

GEORGE GREEN Forklift operator

George Green longed for his productive days as a forklift operator as he whiled away his years at the Hamlin Hotel watching TV and movies with friends, nipping at booze even toward the end when the cancer ravaged his emaciated 5-foot-8 frame and sent him across the bay into the arms of his girlfriend where he died.

His friend of many years, Clarence Varnedoe, was one of a half dozen mourners at Mr. Green's memorial June 17 in the hotel's sparse community room. Varnedoe, a Department of Public Works employee who now lives near Fisherman's Wharf, was Mr. Green's sixth-floor neighbor. He arrived late, after Rev. Glenda Hope's prayers and Scripture.

"I moved here in 1996 when (the hotel) reopened," Varnedoe said. "George came five or six years later. I met him on the elevator. I knew him a long time. We had a lot of conversations and ups and downs.

"My grandmother used to say, 'We're born, we live and we die. So accept life as it is,'" Varnedoe said.

"I couldn't say it better," Mary said from the second row.

Another woman said she used to "go to his home and watch TV and just talk."

They remembered Mr. Green's love of movies. They watched "all kinds" with him, Mary said, cowboy, action and even exotic, and he especially liked the "Wolf Man." They also said Mr. Green was a quiet man.

The beeping outside of heavy equipment backup alarms and the groaning of a hydraulic lift permeated the air and people tried to speak above it, sounds that might have been music to Mr. Green, or at least set him reminiscing.

"He'd visit me, too," Varnedoe said. "He'd talk about the good old days growing up in L.A., the job he had for 15 years as a forklift operator. He loved the job."

Nobody knew if a disability knocked Mr. Green out of his seat, but Varnedoe said he was sad not to be working and missed it.

"He was a good person, you could tell in conversation by the way he respected his family, the way he talked to people, politely, and he offered you food," Varnedoe paused and smiled. "He liked his alcohol."

The mourners were surprised to hear that Mr. Green had moved out of the hotel. One said he had died in a hospital, maybe Laguna Honda. His ex-wife might know, they said.

Contacted in the East Bay, Angela Hall explained later on the phone that Mr. Green had not checked out of the Hamlin but had come to be with her, a good friend, not his ex-wife. She had known him 15 years and confirmed he previously worked in a warehouse.

"He died May 30 of cancer, at home with me," she said.

"He drank a lot. It's all he did."

The best thing she could say about him, when asked, was: "He didn't take no shit (drugs). He was a loner, but a good friend with a heart of gold. If he liked you, he'd give you the shirt off his back."

Mr. Green was 61. ■

— Tom Carter

RICHARD VIDAURRI They called him "Speedy"

No one at the Ambassador Hotel called Richard Vidaurri by his given name. He was "Speedy" to all, much loved and much missed since he died in mid-May. More than 20 residents and staff attended his May 21 memorial, about half crammed into the tiny

Listening Post at the Ambassador Hotel and the rest gathered just outside the door, straining to catch what was being said inside.

"When we heard he had died, I saw people standing at his door crying," said neighbor Edmond Juicye.

Several people called him "sweet" and "friendly" and a "good spirit." Others remembered how he'd see them in the hall and jovially command them, "Go to your room!"

He had a notable appetite until his last months, said others. He was the go-to guy for help setting up neighbors' cable TV, liked to play pranks, and knew a lot about gambling and race cars. On more than one occasion, he playfully told his neighbor Sasha that they'd get married someday, she said.

"Speedy and I weren't close at first, but toward the end, I got to know him better," resident Tom Laurent said. "He was a veteran and told me about making 146 parachute jumps in the Army. I know he was on dialysis, in and out of the hospital." Before he died, he'd missed at least a few appointments for treatments at Fort Miley VA Medical Center, Laurent said.

Laurent estimated that Mr. Vidaurri was in his mid-50s.

In a setting where facts about the departed are hard to come by because of confidentiality restrictions, the details of Mr. Vidaurri's life are sadly sparse: no birth date, no death date, not even why he was called "Speedy." How long

he'd lived at the Ambassador was also a blank. One resident recalled that when he moved into the Ambassador 10 years ago, Mr. Vidaurri was already living there.

Kelly Marie Noss sat in the Listening Post with her small dog on her lap, alternately smiling about memories of Mr. Vidaurri and holding back tears.

"For the longest time, my dog always barked at Speedy, every time he'd see him," Noss said. "And then, suddenly, he stopped barking." That was a good sign, and Noss and Mr. Vidaurri became friends.

"I remember Kelly and Speedy cooking together in the common kitchen," said another resident. "They'd cook up some really good meat."

Another friend at the Ambassador was Cecil Baker, a resident there for 26 years. He admitted at the memorial that he had been "incompatible" with Mr. Vidaurri and his good friend Art and the situation had persisted for far too long.

"And then I changed," Baker said. "I decided to make the change that made me feel better, and they both felt better, too."

Baker was emotional describing the effect of his friend's death on his own sense of mortality: "When Speedy died, I couldn't sleep for several nights — I was afraid to close my eyes, terrified I would also die. His passing was a catalyst. There are just so many deaths here." ■

— Marjorie Beggs

Office rents skyrocket

► CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

Another caution is the cyclical nature of neighborhood improvement. Siegel has 20 years' of commercial real estate experience in mid-Market and watched the 2000 bubble burst. "Areas come into favor and go out again," he says, "but I think mid-Market will continue to improve. This time around, I hope there's staying power."

The vacancy rate, while "tightening up," is still high, he adds. Some buildings, like 1145 Market, are struggling more than others; as of June 24, its vacancy was 70%, according to listing broker Colliers International's Website.

Housing is the other key factor in the mid-Market boom. Jones Lang LaSalle lists 16 residential structures with 3,192 housing units in the mid-Market, ranging from newly completed buildings to ones just approved by City Planning. Coupling new tenants with new commerce, its report says, suggests the neighborhood can "become as vibrant as any other in San Francisco."

Siegel agrees, citing the salubrious, symbiotic relationship of housing and commerce. "The advent of all this housing is the other really big change in the area. Once the housing is there, it will anchor the neighborhood."

The largest single residential development so far is NEMA [think New Market], 719 units under construction at 1401 Market, next-door neighbor of Square and close to Twitter. NEMA's studio rents will start at \$1,950 for 469 square feet and 789-square-foot one-bedrooms at \$2,788.

A block away, at Market and Eighth, Trinity Place's third and fourth phases are under way with the demolition of the old Del Webb Townhouse, which evolved into Trinity Plaza. When the third building is complete in 2016, and the fourth a few years after that, Angelo Sangiacomo's properties will total 1,900 units.

New residential and commercial buildings may give mid-Market a sparkle, but Siegel doesn't dismiss the value of all the early 20th century beauties being renovated. He calls out the Renoir Hotel, Market and Seventh, as "another anchoring factor" that has the patina of age but when newly spiffed up and reopened next year will appeal to more upscale tourists and businesspeople.

Two other historic buildings are drawing interest from new commercial tenants because of their "creative feel," says Siegel: Music-streaming company Spotify begins leasing three floors of the Warfield Building at 988 Market in July. And next spring, Nordstrom Rack will move into the first two floors of 901 Market at Fifth, that five-story, 1912 grand old dame, once Lou Lurie's J.C. Penney's and now mid-Market's eastern anchor.

The metamorphosis of mid-Market is happening so quickly that even real estate agents can't keep up with it. Nine months ago, Michael Cohen, former head of economic development for San Francisco and now a partner with Strata Investment Partners, told the S.F. Business Times he predicted dramatic mid-Market change in four or five years.

"It's already happened — you just can't see it yet," Cohen said.

You can now. ■

"I hope there's staying power. ... Once the housing is here, it will anchor the neighborhood."

Zach Siegel
CUSHMAN & WAKEFIELD



HOUSING APPLICATIONS ARE BEING ACCEPTED FOR SINGLE ROOM OCCUPANCY BUILDINGS (SRO'S)



Please go to 241 6th Street, San Francisco, CA for applications.

The TODCO Housing wait list is open for the BAYANIHAN HOUSE AND THE HOTEL ISABEL. If your name is currently on any TODCO Housing Waiting List and you would like information on your current status please call the TODCO Marketing Office at 415-957-0227 on Fridays only.

Building	Size/Occupancy Limit	Max./Min. Income Limit	Rent
Hotel Isabel 1095 Mission Street (Homeless Project Based Section 8) Open Wait List until March 29, 2013	SRO – 1 person In the unit there is a sink, microwave, refrigerator, 2-burner stove, closet, single bed, community kitchen, 24-hour staff & surveillance, laundry facility	1 person \$34,600 a year No Minimum Income	30% OF INCOME Requires a Certificate of Homelessness
Bayanihan House (Non-Assisted Units) Located at 88 – 6th Street & Mission OPEN WAITING LIST	SRO – 1 Person, Couple Shared Bath Single 10 ½ x 12 – Double 12x12 In the unit there is a sink, microwave, refrigerator, 2-burner stove, closet, single bed, community kitchen, 24-hour staff & surveillance, laundry facility	1 person \$30,275/a year Couple \$34,580/a year Minimum income of \$866.40/month	Starting 1-2013 Move in Deposit \$545.00 Rent \$545.00 Utilities included

TDD: (415) 345-4470 