

# Restless over ups and downs at the Alexander

*Frustrated tenants must make do with 1 wheezing elevator during hotel redo*

PHOTOS BY MARK ELLINGER



There are usually several people waiting for the single working elevator at the Alexander Hotel.

BY TOM CARTER

**T**ENANTS of the 12-story Alexander Hotel at 230 Ellis are finding that the building renovation begun last December is not only inconvenient, it's complicated daily by agonizing ups and downs. Indeed, the hotel's two small 1928 elevators have turned into the No. 1 gripe on the residents' hit parade.

"Only one is working and it is very, very slow," says Marie Marik, at 87, the oldest resident, having been there 25 years. "It takes 15 to 20 minutes for it to come."

Although the former World War II WAC suffers a spinal impairment and is frail, she has at times given up waiting. She walks up the five dusty flights to her room, stopping often to rest and to use an inhaler for her asthma.

"So if you have an appointment some place, you just better start walking," Marik adds. "But I don't have to go to the doctor as much as the others. We have so many elderly here — about half, several in wheelchairs — and we have 170 rooms. I feel sorry for the people who can't walk up."

The \$8 million Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corp. renovation of 179 SRO units is scheduled to be completed in March. It includes new electrical system, fire alarms, sprinklers, carpets, emer-

gency generator, some new plumbing, a few rooms that comply with Americans with Disabilities Act requirements and new paint inside and out. Plus two new elevators.

TNDC Project Manager Diana Downton sympathizes with the tenants.

"It's difficult, I know," Downton says. "We have had to shut one (elevator) down in order to renovate it. At least we have two of them. It does mean long waits and a crowded elevator. But I don't see any way around it. I'm asking them to be patient and reminding them how fast and safe they will be when they are fixed."

One elevator was shut down in mid-June and it was to come back on line in six months, now changed to seven, when the other will be taken out for renovation. Limited by shaft size, the operating elevator for the residents is 4' 3" by 4' 9" and isn't ADA-compliant. The nonworking elevator is slightly larger — 5' by 6'5".

Normally, the elevator is shut down Monday through Friday, 7:30 to 8 a.m. and 3 to 3:30 p.m. to haul garbage because the chute is out of commission. On Oct. 25, the residents' elevator was shut down from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. so items could be returned from storage.

"Sometimes I have just given up waiting and gone back home," says Terry Hogan, a former LVN nurse who is confined to a wheelchair and

Attention Alexander Residents:

On Saturday, October 25<sup>th</sup>, we will need to use the elevator between 10:00a.m. until approximately 2:00 p.m.

We apologize for using the elevator during the day, but it could not be avoided. We are returning things from storage and that must happen during business hours.

We appreciate your patience.

The only working elevator is sometimes appropriated for other uses.

lives on the 10th floor. "The elevator is so slow it is frightening. And the more it has gotten fixed, the slower it gets."

Hogan raised hell about it in the tenants-owners meeting Oct. 23 when elevators were the hot topic. But everyone is trying to keep their tempers down, mindful of stress levels.

The occasional malfunctioning of the operating elevator has given rise to the rumor that the manufacturer, Haughton Inc., went out of business and that there are no replaceable parts to fit.

Downton says she hasn't heard that. The Kone Co. that is working on the elevators says there is no problem finding the standard parts required, she says.

Meanwhile, the construction goes on. The big dug-out pit in front of the hotel is for a PG&E transformer to go under the new sidewalk. Fencing routes pedestrians around the pit. Wooden planks lead to the hotel's front door. The lobby, which has temporarily lost footage to the construction of a recreation room and bathrooms, is hammered by construction noise. There have been water

stoppages and lots of dust and unexpected interruptions in the limited elevator service.

The residents move by floors to vacant rooms, then back when renovation is complete. TNDC, which bought the building in 2000 — Redevelopment owns the land — pays movers to move individuals or gives tenants a stipend to do it themselves.

"We've been through hell," grouses Glenn H., who doesn't want to give his last name. The tall, former construction worker, 54, suffered career-ending nerve damage after working an earth-compact on a Humboldt State University job site. Considered disabled, he has a little trouble walking.

"We've felt helpless for a long time," he says. "They've turned the water off 4-5 times, and it's off like 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. But the elevators are the worst of it. In the late afternoons I have seen 10 people crowd into it."

"They (TNDC) don't get angry at us and we don't get angry at them," says Marik with a small smile. "But, as we used to say in the Army, we bitch. And it's good to get rid of it, so it's not bottled up." ■

## Ambassador's classy transformation

PHOTO BY MARK ELLINGER



**I**N the beautifully renovated lobby of the Ambassador Hotel, Mason and Eddy, desk clerk Ed Turner greets visitors at the Oct. 24 grand opening. TNDC, which purchased the Ambassador in 1999, began the \$10.8 million reconstruction project at the end 2001 using city, state and private funding. The hotel interior, virtually gutted, now offers 134 permanently affordable units — all with private bathrooms and kitchenettes — plus laundry, community

rooms, and a new 4,000-square-foot area for service providers that includes offices, a multi-use room, library and conference room. TNDC replaced all building systems, windows and finishes, retrofitted the building seismically, restored the façade, added new signage and replaced all side-walks. Most of the Ambassador's previous long-term tenants are back in the hotel, which is 90% full. ■

— MARJORIE BEGGS

### NOTICE TO VOTERS

Dear San Francisco Voter:

On page 14 of your Voter Information Pamphlet for the November 4, 2003 Election, a symbol appears below my name indicating that I have voluntarily agreed to limit my campaign spending in the District Attorney's race.

This is incorrect. I have not voluntarily agreed to limit my campaign spending.

Due to errors by my campaign, I failed to file a form on a timely basis with the Ethics Commission stating that I do not accept the campaign expenditure ceiling and also failed to file forms with the Ethics Commission within 24 hours of receiving contributions and making expenditures which exceed the ceiling. These errors led to the symbol incorrectly appearing in the Voter Information Pamphlet.

I take full responsibility for all actions of my campaign, and apologize to the voters of San Francisco for the confusion which these errors have caused.

Sincerely,

Kamala Harris, Candidate for District Attorney

Paid for by Kamala Harris for District Attorney, 325 Highland St, San Francisco, CA 94110  
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