

Saturday, January 31, 2004

## Hey Buddy, Can You Spare a Treadmill?

**By Isabel Sanchez**

*Journal Staff Writer*

As a source of renewable energy, consider the homeless person, addicted to drugs or alcohol, pedaling out toxins on an exercise machine attached to a generator.

Dr. Sam Slishman has.

The emergency room physician was standing under the Eiffel Tower a few years ago, annoyed with the trinket sellers. What a waste, he thought.

"Every city has their trinket sellers. These trinkets don't contribute anything," he said. "I'd rather pay them to sit on an exerciser and generate electricity."

The idea stuck with him and became part of Endorphin Power Co., his solution for several social issues at once: It would restore addicts to sobriety, return homeless people to the larger society and conserve fossil fuels.

Slishman doesn't want to make too much of the energy part. What's important about the plan, he said, is improving medical care for indigent patients.

"The concept is not to get homeless people to light up Albuquerque," he said.

Slishman in 2002 formed the Endorphin Power Co., envisioning a fitness center full of people pedaling and pulling on machines connected to generators.

"I was thinking of building an entire exercise center focused on generating electricity," he said.

Then he thought about the social problems he sees as an emergency room physician at the University of New Mexico Hospital—not just the five to 20 intoxicated people on any night, but the hours they spend in hospital beds, sleeping it off.

Why not offer free basic medical care, he thought, such as stitching up cuts and draining abscesses. Why not offer overnight housing for those who are intoxicated, who are turned away from traditional homeless shelters until sober.

Endorphin Power Co. "will become Albuquerque's inspirational flagship for social rehabilitation and renewable energy use," according to a draft business plan.

Once the company gets the money it needs to buy a building for a rehab center, patients would go there, or be taken by ambulance,

sleep it off, and in the morning meet with social workers.

"Now when an ambulance picks up a drunk person, he goes to the emergency room or jail. We would like to offer something different," Slishman said.

So far, Slishman has a van donated by United Blood Services, to be outfitted as a mobile medical unit for duty around the clock. It will take some pressure off local emergency rooms and steer patients to social service agencies, he said.

It needs a paint job, which might feature yellow lightning bolts, and should be ready in a month or two, he said.

Endorphin Power Co. also has a board of directors, about 100 volunteers from all walks of life, official nonprofit status and a Web site, where the homeless can find shelter addresses and information.

The Web site, [www.endorphinpower.org](http://www.endorphinpower.org), accepts donations. The rehab center expects \$2 million a year in operating expenses.

Custom-designed trekking poles (\$50) and black T-shirts (\$15) that say "The Home of Social Invention" are for sale on the site.

So is all kinds of information about company proposals— a cost-benefit analysis, charts and graphs and references to Public Service Company of New Mexico's power grids.

"I agree this is not exactly the most normal part of the business plan," Slishman said. "It really will require a lot of studying. We haven't studied it at all ... I'm really nervous about turning people off."

