

# 64 robberies in TL in 90 days – on pace to 6-year low

BY TOM CARTER

**A** CENTRAL City Extra study of robberies in the Tenderloin from March 12 to June 9 shows a trend of fewer robberies this year than last and reveals some unusual patterns of the crime.

During those 90 days, there were 64 robberies in the 36-block police district, an average of 1.8 per square block, highest in the city. The majority were within two blocks of the police station.

Projecting the quarterly figure, the TL can expect 27% fewer robberies this year than last.

Monthly totals in the Tenderloin fluctuate unpredictably from 15 to 40 robberies or more. Annual totals vary, too. The robbery bell curve over eight years looks like the Alps. Starting in 2001: 338, 284, 249, 336, 271, 364 and 331 in 2008.

If the 13%-25% up-and-down trend holds true, 2009 will have 256 robberies, the lowest in six years.

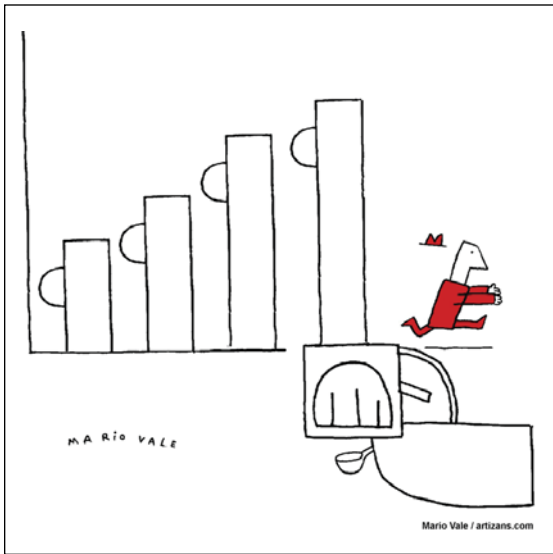
The 90-day statistics from the Police Department's Crime Maps unit reveal that the methods used for robbery were fairly divided: 23 cases of strong arm (using threats), 22 of bodily force (hands on) and 19 with weapons. Most incidents happen at night using the cover of darkness when few witnesses are around and fewer cops on duty. The crime drops off after 2:30 a.m. Robbery is stealing by force or intimidation; burglary, is breaking in to steal.

More police on the street and better communication with residents is happening. Elderly, often reluctant to step forward as robbery victims, "have been getting better at reporting," says Street Crimes unit Sgt. Mark O'Brachta. "Immigrants, too. We're not concerned about documentation. We won't turn anyone over to the INS. We're a sanctuary city."

"People call in (911) or just stop us on the street to tell us what's going on. We get anonymous tips, too. Maybe someone knows about a drug deal and a gang that's going to hit it. And, yes, we are authorized to pay for tips, depending on the circumstances."

The Tenderloin's population makes it a different kind of robbery turf from other neighborhoods. Store robberies aren't as frequent here as elsewhere because it's easier for predators to spot weak targets on the street and snap spontaneously into action. Anyone alone and reduced by age, drugs or alcohol, or physically impaired, is game. A healthier mark,

## SPECIAL REPORT



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but alone, can be hit by two to four robbers, too.

Prime booty in these spontaneous crimes of opportunity is purses, iPods, iPhones and laptops. Shakedown for just a few bucks are common, too. Just about every elderly person has a story or knows of someone else's.

Melissa McNeill, 82, is a 25-year resident of the Tenderloin. She's been victimized three times, maybe more, she can't remember. Once she was walking on Leavenworth between Eddy and Turk when a "good-size" black woman appeared out of nowhere, slammed her against the wall, snatched \$13 out of her pocket and disappeared around a corner. "I don't know if she saw it sticking out," McNeill says, sitting in the Curry Senior Center on Turk where she's a regular. "It happened so fast I was ga-ga."

She reported that robbery but not the next: She had just gotten \$17.50 in change back from a \$20 bill at Barah's Market, corner of Leavenworth and Turk.

"A man followed me out the door, reached in my pocket and took it and my ID and everything. He ran up Leavenworth. I never saw his face, just his back so I didn't report it. But around the Empire Grocery they just reach around me and into my pockets — there's more around there than anywhere else."

For cops to catch the bad guys they need a 911 call, a location and good description of the robber. They caution people not to fight back and to call immediately. Attempted robbery is a crime, too, and, reported, can lead to an arrest later.

It's especially helpful when witnesses stay the course. Maurice "Moe" Jackson did in February after being astonished and appalled to see a brutal robbery unfold at the Market and Hyde streets bus stop. As a woman was boarding the bus, a panhandler stepped up and yanked the purse so hard it pulled her back down. Then he slugged her in the face to rip the purse off her arm.

"Cold-cocked her," said Jackson, another Curry Senior Center regular. "And I was mad."

The robber ran off with Jackson and others in hot pursuit. Someone called 911 as they ran, giving location updates as they continued west. A volunteer track coach in the East Bay, Jackson, at 72, can still do 40 meters in 6.8 seconds, he says. But carrying a 13-pound backpack that day winded him and his legs were "burning" when the pursuers and arriving police converged in front of Herbst Theater on Van Ness Avenue. Police took the suspect to the ground and made the arrest.

"I just wanted to stomp him, but I didn't," Jackson said. "The woman reported it and it ran in the Examiner's police blotter."

But a flaring temper can hurt a victim. A few blocks away, Ron Santiago, 60, was finishing his oatmeal one morning in June at an overflowing senior drop-in center that requested anonymity. He remembered two months before, in front of his apartment building at Larkin and Ellis at 11 p.m., when he called the desk clerk on his iPhone to let him in. A husky black man in his 40s came up behind him and grabbed the iPhone.

"I got angry," Santiago said. "I fought him." Santiago lost. He suffered two broken ribs, he says,

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