

DAILY NEWS

50¢

2.5 MILLION READERS EVERY DAY

NYDailyNews.com

BRONX PEOPLE

SPOTLIGHT ON FLOYD CUEVAS

He's a shining example

BY BILL EGBERT

FLOYD CUEVAS grew up literally in the shadow of Fort Apache, the embattled South Bronx police precinct that became an icon of the chaos and drug-fueled decay that marked the neighborhood of his youth.

"I used to shine shoes at the corner of Simpson St., under the train tracks," said Cuevas, 54. "The drug dealers would get a shine for 25 cents and give me a \$5 tip, and as a kid, I was impressed by that kind of money."

Recognizing his entrepreneurial spark, the drug dealers enticed him into the trade, beginning Cuevas's spiral into crime and addiction that landed him in jail by age 16.

"Then while I was incarcerated, a kid from my neighborhood got arrested, and he was in jail waiting for trial," Cuevas recalled. "And he took his own life. He probably would have been released, but he took his own life."

That shock started Cuevas on his long journey back from the abyss, and eventually led to his life's work of pulling others away from the edge as Director of Operations for Praxis Housing, a non-profit offering transitional housing to homeless addicts.

After a few more years in and out

of jail, struggling with an addiction that estranged him from his family, Cuevas finally entered a treatment program — and this time it was the drug program that tried to recruit him.

"I was making more money working construction," Cuevas said, "but they wore me down finally, and I became the youngest assistant director they ever had."

Cuevas went on to work with adolescents on Rikers Island and to train lawyers to work better with indigent or addicted clients, but he takes greatest pride in his

work for Praxis, managing four supportive housing facilities that help 345 men and women with AIDS and addictions to pull their own lives together.

"I've seen people get their kids back," he said. "I see that look of pride when they have a lease in their own name."

His main hope now is to prevent others from repeating mistakes he made.

"Not everybody has to hit rock bottom," said Cuevas, "to start getting up."

Floyd Cuevas, 54, is director of operations for Praxis Housing, a non-profit in the Bronx.



VITAL STATS

DATE OF BIRTH:

April 1, 1953

BEST PART OF JOB:

Developing new projects that will enhance the service we provide our clients.

BIGGEST HEADACHE: Trying to attain additional funding for housing development.

FAVORITE FOODS: Seafood, shrimp gumbo

FAVORITE PLACE IN THE
BRONX: Willie's Steak House — good food & Latin Jazz.

LAST BOOK READ: "Pure Rhythm and Patriotisms" by Paula Santiago

FAVORITE LEISURE
ACTIVITY: Mambo dancing, oldies concerts and mystery novels

SECRET TALENT: Good cook and good listener