

PATRICIA FLORES
'A good neighbor'

Friends, some longtime, others new, gathered March 22 at the Hotel Iroquois to say goodbye to Patricia Flores, "a good lady," "friendly and warm," "someone who always listened."

Ms. Flores died March 13 of complications of diabetes. She was 59.

"I found her in her room, and she had been there several days," said Dorothy Ridley, Iroquois tenant services manager. "As supervisor here, I knew her as a sweet, quiet lady. Some people took advantage of that, but like many quiet people, she was strong."

Several fellow tenants mentioned the kindness of Ms. Flores, who had lived at the Iroquois for just over two years.

"Patricia was a good neighbor," said a man. "She looked out for a few people on a regular basis, took them to the store. She is very much someone who will be missed."

Case worker Roger Blalark said that she used many of the services offered by the hotel, but still seemed to care more for others than herself.

"I knew Patricia for 30 years," said another man. "She's passed now, leaving a wound, but I'm going to try to remember the good times."

Several people at the memorial had attended a wake for Ms. Flores the previous day, held by her family — two daughters, a son and a father.

Luis Rosales, another friend of many years, brought snapshots from the wake of Ms. Flores, now at peace, in an open casket.

"She was a lovely lady," Rosales said.

—MARJORIE BEGGS

JARMAN MICHAELS
Tenant organizer

Jarman Michaels, a tenant representative for the Jefferson Hotel and biology student at San Francisco State, was remembered as a kind soul, making strides to move from the hotel when his health took a turn for the worse.

Mr. Michaels was found dead March 15 in his fourth-floor room during a pest inspection, Mary Katherine Flynn, his case worker, said. He was 54. Flynn said Mr. Michaels suffered from diabetes.

"He was one of our most active members," said Alysabeth Alexander, a tenant organizer for the Central City SRO Collaborative. Alexander said Mr. Michaels had worked hard to alleviate the bedbug problem afflicting SRO residents.

"He was dedicated to the tenants," Andrea Edwards, a Jefferson Hotel resident, said at his March 22 memorial. "I knew he was sick. He didn't want to go to the hospital. He didn't want to go through all of the cutting..."

Mr. Michaels, who stood about 5-foot-8 on a thin frame with a large stomach and had dyed black hair with a purplish tint, liked to read and often could be seen pulling a wheeled backpack of books through the lobby of the Jefferson, Flynn said.

The memorial, conducted by the Rev. Glenda Hope, was attended by a handful of mourners in the basement of the hotel where a poster that read: "Jarman — WE Will Miss You," was taped to the wall behind an altar decorated with Hershey's Kisses and

Hugs in silver and purple wrappers.

"I use to go to his room. He was a very likable man, well-educated, well-spoken — a good guy. I miss him. His death was a shock to me," said tenant Mario Lopez.

"He really did, in his heart, want to help people," Flynn said. "He was an incredibly kind soul. I know that he'll be missed here."

—JOHN GOINS

LINDA CHIKERE
'Very sweet, very feisty'

A bright light burned out at the San Cristina Hotel when Linda "SuSu" Chikere died in her room of complications from AIDS on Feb. 18.

Ms. Chikere, known for her tenant organizing since 1992 and her driving personality, had recently returned from the hospital, rejecting doctors' advice to stay under care. She wanted to go "home," she said. When her condition worsened, her friends said, she refused an ambulance ride back to the hospital. She was 49.

Ms. Chikere helped organize the hotel's first tenant board in 1993, soon after the hotel reopened after renovation. Alternately cantankerous and loving, she became the first board president, served nine years and inspired a host of tenants to join the board and speak up for their rights.

More than 50 of her friends celebrated her life on Feb. 27. They packed a small room off the hotel lobby. A dozen stood along the walls.

"I look at this gathering and know this was quite a woman with a legacy of love of life and drawing people into the larger community," said the Rev.

Glenda Hope, who led the service.

Marcelee Watkins and Earl Gadsen sang solos a cappella and their voices filled the room. Clapping and humming, the crowd got down with Gadsen's rendition of "Take My Hand Precious Lord."

"In honor of people who give help, we honor SuSu," Gadsen said. The nickname, her sister Lucille Daymon said, she gave herself.

Ms. Chikere was well-known for being tough and "cussing people out," yet she won people's hearts. She was a "beautiful, strong woman" who wisely advised people.

"Very sweet, very feisty," said former San Cristina manager Brian Quinn.

"She got me out of my shell," said a man who met her 10 years ago. "She said get out and talk to people. I became a photographer. She's up there now wanting a bigger house — and saying she deserves it."

"She was unofficially known as 'the warden,'" another man said.

The 5-foot-4 woman had battled AIDS for years and weighed 75 pounds when she died, said Laurie Rudner, her friend of a dozen years.

Ms. Chikere's spirit filled the room, her friends said repeatedly. They said they needed to remember that the gathering was an inspiration to come together more frequently as a supportive family.

Tenant board President Benjamin Wynn said the board wanted to name the hotel lobby's garden with its tropical wall mural painted by residents and fountain "SuSu Garden."

"She came back," said Rudner, "and we were lucky enough to say goodbye."

—TOM CARTER

Tenderloin Health remembers 13 homeless at memorial

TENDERLOIN Health resumed its group memorials April 25, commemorating the lives of 13 street people who had shared the neighborhood's dire living conditions and died since December in poverty and, in many cases, disease.

The more than 30 staff, volunteers and clients who attended didn't know everyone on the list, and only a half dozen were mentioned in comments. But their presence showed "how much community matters," the Rev. Glenda Hope, who officiated, said. "And everyone here contributes to that, whether it's (through) just a smile or being polite."

The service at 187 Golden Gate is where Tenderloin AIDS Resource Center was located before merging with Continuum to make Tenderloin Health. Both nonprofits had held group memorials regularly. But TARC had suspended them for six months before Tenderloin Health was formed, then reinstated them in December and a spokesman said the memorials now will be held quarterly.

Those commemorated were: Jay Hunt, Todd Werschay, Reynaldo Bombuse, Bobby C., Angel-lina

Cisneros, Gwen White, Robert Girard, Mark Savage, Bobby Palmer, Martin Ellis, Randy Bates, Robert Cabral and Santiago "Christina" Mendoza.

Ushers greeted people at the door and showed them to seats in two rows of metal blue chairs in front of a table with a red tablecloth, a bouquet of mixed flowers and four lit candles.

Clinical Services Director Marea Murray read the list, pausing a moment after each name.

People spoke from their seats. Gwen White was remembered affectionately for her "enthusiasm and positive outlook on the community," and Martin Ellis for his natty, uplifting appearance, always dressed in a suit, "looking like he owned the place." These people, one man said, "you carry around (in your mind)."

A woman read a poem about "love in pain" that she said was written by Joe Case for the occasion. "We have each other to help with the pain," she read, concluding, "These things are us."

Several people talked about Angel-lina Cisneros, a strong-minded woman with "her own view of the world," an "open heart" and a temper. Someone said she was on the mayor's task force to work with sex workers, and had become a volunteer health outreach worker, going on to find people at risk of HIV and connecting them to health services.

"Lots of big personalities come through here, and Angel-lina was willing to listen as long as she could be heard. I'm here to encourage people to encourage each other," a man said.

Gwen White also was a health outreach volunteer. A grief-stricken young man said he met her 12 years ago in Las Vegas and that they had been married for two years.

"We were together all the time except for the times I was in the penitentiary," he said through tears. "She held me together. She was the backbone of my life. She died in my arms and told me how much she loved me."

"She had a TB infection for years and no one knew it," he continued. "She had AIDS. She had a psychological problem and people took advantage of her. She fell behind in her rent and the manager raped her, gave her AIDS. But I feel so guilty about her death." The Rev. Hope assured him he had no reason to feel guilty.

A bejeweled woman who gave her name simply as Momma Tracy came to the front and in her aging voice softly sang "Precious Lord" to much applause.

Afterward, the mourners repaired to a snack-and-drinks table in the back of the room.

—TOM CARTER

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