

Pink Diamonds manager hires ex-Tenderloin police captain to plan security for strip club

BY TOM CARTER

UNDER mounting pressure from police and the community, the manager of the Pink Diamonds strip club on Jones Street announced in a public meeting Oct. 29 that he has hired a retired San Francisco police captain as a consultant to help solve the club's violence problems outside.

Also, the club will put surveillance cameras outside and increase the security guards monitoring outdoors, especially at closing time, Manager David Muhammad told a gathering of about 50 neighborhood residents, police and city officials sitting on rows of folding chairs in the carpeted, nicely appointed strip joint.

Entertainment Commission Executive Director Bob Davis advised the club to hire a noise abatement consultant as well.

Notably absent was building owner Terrance Alan who serves on the Entertainment Commission. Alan refused to comment for The Extra's October story that highlighted the club's troubles, saying it was

management's problem to deal with, not his. Even so, as the club's shoddy record has lengthened, some residents have voiced concern about his laissez faire role.

Pink Diamonds has hired Richard Cairns, who walked the Tenderloin as a beat cop in the 1970s and was a captain here in 1986 before retiring in 2001 at Treasure Island. He's a pal of TL Capt. Gary Jimenez since their Police Academy days 38 years ago.

"I'm not on anybody's side," Cairns said. "I'm not defending anyone. We (he and his assistant) are evaluating the situation and when we come up with a plan, we'll make it available. Then I'm gone."

Right off, though, he recommended that the club ban people who are arrested outside for having guns or dope.

"Arrested for cocaine, banned forever," Cairns said. "Stop them here and they'll go to Broadway. At least they won't be here."

Assistant District Attorney Brian Buckelew attended to learn what "concrete" steps are being taken to stem the violence.

Just about everyone during the two-hour meeting acknowledged that controlling a raucous early morning crowd is a tall order. In recent weeks, residents have complained of being jarred awake by wee-hours noise from crowds, fights and vehicular traffic. One from next door said his bedroom shook from the noise and vibrations.

Police say many partygoers migrate to the self-described "gentleman's club" from the equally troubled Suite 181 Club on Eddy Street. Especially free-wheeling out-of-towners, some with guns and narcotics in their cars, thumb noses at residential peace in the neighborhood.

This year's troubles at Pink Diamonds culminated Sept 21. Police responding to a call about gunshots fired outside the club had to summon what Capt. Jimenez estimated as 50 officers from four police districts to quell the crowd. Police shuttered the club at 2:30 a.m. and cited it for violating the city's Good Neighbor Policy and operating without a license after hours.

Jimenez vowed to defuse future crowds — if any — before "there's a dead body" on the street. The "thin blue line" of after-hours cops is overtaxed by the club's problems and detracts from other TL areas needing policing, he said. Jimenez admitted "harassing" Muhammad, but said he respected him. However, until the cops are satisfied the area is safe at night, he'll keep the pressure on.

Last year police attributed seven shootings outside to patrons they said were leaving the club, which was then called The Vixen. A hue and cry went up from community leaders, parents, working people, retirees and handicapped residents. Tenderloin police Permit Officer Miguel Torres included the shootings in a litany of citizen complaints, club violations and citations that Jimenez asked him to read to show the scope of the police problem. The cops see 220 Jones as a trouble spot that changes only in name.

Muhammad left no doubt the club has turned over a new leaf, and while praising Jimenez for the job he does in the neighborhood, said he felt that his four-month tenure as manager was unfairly linked with the club's dismal 2007 police record and the "negativity" of The Extra's October report of the 50-cop scene and prior history.

He was calm and spoke politely about wanting to be a good neighbor. He had laid out bottled water, soft drinks, cheese and crackers, and fruit for the attendees. Standing before the crowd under a silent, wall-size TV screen showing baseball highlights, Muhammad told how his DJs are turning down the volume and he has installed sound-deadening curtains. He said he gave apartment building managers near the club his cell phone number in case noise was bothering their residents, and he's encourag-

ing citizen feedback. He said he's met with other club owners about security problems.

Pink Diamonds has a dress code to keep a certain element out, turning away baggy jeans and hoods. And Muhammad told of outreach ambitions to donate clothing and Thanksgiving turkeys to the poor.

In the club's defense, he said, Tenderloin police have made 5,000 arrests so far this year, and not a single bust was inside the club.

The Entertainment Commission's Davis gave Muhammad the clearest advice of the evening.

"The noise shouldn't be heard in any residence," Davis said. "Get a consultant."

Put up signs reminding smokers and loiterers outside to be quiet and respect the neighborhood, he continued. Have a clean and controlled area in a 50-foot radius of the club and a line policy, he advised. Fifty feet is a common requirement among agencies, including the state Alcoholic Beverage Control department.

But Pink Diamonds doesn't have a liquor license. It doesn't even sell food or drinks and hence is not licensed by the Entertainment Commission. It's not subject to commission actions. It made no difference to Davis whether Muhammad was running a more collegial operation.

"The club's responsible for the conduct of patrons leaving," Davis said. "It's not easy but it can be done. Take more responsibility. This meeting is a good start."

TNDC's Steve Woo wasn't satisfied with just talk from Muhammad. He said he had received many upsetting complaints from nearby TNDC residents about noise and violence. He adamantly asked for Muhammad's "promises" to "keep at it" until residents can feel at peace.

Muhammad assured him that "we don't want to see people shot any more than the captain does."

Until Muhammad turns the leaf, though, cops will continue to ride herd on the club.

On her way out of the meeting, Night Watch Lt. Leanora Militello, the last cop to close the club in September, stopped to shake Muhammad's hand. She promised him she'd be zeroing in on the club every night he's open because it's "a pain in the ass." She wasn't smiling. ■

Pink Diamonds can't seem to shake its past and is under heightened scrutiny to shape up and stop the rowdy crowds outside late at night.



PHOTO BY TOM CARTER

GOOD NEWS for...

6TH ST. RESIDENTS Central City Hospitality House unveils its new Sixth Street Self-Help Center on Nov. 10 with a grand-opening splash featuring light refreshments and appearances by Supe Chris Daly and other community leaders. The center at 169 and 181 Sixth St. between Mission and Howard will offer case management for health and mental health clients, employment resources and socialization activities for Sixth Street corridor residents. The center will also provide a seniors-only drop-in area. Hospitality House, which also operates the Tenderloin Self-Help Center on Turk Street, runs the new Sixth Street center under contract with Department of Public Health. It will be open weekdays 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The grand opening, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., is open to the public.

DISABLED PET OWNERS Want to spread some good cheer this holiday season? PAWS can use your help. PAWS (Pets Are Wonderful Support) in SoMa helps disabled clients care for their pets. Each December, volunteers distribute pet treats and toys to PAWS clients. This year's event is set for Dec. 7, and PAWS is looking for 80-90 volunteers to help with the distribution. Volunteers, will work in teams and will be assigned to a 10 a.m.-noon shift or a noon-2 p.m. shift. Those without cars will be paired with people who have one. To volunteer, call Daniel Marlay at 979-9550, or e-mail him at info@pawssf.org.

If you have some good news, send it to marjorie@studycenter.org or tom@studycenter.org.

CENTRAL CITY
EXTRA
SAN FRANCISCO

CENTRAL CITY EXTRA is published monthly by San Francisco Study Center Inc., a private nonprofit serving the community since 1972. The Extra was initiated through grants from the S.F. Hotel Tax Fund and the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund. It is now assisted by the Kosland Committee of the San Francisco Foundation, which funds the Southside coverage. The contents are copyrighted by the San Francisco Study Center, 1095 Market Street, Suite 601, San Francisco, CA 94103.

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