

'I'm living on my own in this wonderful place, the Aarti Hotel'

TNDC, Larkin Street partner in new residence for troubled young adults

BY BRIAN RINKER

THE 40-unit Aarti Hotel, next door to the Tenderloin National Forest, celebrated its grand reopening March 26 as newly renovated transitional housing and supportive services for mentally ill youth.

As the sky darkened and a brisk chill cut through the crowd at the event, Meredith Hardesty took the stage. The 22-year-old Aarti resident shared her story of a life wrought with "difficulties and challenges." Nervous, she stuttered and stumbled in her speech, then paused. Some in the crowd tried to calm her. "Take your time," they said. Hardesty continued and delivered her message that ended with a promise of hope.

"Now I'm living on my own, in this wonderful place called the Aarti Hotel," she said, adding that she had volunteered to tell her story, but was so anxious the night before the celebration she slept barely two hours.

The Aarti Hotel is owned by Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corp., and Larkin Street Youth Services provides counselors, case managers and other support staff that serve the formerly homeless residents, ages 18 to 24.

A score of people packed the meandering trails of the landscaped oasis nestled on Ellis Street at Larkin, while musical performers, community leaders and supporters took the stage, all in support of the new residences.

Other speakers included Don Falk, TNDC executive director, and

District 6 Supervisor Jane Kim. A ribbon-cutting and tours of the hotel followed.

"It's a good marriage," Falk said of the partnership. TNDC acquired the building at 501 Ellis St. in 1981. Falk said once subsidies dried up for the previous tenants — adults with mental disabilities — they moved out and the building was vacant until now.

"The Aarti Hotel gives young people a home they can respect," said Kathie Lowry, Larkin Street's chief development officer.

For Amanda Maynard, a 23-year-old hotel resident, the hotel is more than a home. It's a place to learn independence and gain self-esteem.

"Staying here teaches us to pay our bills, and they tell us what to look for when grocery shopping," says Maynard. "They even have cooking classes."

Since she was 8 years old, when Maynard became orphaned, she's bounced from family to family and then, when of age, she floated from couch to couch. She got connected with Larkin Street through the HARTS program at City College of San Francisco. While attending City College, Maynard struggled to make classes; being homeless, jobless and suffering from severe mental health problems made life challenging.

Larkin Street, a social service organization for homeless youth ages 12 to 24, took Maynard in. With two shelters, one near the Panhandle for underage youth and another for young adults on Ellis Street down the road from the Aarti, and other transi-



PHOTO BY BRIAN RINKER

Twenty-three-year-old Amanda Maynard (second from left), a resident of the newly renovated Aarti Hotel, stands with others in the adjacent Tenderloin National Forest next door. "They even have cooking classes," she says.

tional homes scattered throughout the city, Larkin Street serves 3,100 out of the city's 5,700 homeless youth, says Lowry.

Residents participate in employment and educational programs designed to teach independence.

Of those who participate in all the

programs, 75%-80% will move on to be self-sustaining. Those who don't or age out at 24 will move on to other adult social service organizations.

Later that evening, Maynard had her first job interview in over two years, at an AMC movie theater. ■

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WORKSHOP DATES AND LOCATIONS

Las fechas y ubicaciones de los talleres / 研討會日期和地點 / Семинар даты и места / Hội thảo Thời gian và địa điểm / Gawaan Petsa at Lokasyon

Workshop Topic	Day/Date	Time	Location
28 19th Avenue and N Judah proposals	Sat., March 31	10 a.m. – 12 noon	Jefferson Elementary School 1725 Irving at 18th Ave.
30 Stockton and 8X Bayshore Express proposals	Sat., April 7	10 a.m. – 12 noon	Gordon J. Lau Elementary School 950 Clay at Powell
1 Church and 14 Mission (South of Cesar Chavez) proposals	Tues., April 10	6 – 8 p.m.	Fairmount Elementary School 65 Chenery at Randall
14 Mission (Inner Mission) and 22 Fillmore (16th Street) proposals	Wed., April 11	6 – 8 p.m.	Women's Building 3543 - 18th St. at Valencia
8X Bayshore Express, 1 Church, 14 Mission (Outer Mission) proposals	Thurs., April 19	6 – 8 p.m.	City College of SF, MUB 140 50 Phelan at Ocean
8X Bayshore Express proposals	Sat., April 21	10 a.m. – 12 noon	Vistacion Valley Community Center 50 Raymond Ave. at Bayshore Blvd.
28 19th Avenue proposals	Tues., April 24	6 – 8 p.m.	Lakeside Presbyterian Church 19th at Eucalyptus
5 Fulton and 22 Fillmore (16th Street) proposals	Sat., April 28	10 a.m. – 12 noon	Ella Hill Hutch, McAllister and Webster 1050 McAllister St. at Webster
14 Mission (Downtown) and 30 Stockton proposals	Tues., May 1	6 – 8 p.m.	Bayanihan Center 1010 Mission at 6th St.
All corridor proposals	Sat., May 5	10 a.m. – 12 noon	SFMTA, 2nd Floor One South Van Ness Ave at Market St.

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