

PRIEST'S OUTREACH PROJECT FINDS AND HELPS TEEN ADDICTS

Long crusade

Padre fights drug battle

By CHARLES W. BELL

Daily News Religion Editor

He got into the drug-battling business in the early '70s when the hottest thing on the street was phencyclidine, a mind-warper called "angel dust."

He warned youngsters so often about the stuff, they nicknamed him "The Angel Dust Priest." That was okay with the Rev. Coleman Costello.

"The collar broke the ice," says the 48-year-old Queens priest, whose drug-war combat uniform is still the Roman collar and cassock.

The war has expanded considerably since Costello got into it with a one-man storefront-counseling center in the Rockaways. But then, Costello has expanded considerably, too.

40 beds in Ridgewood

He now runs the Outreach Project, which he founded and which operates the city's only adolescent residential drug-treatment program, a 40-bed facility called Outreach House in Ridgewood. Last month, he broke ground for a second residential center in Brentwood, L.I.

By 1994, he plans to open two more residences and two halfway houses, for kids with no place to go after they complete drug treatment. He reckons the entire project will cost about \$15 million.

He also reckons he will get the money. "My optimism sometimes gets far-fetched,"

Costello says, "but believe me on this."

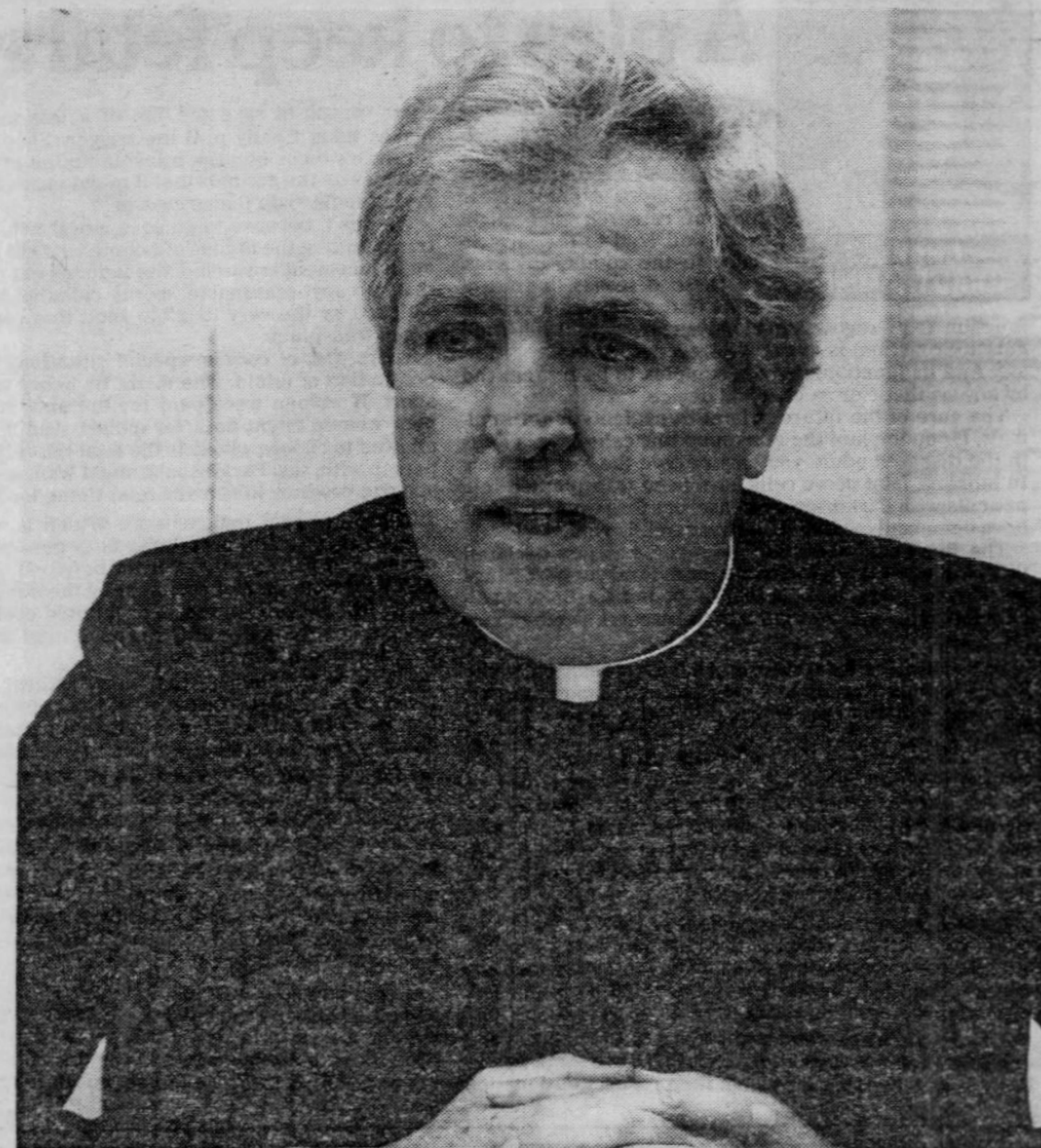
He will raise \$250,000—that is guaranteed by the Building Contractors' Association—at the eighth annual Outreach dinner, a \$200-a-plate bash on Thursday at Antun's in Queens Village.

Penthouse interview

Costello considers everything fair game in his save-the-kids crusade. He once even gave Penthouse magazine an interview and then shrugged off the ensuing uproar by saying, "The Holy Father himself has come out against drug abuse."

Costello launched his war on drugs in 1970, nearly three years after his ordination. The sturdy 6-foot-3 rookie priest's first assignment was an eye-opener—St. Vincent de Paul in the drug-ravaged Williamsburgh neighborhood of Brooklyn.

Shocked at the number of young addicts he saw, Costello began thinking of ways to turn off the "turn-on" generation. It was not until he was assigned to Belle Harbor, in



THE REV. COLEMAN COSTELLO at Outreach facility in Ridgewood.

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the Rockaways, that he came up with the Outreach idea.

"The only difference between Belle Harbor and Williamsburgh," he said, "was that kids in Belle Harbor had

more money to spend on drugs and booze."

Costello began with his bishop's blessings and a storefront office. His target were kids aged 11 to 19 who

sought help for drug abuse. But, all he could do was refer them to the handful of de-toxification and treatment centers that accepted adolescents.