THE MIRACLE WORKER OF SAN FRANCISCO

DOLORES was a street prostitute and heroin addict from age 12 to 22. She is now an accountant. They served 12 years in prison for burglaries, robberies, and drugs. He is now a plumbing contractor with a wife and two children. Billy was a school dropout, drug addict, and car thief. He is now an attorney.

The leaflet on the Delancey Street Foundation stops at three but could have gone on and on to cover the 10,000 "graduates" whose lives the San Francisco, California-based rehabilitation center has transformed.

Sunday PJ met Dr. Mimi Silbert, the miracle worker, via a USIS-sponsored electronic live program last week at the Thomas Jefferson Cultural Center.

Across the trans-Pacific cables, her voice came loud and clear. But more than the timbre, she exuded warmth and passion for the work she is doing for drug addicts, violent felons, and people who have hit bottom.

"Electrifying" was how Manila Vice-Mayor Lito Atienza described the two-hour dialogue with the multi-awarded psychologist and criminologist who candidly answered questions raised by local drug experts.

Appointed to the California Board of Corrections, Silbert thinks imprisoning criminals "at some one else's expense, providing all their food and lodging and letting them sit there with no responsibility, is absurd."

To provide an alternative, she built the $30-million Delancey Street complex from scratch. A state tidelands law written by a good friend, Assemblyman John Burton, allowed her to build on a piece of land bordering First and...
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Branaman Streets and the Embarcadero in San Francisco. She persuaded the Bank of America to give a $10 million unsecured loan. Developer Al Wilsey gave the project its first $3 million.

Mimi drew her plumbers, electricians and pipers drivers from the first clients she took in. They had used them as thieves, murderers and unskilled dope-joins.

Her foreman Abe Irizarry did some community service: he helped pour the concrete for the handball court at San Quentin.

"How do you get funding for your projects?" a Philippine Council for NGOs Against Drug and Substance Abuse asked Mimi.

"Since you claim you get a cent from the government, I believe in teaching self-help," Mimi replied. "We also teach the people the skills and the self-confidence to be productive members of society. In this way, we can contribute to the community. Discipline, dignity, self-respect, responsibility, and entrepreneurship are key concepts in the Delancey Street program."

Delancey Street clients are tutored to receive a high school education and have a chance of attending college. They have been returned to their credit union management, catering, culinary arts, construction trades, plumbing, air-conditioning, carpentry, welding, electrical, glass, woodwork, college enrollment, and Christmas gifts.

The rehabilitation center runs various enterprises to help its clients, including a restaurant, a moving company, a wholesale restaurant and furniture, a glazier, a restaurant and a furniture store, and a catering business.

"Have you had violent attacks or have there been any incidents?" a reporter asked.

"No, never," Mimi answered. "Never an arrest." She said the program was operated by Assistant Cultural Officer Carol Howarth with the help of 30 people who had much to learn from her.

"If you are not interested in violence, Mimi answered, "Never an arrest."