

**DEREK DECOITE
NOBLE CUNNINGHAM**
Deaths shock residents

Nine residents and a staff member met in the William Penn Hotel community room July 15 to remember two of their own who died recently. Derek Decoite and Noble Cunningham weren't well known by any of the mourners, but several said they were surprised by their deaths.

Mr. Decoite was found in his room by his social worker a week after he died alone at age 40.

He used to listen to bands like the Misfits and the Dead Kennedys, said a resident named Jesse — "the same ones I listened to when I was young. I didn't know he had died. I was shocked, just so shocked."

Another said Mr. Decoite "was open to sharing information about services in the neighborhood, a good spirit who cared about people."

Mr. Decoite was "a very nice person," said Lavonne Adams, who has lived at the William Penn for three years, adding that she hadn't known anything was wrong with him.

After the memorial, The Extra talked with Veronica Gutierrez, Mr. Decoite's social worker for the year that he lived at the William Penn and the two years before that, when he was homeless. She knew that he was born in Pleasanton and had parents who still live in Oakley, in Contra Costa County.

"He was kind and sweet and he loved video games and punk rock music," Gutierrez said, naming Green Day and Social Distortion as two of his favorite bands. "He also loved to go shopping for clothes that suited his punk style — his favorite store was Hot Topic."

She didn't know how he had died.

"He had no obvious illnesses and there's been no confirmed cause of death from the medical examiner," she said.

Information about Noble Cunningham was sparse. A resident recalled seeing him riding his bicycle. He had lived at the William Penn for six years, according to Fawzia Amar, property manager, and he was, she said, "a quiet, confidential man, who just went in and out of the hotel." He was 55 when he died May 20. ■

— MARJORIE BEGGS

CURTIS MARTIN
'A cool guy'

The seven years that Curtis Martin lived at the Senator Hotel weren't the easiest for him. They followed a stretch of homelessness and illnesses that, soon after he moved in, left him first on crutches, then in a wheelchair with an amputated leg and, finally, bedridden. Still, he managed to stay upbeat, said the SRO staff and a fellow resident who attended his Aug. 4 memorial.

The memorial began a quarter of an hour late, held up for his aunt and niece from the East Bay who were expected to attend. When staff received the call saying they couldn't make it, Rev. Glenda Hope began, "We're joined here once more, friends, to mourn the loss of one who was among us . . ."

Mr. Martin was 59 when he died in hospital July 25.

"He moved into the Senator with a lot of difficulties," recalled Isabella Marshall, hotel manager, "but he struggled through it, trying to live a productive life." He had many friends in the neighborhood and often visited his mother, who lives in Oakland. She has Alzheimer's, Marshall said, and

Mr. Martin worried about her.

Case manager Margaret Dagovich took a long, emotional half-minute to compose herself before she could speak. "This is the part I hate," she said. "Where to start with Curtis? We'll miss his humor, his sarcasm, the witty comments he'd make whenever he'd see us." His decline was hard to watch, she added, "but I do know he was ready to go — he was comfortable and resting."

Anne Dudley, also a case manager, commented on how Mr. Martin "passed with dignity. He was a funny, generous person we all cared for a lot — if I did something boneheaded, he'd reach over and knock on my head."

After the memorial, The Extra

talked with Bill Malcolm, a Senator resident for 17 years and himself in a wheelchair. He didn't know anything about Mr. Martin's early life and, while not close friends, they'd meet up in the hotel lobby every so often.

"We'd talk about how the day was going and things like that," Malcolm said. "I know he had friends in the neighborhood and I could see that he didn't want to give up."

They met one last time, just before Mr. Martin went into the hospital: "I could see he was in pain, but he never, ever talked about that. Was he a happy person? There was more to it than that — he had a real sense of humor. He stayed on the bright side of things. He was a cool guy." ■

— MARJORIE BEGGS

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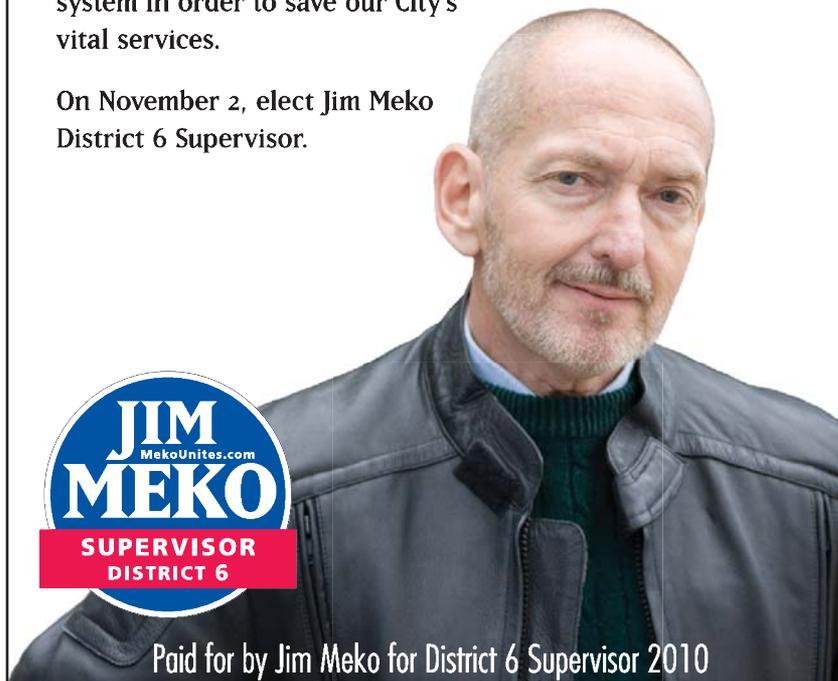
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