



British PM takes, gives, S.F. 'lessons'

Tony Blair learns from drug-rehab center, gives advice on city's Olympic bid



Tony Blair said his meeting with Delancey Street rehabilitation center graduates showed him "something that's got a lesson in it for all countries, including mine."

Delancey Street's success offers 'lessons' for the world, U.K. prime minister says

By David Smith
Staff Writer

On Sunday morning, a resident of a San Francisco drug rehabilitation center — and a self-described former "human garbage can" for narcotics — helped the prime minister of the United Kingdom sit down to breakfast.

With his tattoos peaking out from his shirt, James Dorne, 43, six-year resident and now property manager for the Delancey Street rehabilitation center, pulled out Tony Blair's chair for him as the leader sat down after receiving two standing ovations from the center's roughly 500 residents.

The entrepreneurial spirit of the award-winning program is what drew Blair to the site during his West Coast tour of "innovation," which also includes stops at Cisco Systems and Genetech and a trip to Los Angeles to discuss climate change and give a foreign policy address.

As runners in the San Francisco Marathon trotted by on the water-front, Blair took an hour-long tour of Delancey Street, which boasts a more than 90 percent success rate, and peppered residents with questions about how it had changed their lives.

"I've seen something, something that's got a lesson in it for all countries, including mine," Blair told the residents.

"All of us need to change our lives from time to time," he said.

Leaving Delancey Street, Blair received applause and a few disapproving shouts on England's Mideast policy from a crowd that had gathered outside.

Silbert, with late co-creator John Maher, founded the Delancey Street Foundation — named for an immigrant street in New York City in which neighbors supported each other — in 1971 with a \$1,000 loan, taking in four residents. The foundation now boasts more than 14,000 recovery success stories.

The foundation takes in all forms of substance abusers, former jailhouse residents and streetwalkers. It receives no government funding and levies no fee to its residents, subsisting on its own revenue production from a variety of business enterprises that include a gourmet restaurant, moving service, coffee house, bookstore and catering service, among others. Participants live in dorms and apartments at the facility and are given jobs.

No one is paid for the work they do, whether its mopping the lobby their first day there or being president of the foundation since its inception.

Residents commit to a minimum stay of two years, but most stay an average of four, having obtained an education, marketable skills and control of their lives.

"For all San Franciscans, this is one of the places we want to show off," Newsom said, noting that the overall "dynamism" of the Bay Area had drawn Blair to make the first visit here of a sitting British prime minister.

Blair was interested in replicating the project and spreading its successes elsewhere, saying it was important to "give people a chance to change."

Blair was to spend the rest of his Sunday at a roundtable at Cisco Systems and an appearance at the Rupert Murdoch-owned News Corp.'s event in Pebble Beach. Today, Blair will travel to Long Beach to speak with energy industry leaders about global warming. On Tuesday, he planned to give a major foreign policy address at the World Affairs Council in Los Angeles.



British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, left, meets with Delancey Street co-founder Dr. Mimi Silbert on Sunday. At right is San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom. During an hour-long tour of the nonprofit, Blair spoke with program participants. —AP