



Southeast Heights apartments renovated for people recovering from addiction

By Phil Parker

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Janice Mancuso had been collecting quotes — mantras — for 25 years. "Men do not fail," one says, "they give up trying." "Some people drink from the fountain of knowledge," sings another, "others gulp."

Now some of the mantras are a permanent part of a project aimed at getting drug- and alcohol-addicted Albuquerque residents back on their feet in the Southeast Heights - one of many efforts started by Sam Slishman and the nonprofit agency he formed, Endorphin Power Co.

Where an asphalt parking lot sat a few months ago at 509 Cardenas Drive S.E., there's now a complex of affordable housing for men and women in recovery, including one apartment with Mancuso's mantras affixed to the wall.

"This is a jewel on Albuquerque's necklace," Mancuso said of the apartments. "And it's thanks to Sam. He's humble, and he would never say so, but this is all because of him."

Slishman, 35, started Endorphin Power Co. in March 2003.

He was an emergency room physician at University of New Mexico Hospital and a theme kept recurring in his work, he said.

"There are a lot of problems in Albuquerque caused by alcohol use, and the goal here is to provide better alternatives for people in recovery," he said. Endorphin "was a reaction to my experiences working at UNM."

Adjacent to the newly renovated apartment building are the Endorphin offices.

And much more.

Across the street are the facilities of Metropolitan Assessment and Treatment Services, the alcohol and drug detox and treatment center operated by Bernalillo County.

"They help people get sober, and we help them stay sober," Slishman said.

Staying sober means having things to do. Endorphin maximizes its meager space with ways to keep people busy. It has a library filled with donated books and hosts its own book club. There's a computer lab where members learn word processing and how to search the Internet for jobs. It provides a meeting room for 12-step groups.

The offices have a soon-to-be-converted cafe, a dance hall, an art gallery and a bike shop - members who help fix two bikes get unlimited use of one of the company's bicycle fleet for free.

There's also a gym, where Slishman's program got its name. It has treadmills and weights, but its most noteworthy feature lines the west wall - three bikes hooked up to electrical generators. As people pedal them, they generate power.

"That's where the name comes from," said Regina "Gigi" Gallegos, the program director at Endorphin. "We're generating human power with these bikes."

Right now, the bikes can only make enough power to slow Endorphin's electric meters, Gallegos said. But they give recovering addicts exercise opportunities and easy membership — which costs \$200 a year. A day pass is free for anyone who spends 20 minutes generating power on one of the bikes.

Donations make Endorphin possible, but it also rents office space to help pay for a budget that Slishman said is less than \$100,000 a year.

Gallegos lives in an apartment above the gym. She was in the middle of a career change in late 2003 - from working in electronics to nursing - when she met Slishman and joined Endorphin.

"He (Slishman) meets people, and they're always amazed by what he's doing," Gallegos said. "A lot of people see problems in life and think 'What can I do?' But he saw a problem and worked out a solution in his head.

"He's so dedicated, and he keeps people motivated."

Motivated enough to meet the July 22 deadline for the Endorphin Challenge. Slishman and company earlier had brainstormed ways to renovate the donated apartments — in a month. The challenge was born.

Teams from as far away as California paid \$100 to enter. They received donations of building materials, and they gave their time. Almost all of the 20 teams renovating an apartment were finished by the July 22's deadline.

Each room is distinctive. There are murals in some, unique colors flood others. One team, on the top floor, punched a hole through the roof for a skylight. Another put petroglyphs on the ceiling. There's a room where the twin bed folds into a cupboard. One has a beach theme, others ooze Southwest.

The winning room — voted on by the teams — has a rope light lined inches below the ceiling, refinished antique furniture and a cozy sitting space by the door. A five-day Carnival Cruise Lines trip was awarded for first place.

Gallegos said teams poured their hearts into the project.

"People were very choked up," she said of the competition's conclusion.

Endorphin still doesn't know when the building will open to Duke City residents in need, but it shouldn't take more than two or three months, Gallegos said.

"Our objective is to change people's environment," Slishman said. "A lot of rehab centers will clean you up and then send you back into the same environment.

"These rooms will help. It'll be fluid. Some rooms will be better for some people and others better for other people. We want it to be organic and consistently changing."



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