

IRA JOE ROBERTSON
Tenant organizer

Friends of Ira Joe Robertson were distraught by his passing and invited Central City Extra to his memorial at the Hamlin Hotel on June 9 for purposes of sharing his memory in print. Pastor Paul Trudeau of City Church, San Francisco, presided, with Brandt Petri providing musical interludes on his guitar.

Most of the dozen people gathered in the hotel community room remembered Mr. Robertson as a “fun, fun person.”

After Trudeau’s introductory remarks, a woman who identified herself only as Macy was first to share her recollections of Mr. Robertson.

“I will dearly miss him,” she said. “He made me laugh, sometimes so bad I wanted to hit him. I loved him. He loved me, too. He loved everybody.” After saying her piece, she swept out of the room and the building.

“This was his building,” fellow tenant Andrew Mark said. “Joe touched a lot of people. I’ll never forget the domino games we had. Yahtzee, too.”

Mr. Robertson had retired from work in the building trades, particularly masonry, and was living on Social Security, Mark told The Extra.

“He had hands of steel,” Mark recalled.

“We had a special bond and special relationship,” said a strapping young man in a TNDC shirt who identified himself as James. He said that Mr. Robertson once asked their mutual friend, Macy, “Who is that, walks like he owns the place?”

“We had one common goal — Macy — to make sure she was safe,” James said. “He left it all on me. I’m gonna miss him, truly miss him. But I got this, ‘cause I walk like I own the place.”

Born in San Francisco 63 years ago, Mr. Robertson was the oldest of four or five brothers and a sister, Mark said, and at the memorial he credited Mr. Robertson’s father for shaping his children’s character.

“He stood fast by his family, taught his boys how to be men. A lot of us black men, we didn’t have that, were never trained how to be men, just accepted what was thrown at them. It was rare in black culture to have that,” Mark said.

“In Joe’s family, they all came to him. When they needed something and

would call, Joe got there, never let them down, never one time judged them,” Mark said. Mr. Robertson, he said, “didn’t always like seeing the things they were doing, the bad habits, but would never say anything.”

He also mentioned how, with Mr. Robertson’s help, they led a tenants’ council, “one of the strongest in the Tenderloin.”

Mark, president of the Hamlin Hotel Tenant Council, told The Extra that Mr. Robertson was “absolutely” his right-hand man in that work. “He was a big supporter, told me I had the leadership skills,” Mark said. “He was there to help me.”

Mr. Robertson, Mark said, would tell people to “keep on speaking, don’t give up.” Sometimes he would have to take the initiative if they couldn’t get management to deal with whatever issues they raised. Sometimes they were reluctant to raise an issue at all.

On Affordable Housing Day in October 2012, the work they did was honored by the Board of Supervisors.

“In recognition of your outstanding service at the Hamlin Hotel . . . the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco hereby extends our highest accommodation and appreciation for your achievement and advocacy for affordable housing,” reads the Certificate of Honor that Mark picked up from Jane Kim’s office.

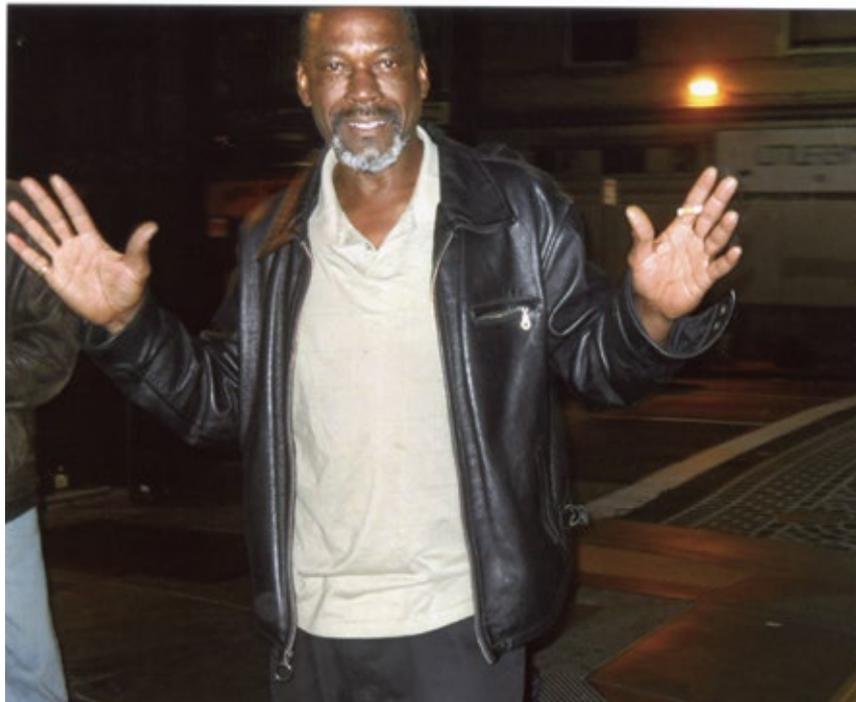
Along with the certificate, Mark said, they got a pair of 50-yard-line tickets to the Super Bowl-bound 49ers, but Mr. Robertson wasn’t around that day and he had to take another friend. Generally, they would watch games together.

“He was there to help me resolve any problems regarding the tenants. If they were having problems with repairs, or couldn’t communicate with management, they would take it up with me or Joe, and we would represent them. We were always on alert,” he said.

“A lot of people around here would ignore the fighting,” Mark said, but with Mr. Robertson, “whatever anger was in them, he’d let them get it out,” and then step in.

Mark said that, besides their advocacy work on behalf of fellow tenants, they would organize outings, barbecues, picnics and such.

“He was a family man,” Mark said, “very family-oriented. I think he had



COURTESY OF HAMLIN HOTEL

Ira Joe Robertson, a “fun, fun person” helped lead the Hamlin tenants’ council.

three kids.” He told The Extra that Mr. Robertson had raised his granddaughter there at the Hamlin during her high school years until she went off to college in Los Angeles two or three years ago.

Ernest Collins, wearing shades and a black knit cap, took the floor next. He said he’d known Mr. Robertson 35 years, as his brother-in-law. Mr. Robertson, he said, was a “hard worker, involved with many businesses, took that from his father, a business worker who knew about a lot of crafts.” The family had operated a restaurant, among other things, and “many days, they’d feed my family, no money.” Mr. Robertson, he said, was “a good man. I’ll surely miss him.”

Then he read from the Quran, in Arabic, before signing out with “I love you, I’m gonna miss you.”

“We had to have a goodbye. That’s the reason I put this together,” said Mark, who called The Extra. Mr. Robertson was “a neighbor, a friend, a brother. There wasn’t nobody he wouldn’t step in to help if they needed it. He had his problems, but always stood firm to help with yours.” ■

— Mark Hedin

WILL DAVIS
Pierre resident

Will Davis, resident of the Pierre Hotel, died in April at age 47 after a long illness, according to a friend who wished to acknowledge his passing but remain anonymous.

Mr. Davis was found in his room in grave condition and taken by ambulance to a hospital where he remained before being taken off life support at his parents’ request.

A memorial was held for Mr. Davis at the Pierre, a Tenderloin Housing Clinic master lease hotel at 540 Jones, where he had lived for two years. The Extra was not invited to the memorial.

Mr. Davis, said his friend, once was a mortgage broker in Chicago and his parents live in Santa Rosa. ■

— Marjorie Beggs

Notice of the death of this Tenderloin resident came in a call from a friend of Mr. Davis who read our announcement in the May Extra.

CENTRAL CITY
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PHONE: (415) 626-1650
FAX: (415) 626-7276
EMAIL: centralcityextra@studycenter.org

EDITOR & PUBLISHER: Geoffrey Link
SENIOR WRITER/EDITOR: Marjorie Beggs
COMMUNITY REPORTER: Tom Carter
REPORTERS: Mark Hedin, Jonathan Newman

DESIGNER: Lise Stampfli
CONTRIBUTORS: John Burks, Ed Bowers
DESIGN CONSULTANT: Don McCartney
DISTRIBUTION: Mark Hedin
COMMUNITY CONSULTANT: Michael Nulty
ONLINE PARTNER: Hoodline

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Sunday Streets back in TL

PHOTO: RAFAEL GAMEROS

Sunday Streets returns to the Tenderloin on July 10, including face painting for people of all ages, like this man’s at the 2015 event. The celebration kicks off with a parade and dancing at 10:40 a.m. at Ellis and Jones. Highlights, 11 a.m.-4 p.m.: Live music at Hastings’ Demonstration Garden and in Boeddeker Park; Rec & Park’s Mobile Rec with free climbing wall; skate ramps and rentals; free exercise classes; a petting zoo at St. Anthony Foundation; education and professional development resources; blood pressure screenings; food demos.