

ROBERT CLARK
Worked for Lockheed

In failing health, Robert Clark, a Lockheed sheet metal worker for 23 years, moved into the Civic Center Residence in March so he wouldn't be a burden to his family here in town, his friends said. He died in his seventh floor room on Dec. 5.

Mr. Clark had multiple medical problems, including advanced diabetes. He was 72.

"He was so polite he was almost courtly," social worker Barbara Fitzpatrick said at his Dec. 13 memorial at the hotel. "He was very well-liked but he was quiet and stayed in his room a lot."

It was difficult for Mr. Clark to walk. He preferred inching along with shuffling steps to using a wheelchair, which he "hated," according to his friend of a year, Johnny, who declined to give his last name. "It would take him forever to walk to the corner but he wouldn't touch his wheelchair."

The two spent hours sitting in the hotel conference room admiring the coffered ceilings and talking about architecture.

"He was an educated man," Johnny said. "And when I look up there now I think of him looking down at me. You can't say anything bad about that man."

Johnny said Mr. Clark was at the hotel to not be a "burden" to his family and that his

"beautiful wife and daughter" had come two days ago for his personal effects.

"I went to his room to remind him of flu shots and he didn't answer," said Fitzpatrick. "An hour later a young man from property management found him dead in his room. It was very upsetting. It's the third death we've had in two weeks."

"It's that time of year," said the Rev. Glenda Hope. "The earth is dying. The darkness comes early and there can be a heaviness, especially if someone we know has died."

—TOM CARTER

LACY GRIFFIN
Security guard

Lacy Griffin, a lanky and youthful-looking security guard who liked wearing button-down-collar shirts in his off hours, died peacefully in his sleep Oct. 17 at the Ambassador Hotel where he had lived more than 14 years.

"I didn't know him well but he was quiet and polite," said social worker Ivet Lemus. "He was very neat and liked wearing button-down collars. I thought he was in his 30s."

Mr. Griffin was 52.

After his friend Jerry Kirby missed seeing him around the hotel for two days he asked management to check his room. New Assistant Manager Barry Stevens found Mr. Griffin lying on his bed, his head resting on a stuffed alligator that Kirby had given him.

"It's very emotional to discover someone like that," said Stevens. "Everything in the room was neat and tidy and he looked asleep. I clapped loudly. But I could see he wasn't breathing. Then I closed the door and went downstairs and called the police."

The social workers said at his Nov. 2 memorial that Mr. Griffin had lost a little weight in recent months but appeared healthy. The medical examiner's office didn't have a cause of death at press time.

Mr. Griffin was an unusual SRO denizen because he seemed to have no problems or character blemishes. The 6-foot-2 former Air Force airman was employed full time as a

security guard. He was not an alcoholic or addict, but smoked cigarettes, his friends said, and he never caused trouble. He liked movies, especially science fiction.

Kirby brought Mr. Griffin's favorite shirt to the memorial — not a button-down — and said to the four people in the room he had recently helped Mr. Griffin expand his wardrobe. He hung it on the window latch above a table on which sat a small vase holding three white lilies. Kirby lit a candle, too. The handsome short-sleeve shirt had deep red masks and red candles with yellow flames figured on a rich tan background showing Africa with its longitude and latitude lines.

They knew each other nine years, but Kirby said in the last three years he had intensified their friendship. He played a rousing gospel song they were fond of on a cassette player. "There's a leak in this old building," it began.

"I gave him a pedicure the day before he died," Kirby said. "I am so glad I did. I kept some things of mine in his room. I cried when he died. I thought it was a dirty trick. We do feel it. We do hurt. And then I thought, oh, I am so glad someone cared about me."

—TOM CARTER

ZEBE BAPTISTE
Free spirit

Zebe Baptiste, a free-spirited former resident of the Camelot Hotel, died Nov. 18 at Saint Francis Hospital. She was 49.

"Zebe was one of the sweetest people I knew," Shannon Hugon, the support services manager of the hotel, said. "She didn't like being held down or confined. I miss her."

Ms. Baptiste, a four-year resident of the Camelot on Turk Street, moved from the hotel Oct. 2, said Hugon.

A memorial at the hotel for Ms. Baptiste attended by 12 people was conducted by the Rev. Glenda Hope on Dec. 11.

"We had a good working relationship," Ms. Baptiste's case manager said. "She always made me laugh. But the Tenderloin wasn't for her. Life wasn't easy."

Ms. Baptiste was from San Diego and of Irish extraction, said her case manager, and "she suffered from emphysema."

The Rev. Hope invited people to light small candles at the altar where a large bouquet of flowers and a photograph of Ms. Baptiste, who had green eyes and red hair, was placed.

"She was really a beautiful person — especially after treatment. She really tried to stay sober," said one mourner. "Zebe kept a childlike heart."

—JOHN GOINS

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