

JIM MEKO

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Mr. Meko was the leading voice of SoMa Leadership Council, an otherwise leaderless group that met monthly to “ensure that South of Market remains a compassionate, diverse, vibrant and complete neighborhood,” as its motto said. It grew out of another organization, the SoMa Residents Association, that Mr. Meko and neighbors launched in 1997 to fight noisy, late-night entertainment.

The council promoted peace between the clubs and their neighbors, urged the Board of Supervisors to ban live/work units and, Mr. Meko told The Extra in 2010, “it created the western SoMa planning process to preserve mixed use.”

“He probably went to more meetings than anyone I’ve ever known,” Rubin said. “And he was the fairest man I ever knew,” a sentiment widely held in the room.

Former Entertainment Commission Chair Audrey Joseph said Mr. Meko was a “huge figure” on the commission, the protector of SoMa residents’ quiet enjoyment when threatened by loud clubs, and head of the commission’s bylaws committee.

Reporters picked up on his “bulldog” side. After seeing one description during his commission days, he fired back — in his gentle form.

“Representing neighborhood concerns on the EC is not glamorous,” he wrote in a 2011 Facebook post, quoted in his Bay Area Reporter obituary. “The Bay Guardian once described me as ‘grumpy.’ Well, if a venue has been keeping families awake at night, if it’s been attracting a crowd that defaces your property, or, God forbid, if innocent victims are injured or killed, that merits more than a frown.”

Daly was aware of how Mr. Meko sometimes was depicted in the press as irritable. “I have a different take on him,” Daly told the gathering. “I knew him as a warm and caring man. People don’t usually glean that from press stories. He always greeted you with a smile. We never had a significant disagreement.”

Mr. Meko dropped off the Leadership Council to run for supervisor in 2010, a move that put the organization on indefinite hold.

The District 6 field had 14 candidates on the ballot and Jane Kim won. Mr. Meko, who had been known to shout disagreements at Kim during candidate forums, finished a distant ninth with 404 votes, even with the endorsement of former Board President Gonzalez, now chief assistant public defender.

With Daly termed out, the task of carrying the Western SoMa Plan fell to Kim, who did not attend the memorial. Her staff stand-in, Danny Madegar, said he had worked with Mr. Meko to bring Kim’s legislation “across the finish line” before the Board of Supervisors and was impressed with Mr. Meko’s meticulousness. The plan passed 8 to 1.

Among stories of Mr. Meko’s effect on people, none was greater than Kris Schaeffer’s. She helped organize the memorial and spoke toward the end. She was his sister Hall’s roommate at Creighton College in Omaha, Neb., 50 years ago when Mr. Meko was a shy teenager. That was ancient history until one day 10 years ago, Schaeffer said.

She was looking for ways to stop giant home-builder Pulte Homes from buying the San Francisco Tennis Club (now The Bay Club) at Fifth and Townsend streets in District 6 to build 500 condominiums. An avid member, she was proud of the club’s reasonable cost, its mixed middle-class membership and its outstanding community outreach programs to benefit low-income children and families. Land use lawyer Sue Hestor, she said, recommended she connect with Mr. Meko.

She found a welcoming, middle-aged

man, but now a cautious activist skeptical of what he figured was an elitist, self-absorbed tennis club member. He grilled her, but listened just as hard. Then he rode his bicycle to the club to see for himself and to listen to the members. He measured what was to be lost or gained and liked what he had found. “He hated classism, but he changed his opinion (about the club),” Schaeffer said.

Mr. Meko persuaded Daly to bicycle over to make his own assessment, too. He did, and partnerships were born.

Mr. Meko helped Schaeffer organize SoMa town hall meetings to discuss the issues. He introduced Schaeffer to a planning commissioner ahead of the hearing on the club, and, like a “younger brother” she never had, schooled her in land use and district political power.

Supervisor Daly authored a resolution putting a moratorium on the kind of massive structure Pulte planned. “Jim gave me the guts to go visit every supervisor,” Schaeffer said. She attended task force meetings to counter the pitch Pulte representatives were making. Rallies were organized on City Hall’s steps and club members and high-profile tennis sympathizers testified at hearings.

In the end, the moratorium passed, the economy took a downturn and goliath Pulte took a rock between the eyes and “pulled out” in 2008.

“As a result, Jim got me involved with neighborhood stuff. I still am,” Schaeffer said, her voice trembling. “He taught me how one person can make a difference — that I could. He got people to know and love SoMa. I will miss him.”

— Tom Carter



PETTWAY FAMILY PHOTO

VERA PETTWAY
A brief, troubled life

Vera Pettway, a native San Franciscan with a 30-year history of drug addiction and run-ins with the law, died Aug. 12. She was 49.

Ms. Pettway, third of nine children, was raised in Hunters Point public housing and in the notorious Bernal Dwellings tower on then-Army Street. She started Woodrow Wilson High but, soon after leaving home as a teenager, she became a heroin user who financed her habit by stealing. Her family is uncertain whether she graduated high school.

Ms. Pettway had five children, two born while she was behind bars. Two adult children remain close to the rest of her family, but the whereabouts of three of their siblings are unknown. Ms. Pettway was jailed many times, including a 3½-year stretch late in the 1980s at the state prison for women in Corona (Riverside County), her sister, Florence Bolden, recalled.

“Vera could have \$1,000 in her pocket, and she’d still be in the store stealing. In her mind, she was rich,” Bolden said. “I guess she was a klepto. It was an addiction, just like the drugs.”

If you didn’t know Ms. Pettway by name, you might have known her as The Girl With the Cats, a frequently seen and assertive presence on Tenderloin streets, often trailed by her tabby, Ty-Ty.

Friends and neighbors gathered for a memorial Aug. 21 at the Vincent Hotel, Ms. Pettway’s home for the past two years. Before a simple table adorned

with a vase of amaryllis, Michael Mallory of Quest4Light asked the assembled to assist Ms. Pettway’s spirit in the transition from life to the next realm by sprinkling herbs on a smoldering cone of incense and ringing a bell in her memory. People performed this simple ritual, then sang a heartfelt “Amazing Grace.”

Her friend, Colquese Coleman, said he knew her from the streets and from the Vincent: “She did a lot of nice things for people. She was a good person.”

Sheila Benson knew Ms. Pettway for 30 years. She tried to speak of her, but tears overwhelmed her and her voice choked. Composure restored, Ms. Benson simply said, “Vera’s in a better place.”

Yreshaof Pickens, property manager of the Vincent, recalled adventures of Ty-Ty and Ms. Pettway’s second cat, Squeak-Squeak: “Sometimes, Ms. Vera didn’t want Ty-Ty to follow her out into the street. She would holler, ‘Ty-Ty you get back home or I’ll kick you for a field goal.’” Ty-Ty would return to await the arrival of his toughlove guardian. When both cats would wander, Ms. Pettway worried, but the sound of a can of cat food being opened always brought them back to her door.

“She spent big bucks on those cats. Organic food, real gourmet,” Pickens said.

Everyone at the memorial was aware that when Ty-Ty was struck and killed by a car on Market Street in early August, Ms. Pettway went into a deep funk. “Someone brought her his body in a box and I know she buried him next to a tree in some park, but she was devastated,” Pickens said.

As the memorial closed, Pickens stepped forward with a well-worn Bible. “The only thing of value amongst Ms. Vera’s possessions,” Pickens said. Mallory opened it to a place mark, the 23rd Psalm, and ended the memorial, reading the verse of walking through the shadow

of the valley of death, but fearing no evil.

Squeak-Squeak has been adopted by a family, Pickens announced. ■

— Jonathan Newman



JOHN BURKS

NORBERT CHARLES
Example for us all

Norbert Charles, featured in The Extra 1½ years ago in a story on palliative care, on July 28 succumbed at the age of 64 to the cancer he suffered then.

Mr. Charles, at the time of the interview, was fresh from a diagnosis of stomach and colon cancer, plus heart and lung disease and rheumatoid arthritis among the litany of his ills.

In a wheelchair and hooked up to an oxygen tank, Mr. Charles related his life history to The Extra’s John Burks, tearfully describing his disputes with the military to clear his service record and obtain veteran’s benefits. The unsuccessful efforts hurt him, Mr. Charles told Burks, calling himself “a skeleton now that they can just throw away.”

The story in The Extra was part of

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Building	Size & Amenities	Max/Min Household Income Limits	Rent as of Feb. 1, 2015
The Knox SRO located at 241- 6th St. & Tehama is accepting applications and has an OPEN WAITLIST	SRO – 1 Person or Couple Room size: 10 ½ x 18 (Semi-Private) bathroom 7 x 7 Unit amenities: sink, microwave, refrigerator, 2-burner stove, closet, single bed Building amenities: small gym, library, private lounge, roof top garden, community kitchen, laundry facility, 24 hour staff & surveillance	1 person \$34,600/year 2 person \$39,520/year Minimum income of \$1,374/month	Move-in deposit \$687 Monthly rent \$687 plus utilities
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