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Ex-Napan's nonprofit mentors troubled D.C. youth

By *CRISTINA DE LEON-MENJIVAR*, Register Staff Writer
 Monday, September 25, 2006 1:10 AM PDT

Penelope Spain had the good fortune to come from a supportive family and community. While attending Napa High School, she was in the band, and was also a longtime member of the Silverado Ballet Troupe, a nonprofit organization that tours abroad and performs for low-income communities and orphanages. When she went of to college she received various grants and scholarships from local groups and organizations.

Now she's spreading some of that good fortune around.

Spain, 30, attended law school at American University Washington College of Law, in Washington, D.C. While there, she decided to give back to her community, mirroring the support she received growing up in Napa.

"I never went to law school with the intention of making money, my intent was to serve per communities who didn't have a strong voice or anyone to advocate for them," Spain said in interview.

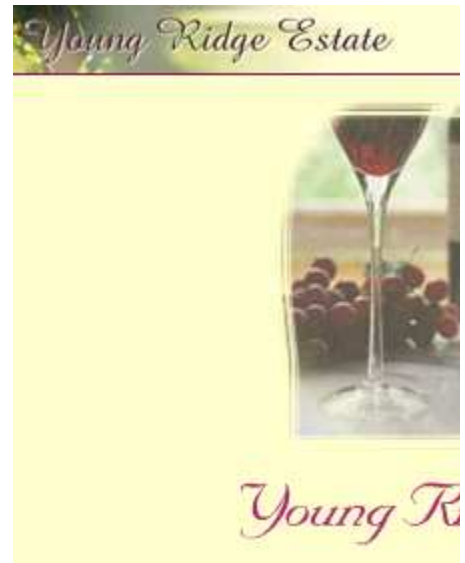
Spain now lives in D.C. and is co-founder of Mentoring Today, a grass-roots nonprofit organization bringing together volunteer mentors with D.C. teenagers who are returning to the community from Oak Hill Youth Center, the city's juvenile detention facility

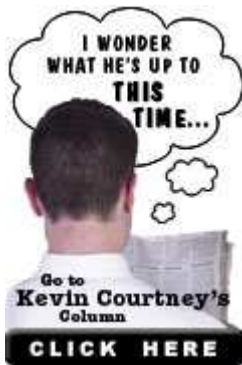
The idea for Mentoring Today sprung from Students United, a program Spain and her partn Louchheim founded while in law school. Students United trains law students to serve as tuti incarcerated youth. Once they saw the success of the program, they realized the need for a focusing on the transition from incarceration to the community, and created Mentoring Tod

"Reintegration is a difficult time for these youth. They are required to receive a myriad of s which can be very helpful but which can also be overwhelming. Our mentors help these you track, comply with the terms of their probation, and take steps towards their life goals," Sp prepared statement.

The pilot program of Mentoring Today kicked off at the end of July, matching 20 youths with

Mentors come from diverse backgrounds. A kindergarten teacher, a British diplomat, a moti are among the volunteers. The mentors will volunteer more than 150 hours this year.





The incarcerated teens must volunteer to participate in the program.

"We explain our program to them and rather than mandate them, ask them if they want to have yet to have someone who doesn't want to participate. ... They are so hungry to have quality time with them and help them support them in their own goals," Spain said.

The Oak Hill Youth Center houses an average of 150 teens at a time. All the teens are either or Latino males, ages 17 to 19.

Spain and Louchheim received a grant in May 2005 that provided the funds for all the basic women to work on the program full-time for one year.

Since May 2006, they have been volunteering their time to the program.

"The goal is in a few months to move to full-time paid status. ... I am so ready for that day

To get support from Washington, D.C., Spain and Louchheim had to be aggressive in selling Spain noted, however, that this summer the city went under a crime emergency and it soon program like Mentoring Today was needed.

Mentoring Today has formed a partnership with the D.C. Department of Youth Rehabilitation Washington Parks and People and other businesses and community service providers support

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