

Step At A Time

Substance Abuse Center Set For Thanksgiving Opening

By **BETTY SKEENS**

News-Record Staff Writer

II-Step House, an extended care facility for substance abusers, will open in Keezletown for Thanksgiving dinner and begin accepting patients Dec. 1, said Pham Chopra, executive director and founder.

The Keezletown facility will be the first in a network of recovery homes Chopra hopes to open across Virginia and, eventually, nationwide, he said. "We want to be regional in three years and nationwide in five years," he said.

"The need and the vision for II-Step arose within me as a result of personal experience," said Chopra, who is a Sikh-American. "I wanted to include my experience with others as an essential part of my own recovery.

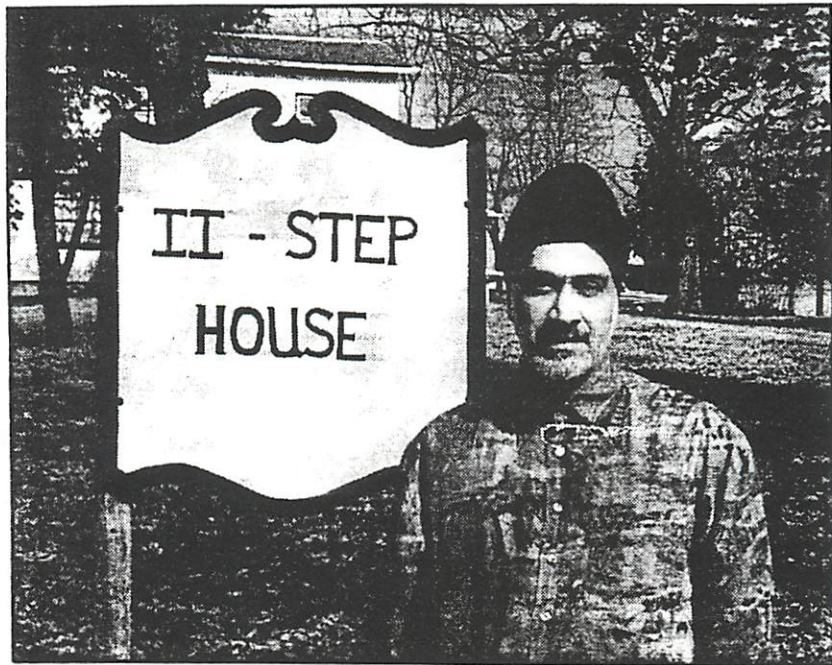
"I felt there was a need for extended care for chemically dependent persons. Extended care both increases the probability of successful recovery and ensures continued sobriety."

He bought the building for II-Step House in May after it was vacated by CoHope, a rehabilitation center for the handicapped. It includes living quarters for eight people under supervision of a program director.

Chopra, a management consultant and contractor, said he invested more than \$75,000 of his own money to start II-Step as a non-profit corporation. He has hired John Erwin, a nationally known prison chaplain and former director of the Maryland Youth Ranch, to help with fund-raising, he said. Erwin worked in the Chicago prison system for 30 years and is founder of PACE, a nationwide corrective education program for prisoners.

Substance abuse is the number one problem in the nation, said Erwin, who is executive vice president of corporate development for II-Step. "The figures are staggering on what businesses have to pay from accidents and lost time at work," he said.

"It makes more sense to help the person get whole and healed again and keep him functioning. The financial burden eventually falls on the government for people in trouble who don't get help. In many



Pham Chopra at renovated substance abuse facility.

cases, alcoholics and drug addicts end up in jail.

"We want to give them the tools to rebuild their lives, if they're interested in rebuilding them."

In addition to contributions, working capital for II-Step will come from room and board payments by residents, which will be about half the rates at for-profit treatment facilities, Chopra said.

II-Step is currently limited to five residents but is licensed for 12, he said. In addition to Chopra and Erwin, the staff will include Ken Banks a certified counselor, a program director, office support and facility maintenance personnel as needed.

Most patients will come to II-Step after having gone through intensive treatment to be prepared for full re-entry into society, he said. The facility will have an extensive outpatient program and consultation services of local psychiatrists and counselors will be available, Chopra said.

Residents will be required to work or look for jobs during the day. Therapy in the evenings will include a disciplined 12-step life for 90 days for patients as well as integrated support for their families, he said.

Residents will also be required to attend AA meetings outside the house, assume household respon-

sibilities and take responsibility for recreational activities intended to restore a positive self-image and facilitate re-entry into the community, Chopra said.

Residents will share bedrooms. All meals will be available at the house. A residency limit of 90 days was set to give patients ample time to get hold of their lives without establishing dependency, he said.

"We want to establish a strong interdependence at II-Step," Chopra said. "It will be a place where they will receive the help and support of people who have been through the same things they have. We want to help them establish patterns of self-sufficiency, self-esteem and self-reliance as the building blocks for a wonderful life.

"We will love them, heal them, mend them, then send them," he said.

"It has been said there are only 6 inches between the halo and the noose. We may not get them a halo, but we will take the noose from around their necks."

Anyone interested in making referrals or volunteering to help with II-Step House can call 269-8306. Those interested in making contributions or who want more information about the program can contact Erwin at Falls Church, (703) 534-0819.