

Suite 181 trying hard: Reroutes buses, adds security and soundproofing

► CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

tions by the state's Alcoholic Beverage Control department, the city attorney's office and the police. Several neighborhood groups have protested the noise inside and out, violence, rowdy crowds and bus parking. The complaints were followed by arrests, community discussions, a March 4 hearing before the City's Entertainment Commission, while a host of expensive club alterations and procedural changes were being made.

The height of the 'hood's alarm was over a shooting outside the club in February that police say stemmed from an argument inside. A stray bullet hit an innocent bystander in the foot, an Empress Hotel resident across the street.

Such nightclub violence, much of it at SoMa hot spots, led to Mayor Newsom's legislative package that month to control the scene. Expected to have the greatest impact is an anti-loitering measure, if it passes.

A community meeting held March 27 on the club's main floor appeared to end the strife and find the peace. A major neighborhood issue has been boisterous after-hours noise.

Contrite co-owner Drew Adelman had all the answers and plenty of good will for all at the meeting. He told the crowd of 60 of the extensive changes he made based on citizen complaints.

But very early the morning of April 20, an unruly crowd leaving the club caused such a ruckus that neighbors called the police. They came and made arrests. Apparently, crowd escorts lost control, or security guards did.

Rich Marchasin, who operates Party Bus San Francisco, has been in the business 17 years and only recently has he received any complaints, he said.

"Twelve years ago I had one bus and I was the driver out in front of 181 Eddy," he said

"And there were never any problems."

But business boomed. Marchasin now has five buses that roam the Bay Area and five competitors who also furnish Suite 181 with Friday and Saturday night revelers. Not all have Marchasin's community sensitivity. He was the only bus owner to attend the March 27 meeting where he was introduced and answered questions about the new bus routines.

His Party Bus revelers wear wristbands color-coded by bus. They follow a dress code and aren't allowed to drink on board, although Marchasin says it is legal. And his escorts make people "walk quietly to keep the peace."

He said he met with his competitors that day to emphasize the need for public decorum.

"I am trying to teach them how to keep peace in the neighborhood," he said. "And I will teach them. My only issue is quiet. And one thing I've learned in life is that anything can be fixed."

The community's March 27 meeting set up by Safety Network and TNDC demonstrated the progress wrought from the wheel that began squeaking a year ago. Nearly 60 showed up, including TL police Capt. Gary Jimenez, code officer Mike Torres, a representative from the Mayor's Office on Criminal Justice and Entertainment Commission Executive Director Bob Davis. Sitting on folding chairs, the crowd listened to co-owner Drew Adelman first introduce his entire staff.

Complaints changed Adelman. He had already been responding to objections to the noise — he said in the last six months he spent \$102,000 on sound-proofing, careful to meet city standards, "not like the old days when you could do it any way you wanted." Then he heard speakers at the Entertainment Commission meeting say they could still hear noise outside after 2 a.m. so he moved music downstairs and added more plywood and

soundproofing.

"Now the only way you're going to hear it outside is when somebody opens the door," he said.

There were other complaints, too, from screeching cars peeling out of the parking lot to muggings there and from noise on the sidewalk to cigarette smoke wafting up from the outside patio in back to bother residents above.

"I learned a lot at the commission meeting," Adelman said. "It opened my eyes. I've been here 10 years and want to be here another 10 years. I'd like to have an open-end communication with the community. And that's why we invited you to meet here."

The club was surprised a few years ago when several bus companies added the venue to their weekend routines — "money for us and we loved it," Adelman said. But many buses rolled up without making arrangements in advance, complicating traffic. And Adelman said many didn't screen their clients like Marchasin does to see if they'll follow basic decorum. Now, security guards won't let any bus stop in front.

"But this is a nightclub — they're not leaving church," Adelman said. "We do remind them to be quiet and behave themselves."

At the urging of someone in the audience, he promised to put up a sign inside the club to that effect.

Weapons, however, were a more serious question. Adelman said no one had ever been shot inside and that male and female patrons keep weapons out of the club. But the Entertainment Commission's Davis said people go back to their cars for guns and it's a reason he wants more police patrols. But he said the issues were being addressed.

"There is a focus that neighborhood rights are to be protected," Davis said.

Besides making bus route changes, the

club has added up to 10 security guards on Saturdays, bringing the total to 22, fewer on the lighter Fridays. He has male and female pat-downs for weapons and has restricted to 25 the number of smokers outside. But since soundproofing and making physical improvements that include ADA accommodations, still not completed, his business has dropped 24%, he said.

"But I'm fine with that," Adelman said. What he wasn't okay with, he said, "was the bump rule." That's when somebody's bumped into, they bump back and payback escalates.

A prime example followed just after midnight on April 20. A bump argument and name-calling started on the dance floor and before any security guards could respond, two Hispanic women got punched, kicked and stomped by five black women, said police, who were called after the incident.

Outside the club, police questioned witnesses and the victims, who pointed out two attackers who were arrested and handcuffed. The Hispanic women, with swollen eyes and cut lips, refused medical treatment, police said. Two pairs of shoes were confiscated as evidence.

An hour later, two Latinos who security guards ejected threatened the police outside and were arrested for drunkenness.

"Maybe 1,000 people come to the club on the weekend and you get some bad actors and it erupts in violence," said Jimenez. "They (the club) have increased the security staff. But I'll be talking to my night watch to see if there's a better procedure to ID these characters before we have to arrest them."

Another community meeting with the club will be held May 22 at 6:30 p.m. at 181 Eddy, Safety Network's Dina Hilliard announced at the Tenderloin Police Community meeting at the end of the April. ■



PHOTO BY TOM CARTER

Streams of Saturday night revelers arrive on buses that stop behind the Hilton Hotel. They often dodge beggars such as Chesa as they are escorted to the club on Eddy Street.

The Heart of the City Farmers Market would cease to be run by a nonprofit board, under legislation being prepared by the city's Real Estate Division. The new Federal Building looms in the background.

Real Estate office plans takeover of farmers' market

► CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Adams said she first got wind of the move when someone from the Real Estate office asked her to fill out an application for her own job. She said the representative explained the office was recruiting job candidates from among the 200 farmers' market managers statewide for positions at the Alemany Farmers Market, which the city owns and runs, and for Heart of the City, which it doesn't own but might in the future, she was told.

People at the collaborative wanted to know why the city would do this.

"I've never gotten a reason why," replied Adams. "We're asking for support. Contact people and let them know how you feel."

The second question was, Would prices go up if the city took over the market?

Adams said the city planned to raise the manager's pay to \$57,000 and she didn't know where the money would come from.

"Where are they going to get it?" she asked. "The market can barely afford \$40,000 for me. They think we do as much business as Alemany. We don't. It's at least twice the size we are."

Adams sold produce at Alemany for three years before she was hired in 1981 as the U.N. Plaza market manager. The market at 100 Alemany Blvd., begun in 1947, is hailed as the granddaddy of California farmers' markets, a model for all that have followed. It accommodates 200 farmers and nets \$200,000 from a \$800,000 gross, according to the real estate office.

Currently on Wednesdays and also Sundays during the summer, 60 or more farmers arrive

at U.N. Plaza mainly from the Stockton, Sacramento and Watsonville areas to set up and sell from stalls they rent for \$25. The market area, rented from the city for \$1 a year, soon swarms with an ethnic mix of shoppers, many from the Tenderloin and SoMa, who buy fresh fruits and vegetables at reasonable prices, some of it organic. People cherish the opportunity and everybody digs the atmosphere.

The market's only income is the rent from an average of 55 stalls per session. After paying fees and four employee salaries, including her own and her bookkeeper son's, Adams said what's left goes for turkeys to the farmers on Thanksgiving and See's candy on Mother's Day. Raising stall fees or increasing the number of farmers aren't good ideas, she said, because the current economic balance works.

"These farmers are paying about \$200 in gas, and if they can't make a profit here they'll go somewhere else," she said. Many also sell at the Alemany market.

A fact sheet that Real Estate Director Amy Brown sent in April to the supes — which Adams hadn't yet seen when she spoke at the collaborative — outlined what the office contemplated. Mainly, it wants to absorb the market operations, replace its \$1,500-a-month Orpheum building office with free city space, turn its board of directors into an advisory committee, update its permit procedures and boost the manager's salary by \$17,000. The fact sheet said Real Estate wouldn't raise the \$25 stall fee or fiddle with the mix of farmer vendors.

A week after the collaborative meeting, Daly's office emailed the three-page April 4 memorandum that Real Estate sent to the Board of Supervisors as part of his response to

the people who had contacted him with concerns.

The memo said the market hasn't paid its \$150 monthly cleanup bill to the Department of Public Works. DPW claims it hasn't received payment. Even so, the memo said, that amount wouldn't cover the cost for DPW's repair and cleaning because the wear and tear on the pavement is "significant."

"Some of the damage to the plaza results from allowing vendors to drive vehicles onto the brick plaza and park there during the market, a practice that should not be permitted," the memo said.

It went on to say that the market's 90 stalls rented "at \$25 per day results in gross revenues of \$4,500 per week and \$234,000 per year." Adams, sitting in her truck at the market the following Sunday, was startled to see the memo's claims.

"I've always paid the \$150," she said. "I don't know why they say that. I pay it in \$900 checks twice a year. I just sent one in last week."

"It's amazing. They have never asked me one question," Adams said. "And I have never gotten one phone call from them."

The \$234,000 gross was way out of line, too, Adams said.

Back in the 1980s, the plaza had a capacity for 85 or 90 stalls, but about 10 years ago new plaza street lights were installed, reducing the stall space between them. Now, Adams said, 67 is the maximum number of stalls she can accommodate. Later, from her office, Adams reported the market grossed \$187,000 last year.

Real Estate's Updike said that discussions

are still being held and "one or the other or both" the farmers' and antiques markets will be taken over by his office, but that cost saving isn't the main point.

"There will be no financial impact on the farmers and vendors," he said. "Any money (from efficiencies) would go back into the markets."

The takeover plan came after a review of the Alemany market operations revealed a need for changes in the city administrative code. City Administrator Ed Lee suggested examining the U.N. Plaza operation as well. The Real Estate office determined a need for new salaries then, which were put in the 2007-08 budget last year, Updike said.

Now the hiring procedure for staffs at both farmers' markets has yielded a good list of prospects but it was seen as "heavy-handed," Updike said.

"It was unfortunate because that wasn't our intention," he said. "It was a hard and awkward discussion we had with the current managers. We want to provide more resources for the terrific venture that the U.N. Plaza farmers' market is."

In late April, Daly's office held a meeting with the Heart of the City market's board to pledge support and explain the legislative process that Real Estate will pursue for changes. Supervisors President Aaron Peskin has also stated the board is behind the market as it exists. And people are still signing the petition.

"There are thousands of signatures on hundreds of pages," said Daly aide Rachel Redondiez. "And we've had a ton of responses in the office." ■



PHOTO BY LENNY LIM/JOCO