

Tenderloin duty high on SFPD ladder to success

Neighborhood captains use it as steppingstone

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

THE Tenderloin Police Station is a proving ground for its captains, says Gary Jimenez, who headed it for three years, from 2006 to '09.

"It's a very challenging assignment [with] two main issues confronting the neighborhood — drug abuse and sales and quality of life," Capt. Jimenez wrote in an email to *The Extra*. "Successfully address these and he or she will have proven their ability to handle any task the city asks of them."

That will be good news for the neighborhood's new captain, John Joseph Garrity, promoted June 19. He's been a cop in the Tenderloin for 24 of his 28 years on the force — so long that he's worked as a sergeant or lieutenant under all of the last six TL captains, who give him an unqualified thumbs-up.

Some of his predecessors took big steps when they left the Tenderloin. Susan Manheimer, commanding officer of the Tenderloin Task Force from 1998 until May 2000, was named chief of police for San Mateo, a post she still holds. Her TL days were "the

best times of my life and career," she says, with the neighborhood "a microcosm of society's successes and failures that let me see how I could make a difference."

Her successor, Steve Tacchini, named captain just before the new TL station opened in October 2000, stayed two years. His Tenderloin tenure, he believes, was the basis for future advancements: "The neighborhood had huge problems, but it taught me about the complexities of working in a high-density, diverse community."

Tacchini's transfer in 2002 to captain of Central Station — a much larger station serving downtown, the

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EXTRA

SAN FRANCISCO

A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN



PHOTO BY TOM CARTER

Otto Duffy has lived in SROs for 24 years. He understands the SRO culture — "It's depressing sometimes. I try not to think about it" — yet chooses to live in the most affordable housing in the city.

Home, sweet SRO

Residents who have lived this life for decades

BY TOM CARTER

SINGLE Room Occupancy hotels have a 200-year legacy in San Francisco. It's the cheapest living accommodations money can buy — the last refuge before homelessness, or the first welcome step up from it.

SRO rooms are little more than a large box. They measure on average 8 by 10 feet — not an easy space to live in. But they have suited laborers, seafarers, migrants, immigrants and, more recently, the homeless. Each floor in older SRO buildings used to have a community bathroom, and some still do, though many, due to the increased involvement of nonprofits and government agencies, now have a private toilet and shower, some a tiny kitchenette, plus social services and recent new rules that make SROs safer and protect residents' rights.

The city had an estimated 90,000 SRO units in 1930. Now 30,000 people are living in about 500 SROs.

Otto Duffy

IT was the best of times in 1986 when Otto Duffy lived in the Aarti Hotel at 391 Leavenworth St., TNDC's first SRO, purchased in 1981. The nonprofit now owns or manages 30 SROs and apartment buildings,

most in the Tenderloin.

Duffy had followed his friends to the Aarti — Jimmy Sugarek and Wade Wilson, who contributed to the long-gone Tenderloin Times, Paul Boden, who went on to the Homeless Coalition, and political activist Bruce Windrem, and Darryl Smith and Laurie Lazar, who started the Luggage Store Art Gallery.

Duffy was a forklift operator working down on the Peninsula. Kelly Cullen, who went on to become TNDC's executive director, had a room at the Aarti, too. And Darwin Diaz, who slept outdoors in Cohen Alley (now the TL National Forest), had done so many chores for the hotel he was soon invited inside to live. But Sugarek and Hudson were the main organizers of the self-styled, nonequity co-op and sparked activities such as group cooking for large, communal dinners.

Duffy is in his late 50s. He has a wispy black-and-gray beard like mutton chops gone wild. Born in San Francisco, he attended S.F. State in the early 1980s.

"There were a lot of upwardly mobile, functional people, and it was the most pleasant, hopeful hotel I ever lived in," he says of the Aarti.

But Duffy left in 1988 to live elsewhere when he got a raise to \$11.50 an hour. The job ended after four years and he returned to the Aarti in 1992 expecting to renew old times. But the movers and shakers were gone.

"When I came back the standard had changed. The cooking declined. People didn't have the money. Before, I'd go to farmers' market and bring back a bunch of vegetables and cook, and the next day, someone else would do it. The cooperative ener-

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PHOTO BY TOM CARTER

Capt. John Joseph Garrity greets well-wishers at a reception at the Infusion Lounge June 30.

A Plea for Unity

HERE is a move afoot to make mid-Market a proper name. People are carving out a section of our neighborhood and renaming it Mid-Market. Subtle, that capital letter, but powerful — and divisive. When it's lower case mid-Market, it's generic. Cap the M on mid and it becomes a brand.

Down here in the central city, where the trenches run especially deep, we are the Tenderloin on the north side of Market Street.

And South of the Slot we're SoMa, west SoMa, Sixth Street Corridor or Skid Row. We are what we are, but we're not Mid-Market, with our identity being handed to us by some realtor.

They try to divide us, slice us up to fit someone else's notion of where we live and work.

Mid-Market is another of those faux real estate labels, like NoPa, north of the Panhandle, in which a neighborhood is manufactured to give real estate agents a new, hot area to sell. Tenderloin is scary; Mid-Market is marketable.

Where is mid-Market anyhow? Does it begin at Fifth Street or Sixth? Does it go to Seventh, or Eighth — as The Extra studied in our mid-Market series — or to 10th, where the mayor's Central Market Cultural District Loan Fund reaches.

And how far on either side of Market Street does "mid-Market" run? Maybe to Mission Street on the south. Maybe not.

How about north of Market? The mayor's HUD loan initiative takes in several blocks of the Tenderloin, but could push fairly deep into the hood.

So now are we supposed to give up the name Tenderloin and all that it stands for and settle for mediocre Mid-Market, a term useful for casual reference but not worth ceding a single block of our storied turf to.

Historically, everything north of Market is the Tenderloin, and everything in the opposite direction is South of Market, or, to be hyper-local, west SoMa. But no cap W please. Don't slice us up with your words.

Together we form the central city, proud to be among the historical neighborhoods of San Francisco and an important part of District 6.

You can refer inconclusively to a few of our blocks as mid-Market, but save your upper-case, upper-class sales pitch for your wine and cheese parties. ■

► CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Financial District, Chinatown, North Beach and the waterfront north of Market Street — was definitely "upward," he says. From there he moved on to commander and deputy chief of the Field Operations Bureau, captain of Mission Station and, this year, commander of the city's Traffic Company, with 100 officers under him.

David Shinn, who replaced Tacchini, calls his time in the TL "a fantastic experience . . . the best of my times on the force, mainly because of my connection to the officers and the community."

After 18 months, Shinn was named commander of SFPD's Field Operations Bureau for patrol; then he became deputy chief of the whole bureau, deputy chief of department investigations and, in 2009, deputy chief at the airport, with 331 personnel under him. "We have 7,100 acres," Shinn said "and I'm responsible for law enforcement for all of it."

Kathryn Brown wore the Tenderloin mantle after Shinn, staying more than 2½ years, until November 2006. It wasn't a random assignment. Given her choice of stations to command, she chose TL, where she had spent three years on the Tenderloin Task Force in the early 1990s. It was in the TL, she told a community meeting a month into her captaincy, "that I started to listen to people on the street."

Brown had had 22 years in the department with previous assignments in the Mission, Northern, Bayview and Richmond stations and a job as Administration Bureau commander. From the Tenderloin, Brown was bumped up again to commander, this time of airport investigations. She now is an Operations Bureau night captain.

Jimenez followed Brown. Ubiquitous in the community and affable with neighbors, he seemed to relish his time in the Tenderloin, a place, he said, "that requires some very dedicated officers to address its many social and criminal problems." ■

Of his November transfer to night supervising captain of Field Operations, he says, "Many would not look on it as a reward, but I am having fun being a cop on the beat again — the night watch is very fast-paced and exciting, a perfect assignment."

Jimenez, on the force for 40 years, says he will retire next year.

Dominic Celaya, Jimenez's successor, took over here after being lieutenant in charge of the general work detail at the Hall of Justice. He became the TL's shortest-tenured captain, here just seven months before his major reassignment to commander of the Tactical Division, which includes the SWAT, bomb, mounted, canine and other units.

Celaya turned over the reins to Garrity in June.

Garrity, 52, joined the force in 1992 as a patrolman at Central Station, which took in the TL, and was a section head here from '98 to '04, when he was promoted to lieutenant. Shorter stints at Northern Station and with the Tactical Squad, public transit and Homeland Security followed. He returned to the Tenderloin as the officer in charge of the Market Street foot beat unit in 2008. With his promotion, he takes over a company of 105 men and women.

"I feel comfortable in the new job," Garrity told The Extra. "I've been here long enough to know the neighborhood's saints and the sinners — I know the people and will build on that."

And he wants a return to what he calls "policing basics — I want the same officers on the same beats all the time so they'll get to know residents and business owners and the activities there, so they'll take pride in their work." Do that, he says, "and all else will fall into place."

Garrity's promotion delighted Manheimer: "It's one of the most remarkable, enjoyable things I've heard in a long time. He's part of the Tenderloin's heart and soul, the original community police officer, the real deal." ■



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Bowers' turn to howl

WE will leave it for others to independently review this new book by Ed Bowers, a security guard who moonlights as a poet. Here we simply want to hip you to an important new work from the hood.

Bowers works graveyard for The Extra, serving as its somewhat self-indulgent Art Beat writer. He's the one who brought you "Will Bark for Food" and a fine photo poem series. So, clearly, my effort here is self-serving.

Many months back, Bowers started emceeding readings at his hangout, the 21 Club, "diviest bar in the Tenderloin," Esquire calls it. The landmark watering hole is smack on the hot corner of the Tenderloin Arts Corridor. It's also now an arts venue: The 21 Club hosts the only ongoing poetry readings this side of Brainwash.

To stay busy, Bowers wrote this concept piece of 21 poems. Turns out the idea provided this stream-of-consciousness writer some welcome structure and focus. To wit, a few choice tidbits plucked from among the poems.

- I admire people who put tattoos on their faces.
They're not trying to impress me.
They're trying to warn me.
- Hemingway was afraid of nouns.
Hemingway loved war.
War is full of verbs.
- The Universe is points of light
fogged by points of view.
- I don't want someone to save me.
I want me to save me.
- I'm sitting here inside me.
Whoever created me is gone.
I am my own responsibility.



21 POEMS

Done in the 21 Club
Ground Zero in the Tenderloin

By Ed Bowers

STUDY CENTER PRESS

There are those of you who will be put off by Bowers' unabashed desire for drink and his perhaps overwrought reverence for neighborhood oases. But it is what it is, as we say, and refer you to the latter two excerpts above to savor his understanding of the ultimate bottom line when it comes to abuse.

I think "21 Poems" is a fine work by the Tenderloin bard. He even lives practically next door to where The Blackhawk once wailed. Now it's his turn to howl. It's published by Study Center Press as a central city extra.

What adds to the uniqueness of this little book of timeless poetry are images captured during a single evening of the poetry readings, sponsored by The Extra, that Bowers presents at the 21 Club the second Wednesday of every month. The artful journalism of Lenny Limjoco, Study Center art director and photographer, play point and counterpoint with the 21 poems.

You can get a copy at The 21 Club or at The Extra — \$5 either way. ■

— GEOFF LINK

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'The TL is not the best place to get

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gy had gone, and there were behavior issues."

When the Aarti was being renovated in 1994, Duffy found a room at the five-story Ritz, 216 Ellis St., also a TNDC property. He's been there since. His third-floor room, with bathroom, had been reserved for a disabled person but the deal fell through and Duffy got it.

The Ritz had a community kitchen on the mezzanine, recently renovated. But over the years it hasn't been the oasis Duffy wanted. The cooperative spirit is missing, and utensils left behind disappear and often people don't clean up after themselves.

The thefts in the hotel may not be the residents' sticky fingers, Duffy suggests, but their guests and the people who sneak in could be responsible. He won't directly criticize his fellow residents.

The Ritz is a Section 8 hotel for people with mental or physical disabilities; rent is \$750 monthly. Duffy says he's retired so he pays 30% of his income; the government makes up the rest.

Crock pot cooking in his room is okay but hot plates are forbidden, though some residents ignore the rule. With his budget, Duffy eats at "all the soup kitchens."

Duffy has a petulant streak because, he says, he's never satisfied.

"Having been in the Aarti, I'm challenged to find anything as pleasant as that was. But the Ritz is better than many. The biggest problem is the behavior issue."

Duffy, who volunteered for several years in District 6 Supervisor Chris Daly's office, and now volunteers for Daly's former aide Supervisor John Avalos, says he

You see a lot of sick people making bad life choices — it's depressing sometimes. I try not to think about it.

"Some people here do age gracefully and they're role models, exceptions. But I think when I get old I'll ask for a senior SRO like the Alexander."

That's another TNDC building, and right next door. ■

— TOM CARTER

Carmen Sigua

CARMEN Sigua smiles sweetly and says that the Alexander Residence is her home and it's just fine with her. "We wouldn't have stayed here this long if it weren't nice," she said.

Eighteen years ago, her husband Ambrosio left the Philippines and moved to the Alexander, then, as now, a HUD-insured Section 8 building. A year later, after good-byes to family and friends, she joined him.

"He had only one friend in San Francisco and we had no family here, but I was so happy to be with him again — I just wanted to see everything with my husband," Mrs. Sigua said.

Any qualms she might have had about living in an SRO in the Tenderloin are not part of her memories. She recalls taking long walks around the neighborhood with her husband, traveling all over the city to see the sights, leaving the city by bus to do a little gambling in casinos — doing everything together.

TNDC bought the Alexander in 2000 and after its 2004 renovation, the Siguas moved up one floor to a larger room, one with a separate sleeping area and private bathroom, unusual for SROs but more appropriate for a couple, she says.

"This is a good place, and the building hasn't changed much in 17 years," she said. "The management takes care if it. If there's something wrong, like in my bathroom, I call them and they come right away to fix it."

Today, Mrs. Sigua, 77, lives alone, surrounded by her collections of small figurines, vases filled with cheerful artificial flowers and scores of framed photos. The most recent is of her newest great-grandchild. The oldest is two separate photos in one frame, her at 16 and Ambrosio during World War II in his summer Navy whites.

Ambrosio died in 2008 during surgery for an aneurysm. He was 82. The brood of their 55-year marriage includes three daughters, four grandchildren and five great-grandkids, all living in the Philippines except for one daughter and her family who live in Japan. Although there are frequent phone calls, busy lives and long distances make visiting difficult, she says, and increase her feelings of loneliness.

"My husband's death was very hard for me, and it still is," she said, "but my faith and lots of friends keep me going."

Mrs. Sigua looks trim and fit, which she attributes to not sitting around too much. "When someone invites me out, I go."

One friend has a car, and they take trips to see the Golden Gate Bridge and other city destinations. She still likes to walk, always with a friend, and seems unafraid of heading over to Walgreens at Ninth and Market, or going out to eat at McDonalds or to Kusina Ni Tess, a Filipino restaurant on Ellis Street.

Many afternoons she socializes with Filipina friends in the Alexander's airy lobby, relaxing after a morning of cleaning and tidying her rooms. Church on Sunday and Bible study one or two evenings a week at the First Christian Ministry fill her hours. Evenings she likes TV — "Family Feud" and "The Price Is Right" are my favorites," she says.

From her eighth-floor room, she can see "problems and things going on" on the street, but they don't seem to have colored her affection for her home: "It's a safe place. I'm alone, but I feel safe. I'm okay. I'm always okay." ■

— MARJORIE BEGGS

Jim Ayers

AT the Lawrence Hotel on Sixth Street there's one resident who other tenants look to whenever building renovations are needed. "It's a one-man army: me," Jim Ayers says about his ongoing struggle for better living conditions.

Ayers served in the Army from 1960 until 1963 and he's brought that no-nonsense style to the Lawrence, saying what he thinks and standing up for what he believes is right.

Since 1992, when Ayers moved into the same room he lives in now, he has fought the landlord: to remove the decrepit, "stinky" carpets, install sprinklers and



PHOTO BY

Feisty Jim Ayers, whose personal mission is to improve the Hotel, knows the baggage that comes with cheap rent.

upgrade the wiring so that two electrical appliances can run simultaneously without blowing a fuse. On all of these fronts, Ayers has won using his tried-and-true tactic: "Bitchin' at 'em."

Ayers has spent the past 18 years in the same third-floor room in what he calls a "nice setup." About 130 square feet, the room has a sink in the corner, microwave, an oven, a PC, a TV and a 1950s GE refrigerator.

"This milk will get so cold," Ayers says, taking a carton out of the fridge, "it will give you an ice cream headache."

Ayers' most prized possession is his stereo with its wired speakers bellowing noise from all directions. He keeps it tuned to 96.5 KOIT except when his neighbors complain it's too loud. When that happens, he pops in Beethoven or Tchaikovsky and cranks the volume till the bass synthesizes with his neighbor's wall-pounding complaints.

Ayers feels like pounding the wall himself sometimes because the bathroom situation is so frustrating. There are 40 residents and one shower, which makes for long waits. To make matters worse, the shower is on the second floor; Ayers lives on the third where there are two toilets.

"Going to the bathroom praying no one's down there, it gets mind-boggling after a while," he says. It's worse in the middle of the night. He has to get up, get dressed, grab his keys and toilet paper, lock his door and hope that when he gets there the toilet is available. Sometimes there are feces on the seat and urine on the floor and when it's cold the unheated facility takes inconvenience to another level. "You freeze to death in there in the winter. It all gets old."

He doesn't leave the Lawrence because "it's the same at every SRO," and rent here is cheap (\$357 a month for his room). "You have to put up with it," Ayers says. "If I get down in the dumps, I'll turn on some cartoons or go outside and walk around the neighborhood."

Lights are out from 9 p.m. until waking at 3 a.m. when Ayers makes a cup of coffee and goes outside to wait for the street sweeper. When it starts to rumble down the street, he hops in his red Toyota 4Runner and drives it around the block until the street is clean and he can reclaim his spot in front of his SRO.

He's back in his room by 4:20 a.m., watches "Cops," and then the 5 a.m. news. After the news he turns the radio on and sleeps until 10 a.m. During the day Ayers is in his room for roughly eight of the 11 hours he's awake. The time outside of his room is spent on Sixth Street talking to people or just observing. During his days and nights waiting for the street cleaner, Ayers has seen a lot on Sixth Street.

"People have picked up pigeon feces because it's white and tried to smoke it," Ayers says. He understands addiction. His brother overdosed on heroin twice. He knows that if anyone wants to stop "they have to get out of the environment around here."

The environment at times becomes claustrophobic and Ayers has to get out too, even if only for a little while.

"There were times I used to wake up so disgusted with life I'd just get in my



Cecil Baker
the communitarian



PHOTO BY MARJORIE BEGGS

Carmen Sigua, 77, two years a widow, still feels secure in her unit at the Alexander and in the neighborhood.

doesn't have the answers.

"But I try to get people to vote and take responsibility for their neighborhood and district and to defend the public resources that are the basis of our well-being," he says. "Then I think they'll start thinking of their personal issues. It's the audacity of hope."

The Ritz lobby and front desk were recently refurbished and a new elevator installed. The hallways are clean and bright, a contrast to many private SROs that are decrepit and dirty.

Duffy says at times the place is very friendly and people look out for each other. His idea of a good time is sitting in the lobby with a half dozen residents talking and letting their hair down. But it's a fleeting moment.

"People are on their guard all the time. Then it breaks down for a minute and people are open and friendly. And I dunno, maybe they are sorry they let down their security for a moment."

Duffy's cluttered room is conveniently messy and his mattress on the floor is near a wall wash basin. The bathroom is small, without a door, shared once with an adjoining room before the renovation sealed it off. It has an old-timey bathtub and toilet and, between them, a small, jammed refrigerator with a microwave on top.

Asked if he would move out of the Ritz and the TL if he had the chance, he immediately says, "Yes!" then backs off. "Maybe I was too quick. The TL is not the best place to get old in. But what can I do about it?"

old in. But what can I do about it?’



CONOR GALLAGHER
the Lawrence

car and drive,” he says. “Sometimes I’d end up in Reno.” He’s thankful that he has a car so he can escape when he needs to. “A lot of people don’t leave their room except for beer, cigarettes, drugs or food.” They’re not much help in his battles with the landlord.

“People in the hotel are a good bunch, but when push comes to shove they clam up because they’re afraid of the landowner.” The former Army man has no such fear and likes to cite something his grandfather told him: “Money can buy you a lot of things, but one thing in this world that money can’t buy is respect.” He emphasizes *respect*. “Don’t lose it. Don’t let it go, because you’ll never get it back.”

While the Lawrence has come a long way from the “hell” and “dump” it was 18 years ago, improvements still need to be made, Ayers says. His two biggest concerns are getting the locks removed from the mailboxes in the hotel foyer so residents can get individual mail delivery and doing something about the noise at Club Six, located beneath the hotel at street level.

“I’ve been fighting them for eight years,” he says about Club Six. “I call the police, I call the Entertainment Commission.” The club owner has spent many thousands of dollars on soundproofing, yet the noise persists.

Ayers came from Fresno to San Francisco in 1991. He was living on Stevenson Street in the camper attached to his truck. He started seeing a woman who lived at the Lawrence and, in 1992, got his own room there. He sometimes wonders what family life would be like.

“It’s a very boring situation to be alone,” he says. “The mind starts wandering, wondering, ‘What are you doing?’ “ And he thinks often about his two children, both live in Kentucky. He drove out to see them eight years ago. Before he left, his daughter sent him a map with the route mapped out along with places to eat, sleep and get gas. “It was so cute.”

While he may think about family a lot, Ayers doesn’t foresee any change for him in the near future.

“I’ll keep doing the same thing I’m doing,” he says. “I’m an activist.” ■

— CONOR GALLAGHER

Cecil Baker

Cecil Baker, 59, is sitting in the Ambassador Hotel’s small lobby, back to the window, his short blonde wig backlit by the morning sun. He’s wearing earrings, a string of beige beads and a colorful brown, black and tan figured smock that he says is women’s nightwear he bought at Ross. He prefers to wear it as a shirt, today over black tights.

Baker’s dimpled, pudgy face works as he talks and his eyes are sincere behind large glasses. He acknowledges my approval of his matched outfit by saying, “Well, I haven’t decided what I am ... yet.”

Baker has lived in SROs for 26 years, nearly 20 at



PHOTO BY TOM CARTER

lived at the Ambassador when it was “the AIDS hotel.” He misses city support of those days, but not the rats and trash.

the Ambassador. He has seen enough to write a book. If he did, a lot of it would be pitiful. And some of it, amid the tragedy, would be joyous and uplifting.

Once Baker had a job he loved: payroll secretary at Kaiser Engineers in Oakland, but he was laid off and he moved to San Francisco. He wasn’t comfortable as a gay man living at home, he says, because his father “hated” him. His mother kept quiet and never spoke against homosexuality.

Baker lived in the Aldridge on Jones Street in 1986, as did quite a few prostitutes. He had a part-time job but got mixed up in drugs, lost the job and moved into the Ambassador in 1990 before it was a nonprofit. It was about the time Hank Wilson was managing the SRO, and sick and dispossessed people with AIDS were welcomed there to save them from homelessness and death in the streets.

TNDC bought the Ambassador in 1999, renovated its 134 rooms — installing a bathroom in each — and completed the job in 2003. Baker, who had been living at the Delta on Sixth Street (now the Bayanihan), moved back in.

The Aldridge and Delta were dumps, he said, but didn’t compare with the rock bottom the Ambassador, a magnificent, 12-story hotel built in 1910, had hit in the 1990s. It was in such deplorable condition in 1999 that many AIDS residents and the agencies serving them had fled.

“There was trash in the hallways and rats and everybody was having sex with anybody in the stairwells — there were a few straight people — 24-hour-a-day drug dealing and people jumping out of the windows and prostitutes bringing in johns with guns,” Baker recalls.

“Visiting Nurses had a station on the second floor and I felt good about that and (Rev.) Glenda Hope was doing good work here. There was one expert here to help people get on SSI, too.” The Ambassador hotel was known as San Francisco’s AIDS hotel and a documentary film was made about it.

“I moved into my completed room in 2002 with all its amenities,” Baker says. “It has a bathroom now, for example. It used to be for poor people with AIDS. Now it’s so expensive to live here I couldn’t afford it. I’m on Social Security disability. And the people who live here are not particularly working class. It bites the shit out of me.”

Fifty rooms at the Ambassador are designated for HUD McKinney Shelter Plus Care Section 8 rental assistance. The remaining rooms are available to anyone earning 50% or less than the area media income. In 2007, that was \$65,500. Most qualify.

A social worker reaches around Baker’s walker and leaves a box of cookies and one of brownies, Baker has trouble walking because of diabetes and back pain. In the afternoon he’ll give out the treats at the Listening Post, an upstairs room Rev. Hope created in the terrible Nineties as a place for residents to gather.

“This used to be a welcoming building,” Baker went on. “Well, it was mostly good-looking homosexual men who came here. Hank helped people get in who didn’t have much money.”

Modern times are different.

“It’s a very nice, clean building now, but high income doesn’t mean civility. When somebody died in the old days, the room where the memorial was held was overflowing with people. Now, it’s just three or four who attend. Now, we don’t know each other and we don’t care.”

Baker’s 8- by 10-foot fifth-floor room is tidy and home also to two large cats, Charlie and Johnny, who a couple of years ago made the cover of Paws magazine. A framed picture of the cover hangs on one wall showing Baker proudly holding his “babies.” But for all its coziness, the room’s single-pane windows on two sides keep it cold.

Despite SRO improvements over the years, such as establishing the SRO Hotel Visitor Policy that outlawed the notorious practice of desk clerks charging people who visit in SROs, there are still things that grate on Baker about the SRO life. The policy rules limit residents to eight overnight visits a month. “It’s not right,” Baker says. “Why should we be limited at all? People in homes and hotels aren’t. And it’s impossible to maintain a serious relationship because of it.”

Baker, like many other SRO dwellers, longs for the past, or some mysterious catalyst to make the present an equally heartening experience.

“People just aren’t connected,” he says. “We’ve nothing in common except being different shades of poor. We used to have the AIDS epidemic.” ■

— TOM CARTER



PHOTO BY TOM CARTER

Marvis Phillips recently lost the love of his life, and his community work has become more important than ever.

Marvis Phillips

THE Alexander Residence has a spacious lobby. It’s airy and redolent of old times with almost a Southern feel. In the middle of the lobby, close to the quick flow of people, Marvis Phillips is observing everyone from his spot on the couch. Phillips uses the lobby like a sitting room pretty much daily.

After 8 at night it gets quieter in the common area. The residents drift upstairs and 54-year-old Phillips has to face the fact that he is on his own. This is still new for him. His wife, Loretta, died in November. They had both lived at the Alexander since Marvis moved in, in 1992. He met Loretta in the lobby, when he was high on meth.

“But she decided to sit next to me. That was a good time,” he says.

Two years after they met, she got him off the needle, and he’s been clean since. His life changed when Loretta entered it. Now it has changed, because she is gone. He is getting better day by day, but thinks the Alexander Residence should have a support group for persons in the Tenderloin who are newly widowed.

His room, one of 179 at the Alexander, has a bathroom. It costs him \$269 a month. He’s been on SSI for more than 30 years. Phillips, originally from Denver, suffers from a back injury, is manic-depressive, and unable to work.

Phillips lives in the end room on a spur off the long corridor on the 12th floor where the carpet is spotless and the bright walls unblemished. “Oh, yes, very clean,” Phillips says from his bed on which he spends most of his time. Also in the room is a chair, a herd of 100 stuffed animals, other collections, files and jars that would spell clutter if not so well organized. Behind his bed are two windows that give good light. “They shampoo the carpets every other month and clean linoleum (in the downstairs community room) once a week.”

His ailments also entitle him to free frozen dinners seven days a week — through a program for the disabled under 60. Hot plates are not allowed, but residents can have a microwave oven or a hot pot, so Phillips heats the cold meals. He also dines out, often at Manor House Restaurant next door on Jones Street.

“I have to pay there, though,” he says. His smile suggests the food is worth it. What better testimony to culinary satisfaction than a neighborhood son with a record of 25 years eating there. Phillips has privileges, too. “The fried rice says with hamburger, or sausage or ham, but I tell Mimi ‘all of it’ and that’s what I get.” He keeps the Manor menu bedside.

Eating at the ever-busy joint gives him a burst of social activity, but it is not enough. Phillips dreams about more events for his Alexander neighbors.

“We used to take buses to places. Every July 4th we went to the beach and had a barbecue. We used to go to Marine World. We miss that around here,” he says and suggests that the recreational services should be arranged by TNDC.

Alexander Residence has been the best SRO where Phillips has lived in his 30 years in residential hotels. He knows how bad it can get, because he has lived in six SROs, including the Elm, the Ritz, the Cadillac, Baldwin House and the Marlton Manor. His worst experience was at the Elm from 1980 to 1983.

➤ CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

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ERIC LUTZ
Loved rock 'n' roll and NASCAR

After living at the Hotel Essex for two years, Eric Lutz still had few friends among the residents.

"He was an avid reader who mostly kept to himself and didn't participate in our events," said Lisa Howe, the hotel's social worker. Mr. Lutz died May 24 of complications from MS and seizure disorder, she said. He was 49.

Fiercely independent, Mr. Lutz seemed to have had no family relationships, Howe said. She thought he had lived in San Francisco for many years, and she knew he'd been a sergeant in the Air Force. She didn't know if he had seen action.

Most of the eight people who came to remember Mr. Lutz at a June 3 memorial were staff, with a notable exception.

"Eric was one of my best friends," said Conde J. (CJ) Peoples, who lives in the Tenderloin, but not at this SRO. "We met two years ago and we just clicked — it was amazing because we were opposites in so many ways."

Peoples tearfully tried to describe what his friend had meant to him. He shook his head in disbelief at "the rarity" of their relationship and the contradictions in Mr. Lutz's personality: "He shared what he had and was a gentle, loving man, but he was also crazy sometimes and a stubborn son of a bitch."

Rock 'n' roll was a passion. "Whitesnake, Crosby, Stills & Nash, the Rolling Stones — he especially loved those groups, and we'd go to the Gangway and listen to them on the jukebox," Peoples recalled.

Another of their favorite pastimes was to watch NASCAR races on TV. "Eric knew all the cars, what they were, who the drivers were," Peoples said. "It gave him real joy. NASCAR is so completely not me, but I enjoyed his enthusiasm."

When his health worsened, Mr. Lutz rejected Peoples' offer to help him physically — "which pissed me off so much," Peoples said. "But I respected his choice and it taught me a lot about 'going' — about dying — in one's own way."

Two weeks before he died, Mr. Lutz was quite ill and hadn't budged from his room for many days, Howe said. Suddenly, he showed up downstairs, insisted he was feeling good, went out and ate a big meal and brought flowers back for the staff.

"He really was a lover of life," Howe said.

Tenant Services counselor Megan Smith called him a loving, thoughtful man who sometimes stopped in just to thank the staff.

Peoples, too, thanked the Essex staff for their care of his friend and the energy they'd put into helping him.

The Essex, at 684 Ellis, has a beautiful Art Deco sign that was refurbished when Community Housing Partnership and Mercy Housing renovated and reopened the hotel in 2008.

Peoples' voice caught: "It's going to be hard to walk by that sign every day and not think of Eric." ■

— MARJORIE BEGGS

Phillips, 30 years in SROs

► CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

"When I stayed there, the Elm had a lot of drug dealing and a lot of health issues. I remember rats, roaches, bugs."

He liked the Ritz and the Cadillac better, but eventually Phillips was thrown out of those places. His time at the Ritz came to an end when he was unable to pay rent. The managers at the Cadillac wanted him out in 1989, after a TV crew had visited the hotel and filmed him shooting drugs. Although the situation was staged — the TV people just wanted him to show their viewers how to clean a needle to prevent the spreading of AIDS, he said — Phillips' landlords saw the broadcasting as a bad commercial for the Cadillac, which was the pioneer of non-profit SROs in the Tenderloin.

His stay at Alexander Residence is less controversial. Phillips praises the SRO as clean and dry, and it feels safe with a 24-hour desk clerk. He is a Neighborhood Watch block captain: a civilian who helps the police; Phillips keeps an eye on the 200 block of Eddy Street and the 300 block of Ellis.

Phillips' commitment to the community is considerable as a member of Central City Democrats and Alliance for a Better District 6. Both groups encourage central city dwellers to participate in elections and government.

"I enjoy doing this kind of work, assisting people. I have been to most places and done most things, so I know how to solve a lot of problems. Just talk to Marvis," he says.

"In 1989, after the earthquake they (the city) offered me an apartment on Twin Peaks (in Diamond Heights), but I turned it down," he says. "I feel needed in the Tenderloin. It's where I belong."

He cannot be as active as he used to be, as he is also coping with a heart condition. But when it comes to volunteering, he does not believe he will ever stop.

Lately he has been writing letters on behalf of the Alliance for a Better District 6.

"It keeps me busy and it keeps me from thinking about my wife."

He even turned his heartbreak into positive action when he lobbied TNDC for weeks after her death to make grief counseling available for the residents. "It took me 50 phone calls," he says, "but now we've got it through our social services." ■

— JOHAN VARDUP

Tom Carter contributed to this story.

Johan Vardup and Conor Gallagher, S.F. State students in Professor Jon Funabiki's journalism class, wrote the profiles of Jim Ayers and Marvis Phillips as a class assignment.



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Your vote counts on Nov. 2, 2010

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

COMMUNITY: REGULAR SCHEDULE

SPECIAL EVENTS

District 6 Safety Forum, Tue., Aug. 10, 6 p.m., 201 Turk St. community room. Code enforcement and alcohol permits are the focus of forum, organized by Alliance for a Better District 6, co-sponsored by Market Street Assn., North of Market Business Assn., Tenant Associations Coalition, Tip Top Market, Boys and Girls Clubs of S.F. TL Clubhouse, Tenderloin Neighborhood Assn., TNDC. Info: 820-1560.

Police Commission meets at Tenderloin Station community room, Wed. Aug. 25, 6 p.m., 201 Turk St. Captain Garrity will present State of the Tenderloin District Report; public comment period follows. Info: 345-7300.

ARTS EVENTS

"Harvest: What have you gathered?" call for art, TL CBD gallery, for winter exhibition. All media welcome, must address harvest theme. Artists keep 100% of sales. Art drop-off deadline: Sat., 5 p.m., Aug. 21, 134A Golden Gate Ave. Info: 756-2325.

NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT

Central Market Community Benefit District, board meets 2nd Tuesday of the month, Hotel Whitcomb, 1231 Market St., 3 p.m. Information: 882-3088, <http://central-market.org>.

Friends of Boeddeker Park, 2nd Thursday of the month, 3:30 p.m., Boeddeker Rec Center, 240 Eddy St. Plan park events, activities and improvements. Contact Betty Traynor, 931-1126.

Gene Friend Recreation Center Advisory Board, 3rd Thursday of the month, 5 p.m. Board works to protect SoMa resources for children, youth, families and adults. Gene Friend Recreation Center, 270 Sixth St. Information: 538-8100 x202.

North of Market/Tenderloin Community Benefit District. Full board meets 3rd Monday of every other month, 5:30 p.m., 134 Golden Gate Ave., 292-4812.

SOMA Community Stabilization Fund Community Advisory Committee meets 3rd Thursday of the month, 5:30 p.m., 1 South Van Ness, 2nd floor atrium. Info: Claudine del Rosario 749-2519.

SoMa Leadership Council, 3rd Wednesday of the month, 6 p.m., The Arc, 1500 Howard St. at 11th. Emphasizes good planning and good government to maintain a diverse, vibrant, complete neighborhood. Contact: Jim Meko, 624-4309 or jim.meko@comcast.net.

South of Market Project Area Committee, 3rd Monday of the month, 6 p.m., 1035 Folsom St. Health, Safety and Human Services Committee meets monthly on the 1st Tuesday after the 1st Monday, 1035 Folsom St., noon. Information: 487-2166 or www.sompac.com.

Tenant Associations Coalition of San Francisco, 1st Wednesday of the month, noon, 201 Turk St.,

Community Room. Contact Michael Nulty, 339-8327. Resident unity, leadership training.

Tenderloin Futures Collaborative, 3rd Wednesday of the month, 11 a.m.-noon, Tenderloin Police community room, 301 Eddy. Presentations on issues of interest to neighborhood residents, nonprofits and businesses. Information: tifutures.org, 820-3989.

Tenderloin Neighborhood Association, 2nd Friday of the month beginning in June, 631 O'Farrell St., 4:30 p.m. Nonprofit focuses on health and wellness activities to promote neighborly interactions. Info: tenderloinneighborhood@yahoo.com.

Tenderloin Police Station Community Meeting, last Tuesday of the month, 6 p.m., police station Community Room, 301 Eddy St. Call Susa Black, 345-7300. Neighborhood safety.

For space considerations, the calendar is shorter than usual this month. We hope to restore it to its regular size in September.

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