

Ex-con program on Maui expands

Project promotes entrepreneurship

By Timothy Hurley
ADVERTISER MAUI COUNTY BUREAU

WAILUKU, Maui — Ex-cons could be transformed into entrepreneurs under an innovative rehabilitation program coming to Maui.

Maui Economic Opportunity Inc. yesterday announced that it will partner with California-based Delancey Street Foundation to create BEST House, a program that will offer shelter, educational opportunities, job training and jobs to former inmates of the Maui Community Correctional Center.

notch," said Gladys C. Baisa, MEO executive director.

Delancey Street Foundation officials are on Maui this week to talk about their program, which is self-sufficient and receives no ongoing government financing.

Under the Delancey Street model, the first goal for participants is to earn a high-school equivalency certificate, followed by hands-on job training. By the time participants leave, they will have received training in three job skills and developed supervisory and management skills.

Delancey Street says it has transformed more than 14,000 former inmates, drug users and others into tax-paying citizens leading legitimate and productive lives.

The BEST (Being Empowered and Safe Together) House will be based on the Delancey Street Project, which has been changing lives in San Francisco for 33 years. The project is trying to replicate itself across the country with the assistance of the Eisenhower Foundation.

On Maui, the Maui Economic Opportunity program hopes to build a transitional housing complex on nine acres in Wailuku with help from \$1 million earmarked by the state Legislature and \$300,000 in federal money allocated by Maui County. In addition, U.S. Rep. Ed Case, D-Hawai'i, has applied for \$5 million in federal housing money.

The BEST prisoner rehabilitation program has been operating on Maui for about a year and a half, but so far it has been able to help only a limited number of former inmates, officials said.

The Delancey Street franchise is going to "kick it up a

level." Instead of offering conventional counseling, the program challenges ex-cons to support themselves by helping to run businesses. In San Francisco, the Delancey Street participants help run a dozen companies, including a gourmet restaurant, a bookstore-cafe and a moving company.

Baisa said the initial plan for the BEST House is to create a restaurant and catering business.

Several officials said the Delancey Street model couldn't have arrived at a better time. Baisa said that with no end in sight to the illegal-drug crisis on Maui, there is concern that prison has become a revolving door that releases inmates back into the same conditions, which leads to more crime.

"We need this," she said. "It really gives you hope."

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