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Silbert shares secrets of her success

Leading “turnaround” specialist Mimi Silbert, speaking during Brandeis’s annual Fellow Breakfast May 21st, shared stories about her wildly successful “business” of improving the lives of drug addicts, ex-convicts, prostitutes, former gang members and the homeless.

Silbert, who later received an honorary degree during the University’s 55th Commencement exercise, founded the Delancey Street Foundation in 1971. The San Francisco-based organization has helped 14,000 people rehabilitate themselves and become productive, law-abiding members of society.

Some 100 university friends and alumni attended the breakfast, hosted by Rosalind ’59 and Richard Kaufman ’57 co-chairs of the Board of Fellows. Fellow honorary degree recipient Blenda J. Wilson, the president and chief executive officer of the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, also attended.

Silbert was introduced to the gathering at the Gosman Sports and Convocation Center by Brandeis Trustee Barbara Rosenberg ’54, a Bay Area resident and longtime Silbert friend. “Mimi had the drive, energy, and commitment – along with the chutzpah – to found Delancey Street,” Rosenberg said.

Rosenberg told the attendees that she is a spirited advocate for Delancey Street, and a satisfied customer of Delancey Street Moving Co., the largest independent moving firm in Northern California. “Only one glass was broken – a wine glass that I

dropped when I was unpacking,” she said with a laugh.

Considered by many to be the county’s most successful rehabilitation project, Delancey Street has expanded to include locations in New York, New Mexico, North Carolina and Los Angeles. Residents spend up to four years at the facilities and must pass a high school equivalency exam to graduate.

“Delancey Street gives people a second chance to be the best people they can be,” Silbert said. “They learn values, they learn about giving and they learn how to take care of each other.”

Delancey Street generates \$20 million a year through the operation of more than 20 businesses, which generate necessary income but also serve as training schools. The schools teach residents marketable skills and work habits to increase their chances of success when they graduate.

The business model resembles that of a kibbutz in Israel. “If we do well, we all eat steak,” said Silbert, whose organization has never accepted government money. “If not, we all eat rice and beans.”

The organization is named for the famed street on



Mimi Silbert speaking at the Fellows Breakfast.

Manhattan's Lower East Side where Silbert's parents
and many other immigrants settled to make a new

life for them selves in America.