rich Focht, president and CEO of the Tiffin Area Chamber of Commerce and SIEDC, said he talked to Don Rankey who owns the former East Junior High building.

"He's interested in sitting down and listening to the proposal," Focht said.

Focht said he and Elder talked about how much space they would need to start with. He said the old Kroger building also would be large enough but he hasn't talked to its owner about the idea.

Elder and Focht will ask local business owners to teach skills to the individuals in the program. Those in the program get free room and board, paid for with the profits from running the new businesses.

"We're asking the community to come forward and invest," Elder said.

Downtown Tiffin would be the ideal location, Elder said, to establish a boutique, café or other small businesses.

"We're all about partnering with the community," Elder said.

She said individuals who enter the program learn three marketable skills. The average person stays in the program two years but can stay up to four years.

"When they leave, they have money in their pocket," she said.

Elder said she plans to have a capital campaign to raise money to get the program started. She said they are looking for grant possibilities to rehabilitate a building in Tiffin.

To restore a building, the program would need contractors to teach people the construction trade.

"That's the first thing they do," Elder said. "They build their living space."

After about five years, she said, the program would become self-sufficient. Though the Delancey Street program is secular, Elder said she hopes to incorporate spirituality into the program.

"It's about teaching people how to live in society," she said. "The problems are here. This is our type of solution."

Though the main program objective is to train people to become productive members of society, Elder said participants with drug problems would be tested. Members will be trained to motivate each other to follow the rules.

"There's going to be accountability," she said.

For example, Elder said, she would expect those living together in an eight-person dorm to push each other to wake up early for group breakfast each morning.

She said they could not take into the program sex offenders or the mentally ill who require psychiatric care oversight to a large degree.

"We would rather leave them to the experts," Elder said.