

DISH throws a party to celebrate it



PHOTOS BY JOHN MARK JOHNSON/DISH

At the DISH raffle table, Molly White, assistant general manager, Windsor Hotel, left, and Emily Van Loon, assistant general manager of the Empress Hotel, part of the SRO staff that helps formerly homeless stabilize their housing — and their lives.

Event gives testimony to how on-site staff help recently homeless find they can go home again

BY JONATHAN NEWMAN

THE IMPORTANCE of supportive housing in the city's strategy to combat homelessness was made clear by the stories of four formerly homeless people at DISH's second annual Tenant Appreciation Party.

Delivering Innovation in Supportive Housing (DISH) took over the Kroc Center gym May 16 to throw the party, a tribute to the homeless who the Department of Public Health's Direct Access to Housing program helped leave the streets and move into a stable home.

DISH, a 6-year-old nonprofit, contracts exclusively with the DPH housing program to provide front desk, custodial and maintenance services at six SRO hotels — the Camelot, Empress, Le Nain, Pacific Bay Inn and Windsor in the Tenderloin and the Star on Mission Street — homes for 450 formerly homeless who have a history of special needs: mental health issues, substance abuse problems or chronic medical conditions.

With 70 employees, DISH keeps the hotels running smoothly. "Everybody can use a good concierge," Director Doug Gary said.

In this city of tight housing and cut-throat high rents, a property manager dedicated to your comfort is a bonus for a ten-



The popular popcorn cart adds a carnival flair to the Tenant Appreciation Party.

ant; a property manager who throws a party in your honor is a rare bird, indeed.

More than 100 formerly homeless adults, many wreathed in neon green and yellow Mardi Gras beads, dined on chicken, pasta and burgers, sang along and applauded a local open-mic talent show and alternately cheered and groaned at the calling of winning raffle numbers.

They took keepsake four-to-a-strip face photos in old style booths and munched cart-popped corn and chocolates by the bagful. And they proudly accepted the DISH tribute for leaving homelessness and seeking safe housing.

Housing the homeless is the simple solution to a vexing city problem, but the

nuts and bolts of housing and, more importantly, supporting the homeless through the oft-perilous transition from life on the street to a settled home requires the combined efforts of landlord and tenant.

DPH supplies support services in-house — case managers, social workers, nurses and home care aides — to the tenants. DISH manages the property.

One thing DPH knows: If the homeless can settle into a stable residence, their ongoing dependency and demand on hospitals, emergency ambulances, police, probation and courts lessen and the costs to the city go down.

The key to that happening is housing the homeless properly: Give them a lot of help. And be patient.