

# Pelosi launches SRO mail inquiry

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repudiates Mayor Newsom's push to alleviate homelessness by getting welfare recipients off the streets and into SRO hotels on one-year leases. The post office, according to its code, considers all hotels transient and simply unqualified for the kind of service apartment buildings get.

"It's patently unfair and it just burns my grits to think of this," says Herman Taft, Tenderloin Housing Clinic property manager. "They (the post office) are just not understanding the changing face of San Francisco."

The frustration came to a head on May 5 when Taft and a contingent of hotel representatives organized by the Central City SRO Collaborative delivered petitions containing 333 signatures to the post-

master's office at 1300 Evans. The Hartland (909 Geary), the Cal Drake (1541 California), Bayanihan House (88 Sixth), the Camelot (124 Turk), the Seneca (34 Sixth) and the Cadillac (380 Eddy) all petitioned for individual mail deliveries to standard-approved boxes on their main floors. Some boxes, waiting to be officially activated, had been idle in lobbies two years. Now, desk clerks receive bulk drops and fashion various ways to sort for distribution.

"This is really a big issue for the tenants," says SRO Collaborative's Earl Brown. "At last year's annual SRO convention there were over 300 tenants attending from 100 different SROs — that's both nonprofits and private. And mail security and privacy was voted on a survey as one of the top five concerns. Some people are living from

check to check and it comes in the mail.

"Our efforts have been to explain (to the post office) that subsidized rents in SROs make them permanent tenants."

It was residents of the SRO hotels, now an essential part of the city's supportive housing stock, that came to the SRO Collaborative for help, beginning with Charles Maxwell of Bayanihan House. Maxwell moved into the Bayanihan House in October when it opened, signing a one-year lease as all residents do.

Maxwell, however, didn't have a mailbox. It was there in the lobby, but it didn't work. He felt cheated. He was upset enough to take the issue to the collaborative. He contacted residents at other hotels. They had meetings every other week. As a member of the group that delivered the petitions, he had helped gather the Bayanihan's 85 signatures.

"We're fighting the U.S. Post Office," he says, standing in the Bayanihan lobby next to the pristine bank of numbered silver boxes bordered by handsome wood paneling. "I tell you, we'd be getting mail if we were in Laurel Heights or on Nob Hill."

Bayanihan Administrator Marsha Jackson says the residents feel discriminated against. One postal authority, she says, suggested to her the post office should have been consulted when planning the hotel. Instead, the Bayanihan installed government-approved boxes assuming that a master lock would be installed. But when the postal inspector came, he said no, it would be a bulk drop.

"We've had to change our procedures," Jackson says. "Desk clerks sign people in and out, answer the phone, monitor the desk and the door area 24 hours. The mail should not be part of that responsibility. It wasn't in their job description and it's a federal obligation to deliver it."

The Hartland is different. Debbie Rauscher, housing service director for THC, which runs the hotel, had called the post office two years ago to check on mailbox requirements. THC was going to renovate the entire lobby floor at a \$317,000 cost and would make the boxes part of the plan. Rauscher says she talked to an employee named Romi Pardees in the Embarcadero Postal Center, according to her handwritten notes.

"(He) informed me that there would be no problem with the use of the mailboxes," she says. "I was instructed to change the delivery status through the postmaster general's office once we were ready to use the mailboxes."

It sounded easy. Rauscher just had to request in writing a change from a general drop to individual residential units. So, based on that information, THC included similar mailboxes in its \$1 million renovation plans for the Seneca Hotel.

The Hartland lobby and adjacent rooms are so stunning now that people who used to refer to it as a roach-infested flophouse "can't believe it," according to two-year resident Yolanda Echeverrea. "It's very clean here," she says, even though the renovation isn't quite complete. "Sometimes there's a line to get mail," she adds. "Sometimes the clerk is on the phone."

The Hartland clerk keeps the mail in two low, free-standing drawers behind the front desk and isn't happy about the bending she has to do. The bank of new mailboxes installed in the wall near her glassed cubicle are fallow. Taft said Tenderloin Housing Clinic was given permission by the post office to put them in but then months later was told "it was an error."

Rauscher wrote to the Postal Service May 19, telling her story and asking for service for the Hartland and the Seneca. She has not heard back.

"We want them, just like the Bayanihan down the street," says Diane Burke, seven-year resident and the Seneca's tenant representative. "Now we're finding out we can't do it, so we've gone to the (SRO) Collaborative to pursue this. They (the post office) haven't produced the regulations for us to see. We just heard that we can't."

The Collaborative's Brown says that since late January he has been asking the Postal Service to cite the regulations under which it is denying individual delivery but has been ignored. Arranging a meeting with postal Inspector Walter Tom and Robert Reid, manager of Customer Service and Tom's boss, was equally difficult, he says.

(Efforts to reach Reid over three days failed. Phone calls were not returned. The Embarcadero Postal Center did acknowledge that a "Romy Pardees" once worked there but now works at another branch and refused to answer any questions, referring all inquiries to Personnel, which has a phone system that doesn't respond to calls.)

"Reid agreed to a meeting but never called back," Brown says. "It was February by then. I made a week of phone calls to him and there was no reply. Then I went to Supervisor Daly's office and they helped us set up a meeting with Reid, which he later canceled. I did finally get ahold of him. He said some time after April 16, so we settled on the 27th. He'd come here. That morning he e-mailed that he couldn't make it."

The meeting was reset for May 5. But this time Reid wanted the hotel managers to come to 1300 Evans. Brown didn't like the idea. Some tenants representatives wanted to be there, too, and the logistics for getting more than a dozen people five miles across town was a "hardship," Brown said, that didn't compare to one man coming to Turk Street. But the contingent went anyway and delivered the petitions.

In the meeting, Brown recalls, Reid said he wanted to work with each manager but was careful "not to admit that their buildings weren't transient hotels." Reid asked the managers to send him copies of their business license and a sample tenant lease. He said that before Walter Tom became postal inspector in 2000 some decisions had been made about mailboxes in hotels, Brown related, but that now things are going by the book. Hotels get the bulk drop.

"I wasn't satisfied with his response and I don't think he understood what an SRO hotel is," says Taft, who was there. "I kept trying to explain to him that for low-income people this is as good as it gets. I mean how many people do you know who have lived in the same apartment for five years? We have some who have been here 30 years. And our clerks, who are as competent as any, are not postal clerks."

When the clerk has to act as a de facto mailman, he or she is always on the carpet.

"Desk clerks can't do all their jobs and still be sorting mail," says Hartland General Manager Valerie Simpson. "People say, 'Maybe you misplaced my mail. It's late. It's never been late before.' Yeah, clerks take a beating."

"I don't want to make the post office look bad — I have friends who work there," Taft continues, "but this isn't right. If it is not his (Reid's) call he should ask his supervisor to look into this issue closer."

The Extra asked the Main Library, a federal repository, to research the postal code to see if there is any flexibility to free hotels from the official definition. A librarian found it in the Domestic Mail Manual D042 Conditions of Delivery (under section 9.0 City Delivery Service) that service is determined by, among other things, "the characteristics of the area to be served." Moreover, the U.S. Annotated Code cited this from a 1977 decision, Egger vs. U.S. Postal Service:

"While undue or unreasonable discrimination among users in provision of delivery services is prohibited, Service may provide different levels of delivery service to different groups of mail users as long as distinctions are reasonable."

It could be this is a simple problem with a complicated answer: funding for added postal staffing. "The bottom line is probably money," Jackson says. "We have a lot of hotels in a row (on Sixth Street)."

One SRO clerk estimates it takes her 20 minutes to distribute mail for 50 people in a cardboard file caddy. Say a pro could do it in 15 minutes, that would add five hours a day to deliver to 1,000 boxes. That's how many SRO rooms the Master Lease Hotel program intends to add by the end of the year at the mayor's request, doubling the number of Care Not Cash residents.

The city has 19,645 hotel rooms, and just 3,781 of them tourist rooms. Sixty-one SROs are owned or run by nonprofits with zero tourist rooms, and these are the ones likely to press the issue of individual mail service, according to Brown. "The for-profits wouldn't want the (initial) expense," he says.

Hotel owner and manager Roger Patel hand-delivered mail for 13 years to all 50 residents of the Cal Drake, a recent THC master lease hotel. He wasn't fond of the mail ruining his Saturdays. When he installed weather stripping in January he found he could no longer slip mail under the doors. So he ordered a \$1,500 standalone, carousel-like mailbox system for the lobby, the boxes being the approved post office size. Most of his residents, some occupancies dating to the mid-1970s, had requested them.

The boxes arrived in April. Patel put in his own lock before calling the postal inspector.

"An inspector came down and said it was okay, safe and secure, but then he said I had to take my lock off," Patel says. "He came on Monday and took out mine and put in his. I offered to help the carrier sort mail as he got used to it. He said thanks, that would save time but he'd have to ask his supervisor. The next day he said his supervisor said they couldn't allocate the time for that. Then someone came and took the lock out."

Patel put his own lock back in. Now, after the mail drop is made, he sorts the mail and puts it in the boxes and residents open their boxes with their individual keys. It does save him steps, but he's got the Saturday problem.

At the meeting he said Reid told him "it was a 99% done deal" that the post office would reinstall the lock. Patel wanted to know when to expect action. He has heard nothing since.

It seemed like a slam dunk for the Camelot, owned by the same folks who own the 90-room Windsor, both on the Department of Public Health's SRO Master Hotel list. During the rehabilitation of the 54-room Camelot, workers would put in the aluminum boxes just like the Windsor had two years ago. But those boxes stand empty and unused.

"It fell into hotel status, they told us," says Tamia Graham, who manages both hotels. "Newly remodeled and rehabilitated is a problem, I was told. But with the Windsor they said they can't take back what's been done."

Graham sent Reid the requested documents the day after the meeting. She and the residents are eager to use the boxes they have passed every day in the lobby for nearly two years.

"It's unfair," Graham says. "These people pay rent and have yearly leases and some plan to die here. They are just as stable as someone in Pacific Heights. And it's part of their dignity. It's really handling people's mail that's the issue. Tenants don't want someone handling it — they want it professionally delivered."

Four years ago the post office approved separate mailboxes for the 162 Cadillac Hotel rooms, manager Magali Echevarria says. A \$6,000-\$10,000 renovation was planned around them. The project extended the lobby and redesigned the front desk.

"They've (mailboxes) been standing there two years!" says Echevarria. "We've written letters to the post office and even congressmen. They (the post office) said the person who approved this shouldn't have done it. But we had already spent the money."

"And when we got them we were so excited. Everyone signed for their keys and we made a roster that is updated when anyone moves." ■

— TOM CARTER

## Post office cites policy

POSTAL personnel would not cite codes or regulations relating to hotel mail delivery when the SRO Collaborative and others asked, but a resident was quoted chapter and verse in reply to his recent inquiry.

John Fritz on April 28 wrote to the Postal Service about his friend Helen Kennedy-Myhree. For five years she lived at the Granada Hotel, 1000 Sutter, before moving in October to an Oakland convalescent home.

The post office would not forward her mail and "Helen," he wrote, "has failed to receive a number of important letters addressed to her as a result of this refusal to forward."

Convalescing made it difficult for her to notify people and agencies of her change, he said, adding: "The Granada is not a hotel. Although the name contains the word 'hotel,' it is a permanent residence, mostly for senior citizens (who) pay a substantial rent for room and board on a monthly basis. Residence hotels, as they are called, are hotels only in name ... and should be afforded the same services that apartments are afforded."

The Postal Service responded that it does not distinguish between a residential and a guest hotel. Both get centralized delivery and it's up to hotel managers to forward mail. Sending a change of address card to the post office does no good.

"Our growth policy states that hotels, motels, dormitories, and care facilities that are classified as such by definition, license or use permit as an institution (POM 615), will be assigned a single delivery point or centralized delivery," wrote Judith M. Wolfe, Operations Programs Support, on May 4. "Regrettably, we cannot forward the mail for your friend." ■

# Fair day on 6th — it'll be hot

BY RACHEL HOLMAN

A sunburst collage of smiling faces. A title — Positively Sixth Street — reminiscent of an old Bob Dylan song. It's the poster announcing the third annual Sixth Street Fair, June 12, 11 a.m.-3 p.m., on Sixth between Mission and Howard.

Still, this isn't your typical street fair. Yes, 20 local artists will be selling their creations at booths, and there'll be live music and food — SFPD will grill free hot dogs, local stores are donating drinks and the Gene Friend Recreation Center will work a cotton candy machine — but this scene isn't intended exclusively for the financially fit.

One fair goal is to take willing people and, by the end of the day, give them the skills and appearance they need to go out into the job market with confidence, said Randy Silva, fair co-chair. The local OPEIU chapter (Office and Professional Employees International Union) will be there to help write resumes, and Episcopal Community Services staff will offer assistance from its Skills Center.

But what about the look? A person can't walk into a job interview wearing everyday street clothes. Fair organizers collected donated interview clothes, which will be given away along with free haircuts and manicures provided by Ms. Marty's.

Silva explained that to be eligible for the free food, clothes and makeover, a fairgoer first must get signatures from six different providers at the fair, indicating that she or he has taken advantage of the offered service.

The fair will have all kinds of entertainment for kids, too: face-painting courtesy of volunteers from Rhythm and Motion, and a Big Blue Dog Jumper, one of those huge bouncy chambers for kids to spring around in. CHALK (Communities in Harmony Advocating for Learning and Kids) will have a booth describing its job training services for teens.

There'll be music throughout the afternoon on two stages. The one on Sixth and Mission,



PHOTO BY RANDY SILVA 2003

emceed by Sixth Street resident and artist Nappy Chin, will cater to a more adult taste — jazz, blues and R&B from local musicians Khevan Lennon Onaje, the Smooth Blues quintet and Tennessee. Chin will introduce each group as well as political luminaries Mayor Gavin Newsom, Supervisor Chris Daly, District Attorney Kamala Harris and Police Chief Heather Fong.

The bands on stage two, on Sixth and Howard streets, will appeal more to the kids, with hip-hop and punk blasting from its speakers. Sixth Street local, Boom, will make the introductions to the neighborhood's own Junior Rifle Club, the Idiots, Gentleman's Club, Potato Couch and Chammin.

But the first act there may steal the show — a toddler's percussion ensemble from the Gene Friend Recreation Center. "They are very much so toddlers, and they play the drums. We'll all be surprised," said Silva.

For those who want to keep partying, the Lit Lounge at 101 Sixth is holding after-the-fair performances from 3-8 p.m., and Kimo's at 1351 Polk will continue on from 8 p.m. to midnight. ■

**Fairgoers thronged to Minna for last year's Sixth Street fair. This year, Sixth will be closed between Mission and Howard with 20 booths, free food, and live music on two stages.**

# TL merchants banding together

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is rampant and once when he called the police, he said, it took them 90 minutes to respond.

"Just moving people along doesn't solve it," said Shamieh, who has had the Daldas grocery for 17 years. "And arrests do nothing. The same people are back in three days. This needs to be addressed."

## BAYVIEW FOCUS HURTS TL

Brown, saying she was sympathetic to their problems, was encouraging and even complimented Shamieh on his leadership qualities. But she's shorthanded these days, she said. The mayor's push to beef up security in the Bayview has pulled officers away from the TL and other stations. In a perfect world with a robust budget, she would have many cops on foot patrols, she said, and that could clean up the neighborhood, just as the tactic had done in New York City.

For now, her best solution for drug dealing is arrest, conviction and implementing stay-away orders that ban returning dealers from the area they were arrested in. That plan, and prosecution consistency, should eventually drive dealers out of the neighborhood, she and the shopkeepers agreed.

"It's been cake here for many years (for dealers)," Brown acknowledged. "But it is not like (there's) a stabbing or a shooting every day like it was when I was here before," she said, referring to her rough three years on the Tenderloin Task Force in the mid-1990s.

Nonlife-threatening offenses such as drug use and dealing are not high priority, she pointed out, then repeated a theme she began promoting the day she took over as commander.

"We need to rise up and claim this as our neighborhood," Brown said. "It's a long, hard process, but it will be done. I am glad you are all here today — it shows something. And when things come up, I encourage you to call the Tip Line (929-9446)."

Brown said she would talk to people at Glide and St. Anthony's about more closely monitoring

their food lines, a problem that at least two other groups have brought up to her.

The captain was also unhappy to hear that the international political situation has aggravated a racial climate in the Tenderloin. Shamieh had mentioned that the Palestinian Americans, some struggling with English and needing a spokesman at meetings, commonly endure racial barbs and epithets at work, often from people they catch trying to steal from their shelves.

## "WE'RE SPINNING OUR WHEELS"

A number of topics were brought up affecting the Tenderloin's quality of life. Resident John Nulty, recently elected to the NOMPC board, said the problems were common and have been "talked to death" for 10 years.

"And everybody's on a different playing field," Nulty said. "And until the police start working on something with the businessmen and residents, we're spinning our wheels. We need a community action plan, specific for the neighborhood."

Brown didn't exactly agree, but quickly suggested that Nulty come up with the action plan, an idea he thought was misplaced, if not a dodge of responsibility. Meanwhile, TL is becoming a "ghetto," Nulty said, and is the last neighborhood "to get resources."

Shamieh later said that the 80-minute meeting "went fine, as a first step," but that the shopkeepers' time with the captain had been "diluted" by the commentaries of NOMPC members.

The merchants group is moving along at its own pace. Elections will be held "relatively soon... as soon as it could possibly be possible," he said, chuckling at the mouthful he'd just mouthed. ■



PHOTO BY LENNY LIMJOCO

**Jimmy Shamieh, in business at Eddy and Taylor for 17 years, is spearheading the shopkeepers' organizing effort. "Arrests do nothing," he says, "The same people are back in three days."**