

1,400 show up at TNDC voter party — 136 sign up

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have the right,” says MacNulty, who calls the Tenderloin a “target area” for education efforts by the Elections Department.

Felons, prisoners can vote, too

LAWs vary from state to state, but in California, it's pretty simple: You can vote even if you've been convicted of a felony or are on probation — as long as you've completed your prison term and are off parole.

“Your past convictions have nothing whatsoever to do with your voting rights,” says Linda Evans of Legal Services for Prisoners With Children. “A lot of people think once you have a felony conviction, you can't vote. That's not true in California.”

Alabama, Arizona, Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington and Wyoming apply the most stringent voting restrictions on felons in the nation, according to Kamy Akhavan, managing editor of procon.org, a Santa Monica nonprofit that explores social and political issues.

But to vote in California, you have to register — this year, by Oct. 20. Registrants must provide a state driver's license or ID card number, or the last four digits of their Social Security number.

You can also vote if you're in county jail as a condition of felony probation, have been convicted of a misdemeanor, or are awaiting trial.

Eileen Hirst, Sheriff Michael Hennessey's chief of staff, says the department's Prisoner Legal Services office has organized voter registration and education drives for years. “Sheriff Hennessey is a former prisoner rights attorney, so it has always been something we've paid attention to,” she says.

Evans says San Francisco's jails have a good reputation for keeping prisoners up to date on their rights. “Mike Hennessey has done a great job,” she says. “We've had people inside (the jails), and they say information is quite available.”

Although the Sheriff's Department doesn't keep voter registration statistics, Hirst says the election is definitely creating a buzz.

“Just like this election has electrified voters at large, it's of great interest to people in jail,” she says. ■

—HEIDI SWILLINGER

Language barriers can keep immigrants from voting, which is why organizers made a point of having literature in three languages and bilingual staff fluent in Chinese and Spanish at the block party sign-up tables, said Woo.

Disabled people may have trouble keeping track of deadlines for registration, or how to vote by mail, said Michael Nulty, head of Alliance for a Better District 6. They may not want to leave their homes to go to their polling places. “One real problem in this neighborhood is the stress factor,” he said.

The Tenderloin also tends to attract people who, for myriad reasons, operate on the down-low — “people with reason to hide,” said Nulty. “Voting is the last thing on their minds.”

Nulty also said many residents decline to register because they don't want to be part of the city's pool of potential jurors, a contention backed up by TL resident Marty Leyva.

Resting against a brick retaining wall, his crutches at his side, Leyva said he showed up at the Boedekker party strictly for the food. “I have a low income,” he said. “I can't afford food, so if it's being given out, I'm there.”

Although he said he'd love to vote in November, he refuses to register because of a bad experience with the court system. When he was called for jury duty a few years back, Leyva said he asked to be excused because of his disability, a request that was granted. Believing that dismissal applied to all future service, Leyva ignored subsequent jury summonses. He discovered his error the hard way one day when he was stopped by a cop, who ran a check that revealed an outstanding warrant for missing jury duty. Leyva claims his infraction resulted in a trip to jail.

Although she declines to comment on specific cases, Ann Donlan, a Superior Court spokeswoman, said: “It's conceivable that a warrant could be issued in such circumstances, but highly unlikely.”

But Leyva's not taking any more chances. Rather than risk a repetition, he stays out of the jury pool by sitting out elections. “I'm jaded about voting.”

Whether or not they're voting, Tenderloin residents — as voters in general — seem interested in this year's election, largely because the presidency is at stake. Many people at the Boedekker party are raring for change. “I think this election is going to get people out because of the economy,” said Eileen, a former Tenderloin resident who wouldn't give her last name. “It's not getting any better for the poor

— they're getting tromped on,” she said.

Alexia Gleaves, a homeless woman who last voted for Bill Clinton, says she registered today because she's fired up about Obama. “I'm voting this time because a black man is running — and a woman was running.”

Both race and the economy are motivating DeForest Woods, who sat out the last two elections but plans to work the polls for this one.

“We definitely need a change,” he said. He reasons that Obama is the man to deliver it precisely because his status as a minority will keep him under such close scrutiny that missteps will be impossible. “This is a great opportunity to have your voice heard,” he says. “I'm going to be out doing my part.”

John McCain is not without admirers in the neighborhood either. Dominciana Ferreira, back in the Tenderloin after several years in the Philippines, came to Boedekker Park so she could register to vote for him, saying she believes McCain beats Obama for experience. Nathaniel Jones, a TNDC volunteer — he made cotton candy for the kids who showed up — also favors McCain and Sarah Palin.

Although many Tenderloin residents lean toward Obama, Jones believes apathy will keep them from voting. “I'm not seeing many people fired up — which is good for Republicans,” he said.

Leyva echoes that concern: “People in the Tenderloin don't care whether things get better or not. They're so conditioned by the muck and shame of this area that they just don't care anymore. They see it as a lost cause.”

It's a grim view, and party organizers certainly aren't unaware that cynicism and apathy are among the reasons for low turnout in the Tenderloin.

“The community is largely disenfran-

chised and disillusioned with the process of voting,” notes Woo. He and other organizers say that re-engagement is a crucial first step to bring turned-off voters back to the civic fold.

The sunny day full of food and free T-shirts, entertainment and helping hands at the registrations tables ended up being a perfect lure for reconnecting residents with the democratic process.

“Just starting the dialog with people is a success,” said Lillian Mark, who helped sign up new voters at a table sponsored by Glide Memorial United Methodist Church.

TNDC organizing manager Tomiquia Moss agreed. “I'm thrilled with how many people came,” she said. “It reflected the true vibrancy of the neighborhood.” ■

Homeless voters live at General Delivery

HOMELESS San Franciscans have the right to vote, but — like everyone else — must register by Oct. 20. The registration form asks for mailing and street addresses. For mailing address, use “General Delivery, 101 Hyde St., San Francisco 94102.” For street address, provide a street intersection (Turk and Leavenworth, for example).

You'll also need to provide a California driver's license or ID number, or the last four digits of your Social Security number (if you can't provide a number, the state can conduct a search to verify your identity, but it's a slow process).

You can pick up an absentee ballot at 101 Hyde St. as long as you have a driver's license, ID card, passport or some other form of government-issued identification, according to James Wigdel, Postal Service spokesman.

If you'd rather vote in person, Charles MacNulty of the Elections Department recommends casting your ballot at City Hall, outside Room 48. Early voting begins Oct. 6; hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mon.-Fri. Weekend voting starts Oct. 18; hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sat. and Sun. ■

—HEIDI SWILLINGER



Eddy Street residents Dominciana Ferreira (left) and Narina Cariaga get registration assistance from TNDC volunteer Angela Winn of the Health Department. It was Cariaga's first time to register.

PHOTO BY TOM CARTER

Late night calls to Pink Diamonds strip club make the cops see red

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landlord, not the operator. I do not control operations. I won't comment until I verify and confirm the conflicting stories swirling around these events.” He referred questions to Pink Diamonds manager David Muhammad.

“Pink Diamonds had nothing to do with the incident that night,” Muhammad said later in an e-mail. He couldn't be reached for further comment.

BAD AS NORTH BEACH

The incident rivals the nightclub street violence that plagues North Beach. Proposals to crack down on out-of-control clubs by giving the Entertainment Commission more power and oversight, increasing club security and giving police more authority on the sidewalk are pending before the Board of Supervisors.

The very next weekend, Pink Diamonds was in Dutch again. At 1 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 27, on a routine check, TL police seized the cash register after finding a woman behind a counter selling water, sodas and the high-energy drink Rock Star, which is advertised outside near the club entrance. Pink Diamonds doesn't have a license to sell food or beverages.

Police have noticed the club's clientele has changed from well-behaved voyeurs to rough ones with a penchant for violence.

ARMED AND UNINHIBITED

“We believe the type attracted to that club have narcotics and firearms or whatever,” Jimenez said. “They come armed and have no inhibitions about letting off a couple of rounds in the Tenderloin. But no one was wounded Saturday that we know about. And no officers were hurt.”

He said the TL Police Station is preparing a complaint to take to the Entertainment Commission about the latest trouble, which didn't sit well in the neighborhood.

“Two-twenty-two is now becoming a problem,” said Tenderloin CBD manager Elaine

Zamora. She lives a block south of the club on Jones. “I hear that noise on Fridays and Saturdays, even at my place. When they close at Suite 181 (a nightclub on Eddy Street) they come over to 220. They piggyback.”

She said she was enlisting neighbors to voice their complaints at the next police captain's community meeting.

The 220 Jones site was formerly a porn movie house. Alan bought the building, he said, “about 12 years ago.” Several years ago it was Chez Patee strip club, a moral thorn in the side of the San Francisco Rescue Mission, its next-door neighbor. The mission's leaders railed publicly and often against the club, even sending young men and women to picket in front for weeks at a time.

In April 2007, Zamora, Alan and others formed The New Tenderloin activist group. Some 125 people showed up at the inaugural meeting. Alan led the discussion on violence. TNT in May marched to City Hall to dramatize its safety causes and submitted a list of five problem properties to the city attorney to investigate: 220 Jones St. was one.

TNT TARGETED 220 JONES

Soon afterward, a string of shootings occurred outside that police traced to patrons of the place that had been renamed The Vixen. Seven people were shot from July to November, Capt. Jimenez said in an interview.

The Vixen expired a year ago, just days before police and city officials at the October TL Police Community Forum meeting reported the club had a batch of permit issues. It had been cited by three city departments. TL police permit Officer Miguel Torres said he had received “a lot” of residential complaints about The Vixen's late-night noise and violence outside.

The club then was under investigation as a public nuisance by police and the city attorney. Police thought 220 Jones was violating its entertainment permit. But a deputy city attorney found that it had no entertainment permit

and didn't need one.

“Initially, police thought they were in violation,” says Deputy City Attorney Jerry Threet. “but they weren't.”

Because of “escalating violence,” then-Assistant City Attorney Neli Palma said at that October meeting, she had asked that the club close. It did “to the great relief to neighbors and police. We're skeptical that it can operate in a nonviolent manner,” Palma said. “If it reopens it will need very, very tight restrictions.”

ALAN CLOSES THE VIXEN

Alan arrived at the meeting late and missed all discussion about The Vixen.

“At my insistence,” Alan said after the meeting, “the club is closed until the issue of public safety is adequately addressed. And we're closed until we are in compliance.”

Meanwhile, he said he was reporting progress to his lawyer, Mark Rennie, who represents many other nightclubs before the Entertainment Commission.

Almost six months later, in March 2008, the place reopened as Pink Diamonds and it was clear of violations. Alan said he had hired a new security company, installed metal detectors and instituted a dress code — “no caps or hoodies,” a sign outside says. And it wore gaudy new paint — hard black and Pepto Bismo pink — “a gentleman's club now hiring dancers and employees,” a sign read.

Soon Alan appeared at community meetings to introduce his new manager, David Muhammad, who was very polite, and together they profusely assured everyone that Pink Diamonds would be as peaceful and neighborly as a strip club could ever be.

Before this September, Pink Diamonds had a passable record, considering how the neighborhood at night has changed. Since April, the club has had 13 police calls for service, ranging from disturbing the peace to aggravated assault, records show.

The figures pale by comparison with police action at Suite 181, considered the neighborhood's biggest nightclub headache (see the May 2008 Extra). The 181 Eddy St. site's noise and unruly crowds spurred two neighborhood meetings in the spring with residents, Entertainment Commission representatives, cops, and the club's owner and staff. Things improved, but the club's track record is dismal.

In 23 out of 38 weekends this year, from Jan. 1 to Sept. 21, cops were at Suite 181 to make arrests or restore order. The Extra's study of Tenderloin police records found. The heaviest figures came from fights: a dozen cases of battery, on track to be 25% more than the club had in 2007, and four aggravated assaults so far. Also this year, four people resisted arrest and two others battled police. None of that happened the previous year.

For officials, Pink Diamonds has a confusing status in night time entertainment.

CLUB'S STATUS 'WEIRD'

“We're looking into that,” says the Entertainment Commission's Bob Davis. “It's a weird spot it falls into because it's not permitted by us. The police are investigating, too.”

“I've had numerous discussions with Capt. Jimenez and it's a legal question — technically, they don't serve food or beverages. Last year, when we looked into The Vixen, the city attorney determined no permit was needed since it didn't serve food or drink. But last weekend Capt. David Lazar closed it.”

Finding no permits for 220 Jones St. on Sept. 21, the police report said, the cops wrote Pink Diamonds two citations. The report also described the club's milieu: “numerous physical altercations and large amounts of noise due to the large crowds in the area.”

“We have a couple of problems there,” Jimenez says. “They have no after-hours permit. And the building owner makes it plain they don't need it, only one from the Fire Department. It puts us in a (strange) position.

“It's been explained to me several times,” he continued, “and I still don't understand it — a girl dancing on a pole is not entertainment, but when selling (food or drink), it is.”

Pink Diamonds' neighbors, residents in the 205 Jones St. apartments directly across the street, say the late-night mob scenes are maddening.

Lea Curry, a 10-year resident, describes the building's tenants as mostly working people, families, some with two jobs, some retired, most not speaking English very well. Several came to her a few weeks ago, she said, and begged her to do something about the club's noise.

“I work nights and live in back and wasn't really aware of it,” Curry told The Extra. “But then I started noticing.

'YELLING, SCREAMING, CARS HONKING'

“The weekend before last there was a huge party outside, big crowd, boom boxes going, yelling, screaming, cars honking. What I've seen is the noise starts after 2 a.m., and at 3 a.m. the traffic is gridlocked. Inside security can't handle that.

“Sometimes it's open on Sundays and that spills over to early Monday.”

She watched people drive and walk into the neighborhood and believed that a portion was a migrating crowd from Suite 181, but admitted she couldn't “guarantee” that.

“We're 70 feet away. That people should be kept up isn't right. We're often not perceived as a residential area. But we are. And if I lived in the front of the building, I'd be angry. I'm encouraging people to get involved.”

Curry says she has known Alan 10 years. She says he's been a good neighbor with 220 Jones until recently. She readily credits him for working hard for community improvements over the years — he's recently been named to the advisory committee of the new Community Justice Center at 555 Polk St. — but she's disappointed by his stance now.

“I wrote him an email about the noise and he wrote back that none of the businesses were complaining,” Curry said. “Well, they're closed at that time. It's a little tricky for me — I've known him a long time. He's always been caring about the neighborhood. Now he's blaming his tenant. I still think the ball falls on Terrace.”

“Because he's the commissioner, who do we go to? Sounds like a conflict of interest to me.”

Roy Castillo, a 14-year resident, was aware of Pink Diamonds' problems long before Curry. His second floor apartment faces the club.

“The noise started four or five months ago,” Castillo said. “So many cars and motorcycles. Boom, boom, you can hear it. And the car radios. Two weekends ago (Sept. 21) I heard three gunshots and then the police came and surrounded Pink Diamonds. There was fighting and shouting going on.”

Castillo speaks Tagalog. Five families in the 50-unit building, one with a small child, have come to him about the noise, hoping something can be done, he told The Extra. The families are scared to speak out because they know “an official” owns the property, he said, and they fear reprisals.

'IT'S TERRIBLE'

“They come to me,” Castillo said. “They can't sleep. It's terrible. I wish the official lived here, too.”

Weekends, Castillo watches the crowds form after 1 a.m. The line for Pink Diamonds extends down Jones Street. It wraps around the corner at the Antonia Manor apartment building at 180 Turk St. so he can't know how many wait. But he sees revelers leave Pink Diamonds 50-60 at a time and then more are admitted, he says. The basement and first floor capacity is 231, according to the Fire Department. The crowds continue until 4:30 or 5 a.m.

“I don't like to speak out either,” Castillo says. “They might get back at me. But if we don't speak out it will cause more harm.” ■