

Delancey Street offers fresh start at clean living

By Andrea Kincs
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BREWSTER — A castle may be an atypical setting for a facility assisting recovering alcoholics and drug addicts, but then, Delancey Street Foundation is not at all typical.

The facility, described by its residents as a "re-educational facility," rests atop 92 acres nestled in the woods of Brewster on Turk Hill Road.

Morningthorpe castle, the foundation's home, was built for Seth B. Howe sometime during the 1700's. The facility has been located there for about 11 years.

Wanda Brown has been a resident of Delancey Street for about 18 months — six months shy of "graduation." She said the program works to reeducate one how to live a normal life without drugs or crime.

"What we achieve is we learn how to be responsible, decent human beings," she said.

She said many residents come into Delancey Street through the prison systems, but anyone is welcome.

Facility Treatment Manager Peter Liotta said Delancey Street is not for everyone, and during an interview process, applicants are screened to see if they sincerely want to be helped and whether the foundation can help them.

"If anyone's life is out of order, and we think we can help them, we ask them to live with us," he said.

Despite the serene surroundings, Delancey Street is not a place one goes to just rest and recover from the real world.

A motivating force behind the program is a work ethic which pushes residents to work long hard hours. Residents are given the opportunity to prove themselves and then they begin to earn rewards. The required minimum stay is two years.

"You can come in and do whatever you want. You just have to fight hard enough for it," said resident Juan Morales.

He explained that every four months residents rotate jobs and sometimes transfer to one of the three other Delancey Street foundation facilities across the country.

He said residents have to put in a proposal for the job they want. Often, however, they don't get the job of their choice and have to learn to keep reaching for their goal while still putting in a 100 percent effort at the job they hold.

Mrs. Brown explained the work needed to gain the rewards makes the rewards more worthwhile.

"All our life we've done things that were easy for us. It was easy to get high, it was easy to lie...if we earn what we get, we appreciate it more," she said.

There are 18 permanent residents at Brewster's Delancey Street, and



The Morningthorpe castle houses the Delancey Street Foundation.

Staff photograph by ANDREA KINCS



Staff photograph by ANDREA KINGS

Falsai Alfaqlh, left, chops vegetables for lunch while Amabo Quiles, right, looks on.

the number of the rest of the residents is always changing as residents move from one facility to another.

Besides the Brewster location, there are Delancey Streets in New Mexico, San Francisco and North Carolina.

The name is derived from a street on the lower east side of New York City where at the turn of the century Delancey Street came to symbolize the self-reliance of old world immigrants who worked and earned their way into the mainstream of American life.

Mrs. Brown has worked her way up to being in charge of the central office but has aspirations of transferring to the San Francisco facility because she is interested in the computer programming offered in that region.

Juan is in charge of the automotive department now but said he had to work his way up through different jobs until he got where he is now.

There is no paid staff at Delancey Street. All the people there are residents who are going through or have been through the program.

Juan said they learn what is called "mutual restitution" — by helping someone else along, they themselves improve and get better.

"A helps B and A gets better," he explained. "All our lives we've been selfish people. Here we learn to care for others."

The foundation charges no fee to its residents. The program is self-sustaining without government funding through its sales and private and corporate donations.

Residents work in different departments such as the college marketing, specialty advertising, retail sales and pull together during certain holiday drives to make items which they sell to maintain the facility.

Aside from items such as shirts, sweatshirts, mugs, office supplies and other items which may be decorated with a college or company logo, residents work to make sand creations in glass which are set and can be hollowed out to fit a plant.

Delancey Street also has a moving company, which Mr. Liotta manages.



Staff photograph by ANDREA KINGS

Sand creations dry out under special lamps before they are hollowed out for plants to be inserted.

Though Delancey Street tries to maintain a quiet presence in the community, there is one time of the year when the group makes an effort to be noticed.



Teresa Townsend spruces up a plant before it is sold.