

Dodge leaves Central City for Oregon farm life

BY TOM CARTER

As cherry-cheeked Sam Dodge prepared to leave the concrete jungle for the green pastures of Oregon, the 31-year-old District 6 head of the Central City SRO Collaborative got a hero's send-off on Jan. 25.

Some 30 friends and fellow activists gathered at the party that Dodge's boss, Tenderloin Housing Clinic Executive Director and lawyer Randy Shaw, threw for him at the collaborative office on Hyde Street.

Dodge began his job in 2000 when SRO fires plagued South of Market and the Tenderloin and hotel visitor fees were a common rip-off. Dodge spent six years fighting shoulder to shoulder with SRO tenants for their rights and better living conditions. Now he's traveling in New Zealand before taking a reflective break on a friend's large family farm in Oregon where he will raise bees.

"It's hard to say goodbye because I love it here," he said before the party.

Supervisor Chris Daly presented him with a Board of Supervisors resolution honoring him. Dodge was involved with issues involving SRO sprinklers, visitor charges and mailboxes resulting in legislation that Daly authored and got passed.

One by one, a dozen fellow workers came forward to sing his praises at the microphone, describing him as patient, kind, loving, gracious, positive, optimistic and eager for a challenge.

"There is no one greater than Sam Dodge," said Sister Bernie Galvin, head of Religious Witness for the Homeless. "I'll never forget him."

"We love you," said Ken Werner, tenant activist from Trinity Plaza apartments. "Thanks for coming into our lives."

"I wish I was 20 years younger," said tenant volunteer at the collaborative, Terrie Frye, drawing a laugh.

Tenderloin Housing Clinic, which master leases 15 SROs for the Department of Human Services, hired Dodge, a graduate of Evergreen College in Washington, to be a tenant organizer. Dodge had been a union organizer in Northern California but returned to Seattle disillusioned. Then, inspired by "The Activist's Handbook," which Shaw authored, he answered a THC ad in San Francisco and was hired.

Dodge began meeting with tenant reps to zero in on code violations, common among the city's 500 SROs that house 30,000 residents. In 2001, THC created the Central City and Mission SRO collaboratives through a Department of Human Services contract. The help centers were meeting places for tenant reps to decide key issues. Dodge became the Central City program director. The collaborative's SRO tenant reps have grown from 10 to 30.

Meredith Walter was the first tenant organizer Dodge hired in 2001. He gave her a tour of a deplorable Sixth Street SRO then asked if she still wanted the job. Walter, then 22, was shocked at what she saw but said yes. Her greater astonishment was that rooms were renting for \$800 a month during the



PHOTO BY MARK ELLINGER

Sam Dodge: "It's hard to say goodbye."

dot-com boom.

But Sam has an effect on people," she said. "I was once in a room with 15 Trinity Plaza residents when we were organizing and things were grim. But when Sam walked in, the whole room lit up."

Trinity Plaza was a major victory for its tenants. They stopped the demolition of their 360-unit home at Eighth and Market streets. Owner Angelo Sangiacomo later agreed to make 360 of the 1,900 proposed units rent-controlled with lifetime leases, and of the remainder, 12% are to be affordable.

Dodge said he would visit San Francisco as often as possible. ■

Model SoMa pot club sets pace for new permit process

► CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Maitri, a residential care provider for patients with late-stage AIDS, and Friends of Victoria Manalo Draves Park thanked Nolin for \$500 donations and the Academy of Sciences for his gift of \$1,000.

Nolin offered the commission glowing letters from Annalita, the restaurant next door, and his landlord who cited his dependability and sensitivity to the neighborhood.

Laura Weil, a mother of three who lives on Tehama Street, had her doubts when the Green Door arrived "when marijuana dispensaries were operating as though it was the wild, wild West," she wrote. But Nolin assuaged her safety concerns.

"The effort the Green Door has put into security is remarkable and has done much to put me at ease," she wrote. "I appreciate their efforts to be a good neighbor."

OUTREACH, OUTREACH, MORE OUTREACH

Weil was responding to informational letters that City Planning sent Nolin's neighbors on Dec. 12. As required for a permit, 500 letters went to residents, tenants and property owners within a 300-foot radius. Then, Nolin said, he got "daily" phone calls objecting to his pharmacy. But through "educating" conversations, he said, he was able to turn people around.

Nolin extended his outreach in January. He gave presentations to a senior group at Woolf House, and at a meeting of the Alliance for a Better District 6 the night before his hearing where he patiently fielded a score of questions. He assured a crowd of 35 that although the state allows multiple visits a day to dispensaries to buy the ounce maximum of marijuana

each time, Green Door limits customers to one visit a day. More, he said, is egregious.

SOUTHSIDE

To keep his Green Door menu away from the public eye, Nolin said his only advertising is posting flyers in other dispensaries. And to protect his customers, because marijuana sale and use is a federal crime, he scrambles their sign-in ID numbers so they can't be identified if federal agents seize his records.

Neighbors Joseph Gipson and his wife Heather were the only ones at the hearing who were opposed. They have three children under 5 and walk them down Howard past the Green Door to the carousel in Yerba Buena Park and a day care center. They were "horrified" to learn the Green Door was there. There are enough pot clubs already, the Gipsons said.

A few Green Door supporters reeled at the attitude. A man calling himself StarChild said future generations will look back "in stark disbelief," that such a facility would be opposed. Tammie Golyin was "shocked." She said the couple's "uneducated comments" made her "sick."

Green Door employee and patient Rachel Walker, a graduate student who lives a block away,

said she was pleased with her pay and medical benefits, and her employer's policies: "Anyone suspected of resale (has their membership) revoked," she said.

Denise Dorey, who has neck and back problems, said she is happy to live nearby. "The Green Door has been my saving grace. It's a gem South of Market and adds good character to the neighborhood."

The owner of Green Cross, Kevin Reed, who wanted to move his 22nd Street pot club near Fisherman's Wharf but was turned down last year because of neighborhood opposition, said Green Door is operated by "wonderful people running a model facility."

After public comments closed, commission counsel Badiner advised that the new law prohibits on-site smoking within 1,000 feet of a school or recreational center and "for now, we need to limit the smoking." The Green Door complied and has curtailed smoking on site — for now.

Commissioner Christina Olague, who favored the permit, said she had "no idea what a discreet operation" it is until she visited recently for a tour. Nolin agreed to her suggestion that he meet with the supervisors to amend the smoking law because his ventilation system expels it through the roof.

"I'm not sure why it has to be consumed on site," said Commissioner Michael Antonini. "I'm concerned with driving on roads after they've consumed a product."

Doctors recommend whether pot is to be smoked on site, Nolin said.

Nolin said his employees, who are patients as well, take BART or carpool. "They don't medicate and drive," he said. He knew of no traffic accidents in two years involving anyone leaving the dispensary.

The Green Door also sells edibles. Nolin estimated that of his 40-100 customers a day, 20% — some unable to smoke — buy edibles. It takes an on-site consumer an hour or two to feel the effect, he said.

"I have issues about consuming and being under the influence near kids and driving," said Commission President Dwight Alexander. "I support no (on-site) consumption."

"People leave medicated all the time," Olague said. "I leave medicated when I go to Kaiser (for migraines)."

The commissioners were impressed that the pharmacy had no "red flags" with the police or any city department.

A motion to prohibit consuming any product at the Green Door failed on a 3-4 vote. Then, consistent with the law, the commissioners voted 6-1 to prohibit on-site smoking. But they excused the pharmacy from having to return for a hearing if Nolin gets the supervisors to amend the ordinance regarding on-site smoking within two years.

WHAT'S INSIDE THE GREEN DOOR

Anyone arriving at the Green Door is seen by two cameras. The images show up on monitors on the other side of the door and in the office. When a

patient is buzzed into a small anteroom, a seated employee writes down the patient's card number and assigns him or her a number for the day. Another camera, one of 16 Nolin has in a half dozen rooms, observes this. On a wall, a sign advertises an eighth-ounce for \$45 and claims that the Green Door has the lowest prices in town.

Buzzed through a second door puts a patient into the Bud Bar, a clean, well-lighted 20-by-20-foot room with high ceilings. On one wall are framed pictures from a Marijuana Policy Project Foundation fundraiser at the Playboy Mansion and one of a smiling state Sen. Migden inside the Green Door with Nolin.

A smoking counter with four folding chairs runs along two walls and ends at a water cooler. For sale in a glass case against another wall are green T-shirts and sweatshirts with the Green Door logo.

But directly across the room is the Bud Bar where one of Nolin's 10 employees sits behind a 3-inch-thick bulletproof glass window. He pushes marijuana and edibles under the glass for cash like selling a movie ticket. The adjacent massive door is kept locked and the light wood paneling surrounding it all has 1/4-inch steel plate behind it.

"Even the police say we have good security," Nolin said. "Our head of security worked at the Pacific Coast Stock Exchange. We have regular robbery drills, you know, just so we know what to do. Every room has a panic button that goes to the Police Department."

Above the glass is a menu board where 12 varieties of marijuana are on sale. Three more will be added later in the day, Nolin said. Some names are Dark Star, Bubble Gum, White Rhino and Maui Wowie. At the top, Purple Cream sells for \$45 for an eighth of an ounce, \$90 for a quarter, \$180 for a half and for an ounce, \$350, the maximum for any. Needy regular customers can get a gratis bud or two to tide them over, Nolin said, "but it's not something we advertise."

The Green Door also sells kief and hashish and a wide selection of marijuana-laced edibles such as milk chocolate truffles, cookies, Rice Krispies, tincture (a concentrate with alcohol). An 8-inch carrot cake 2 inches high and 2 inches wide sells for \$8.

The edibles, approved by the Department of Public Health, are checked in DPH visits twice a year.

In back, down a wide hallway, is a large office, a room to meet with growers and an ADA-accessible bathroom.

"People think it's a cash cow," Nolin said, "but I'd be broke if it weren't for my other businesses." He has silk screen and car detailing businesses.

Nolin said he grosses about \$2,000 a day — doesn't charge sales tax but pays it to the state anyway — and pays a whopping \$7,000 monthly rent.

Previously, Nolin had a pot club in Oakland for

► CONTINUED ON PAGE 7