

# UPDATES: Community courts in decline

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SAN will offer a SoMa/Tenderloin Senior University with a health care theme at 965 Mission St., #700, on Tuesdays, Jan. 8, 15, 22 and 28, according to Pi Ra, the new director. Students will go to Sacramento Jan. 28 for a universal health care rally at the Capitol. Call (415) 546-2096 for information.



PHOTO BY TOM CARTER

Anh Le, right, with Al Stewart, left, and SAN President Bill Price, led Senior University classes in the Tenderloin for budding activists.

## COMMUNITY COURTS

In 11 neighborhood community courts, panels of residents hear misdemeanor cases — petty gambling, graffiti, loitering, shoplifting, assault and battery, alcohol and minor drug violations — and sanction the violators by ordering them to pay restitution to victims or do community service. There were 12 courts when 2007 started.

Now there are 11 with the consolidation of Tenderloin and SoMa community courts. Ethel Newlin, director of the D.A.'s Office of Neighborhood Services, and Jackson Gee, the D.A.'s director of Community Courts and A.P.I. Safety Programs, coordinate the work of the courts with California Community Dispute Services.

"The Tenderloin and SoMa panelists consolidated them for the sake of efficiency," Gee said.

Both central city courts started operating in June 2002. In 2003, their first full year of operation, SoMa heard 1,123 cases, TL 567. The next year, the SoMa court was down to an average of 80 cases a month, while the Tenderloin held steady. Not anymore.

According to Gee, in the first 11 months of 2007, the D.A.'s office had referred only 702 cases to the TL/SoMa court.

In July, long-time TL/SoMa community court panelist Mark Ellinger told The Extra that the court was hearing as few as four or five cases per meeting, and he fingered the D.A. for the fall-off.

"I don't speak for everyone, but the D.A.'s office is turning its back on our courts and it's insulting to a lot of us," Ellinger said.

But in December, when The Extra talked to Paul Henderson, deputy head of administration in the D.A.'s office, he put a positive spin on the court's lower numbers: Misdemeanor citations and arrests across the city have been dropping since 2003, he said, and he surmised that was also true for the Tenderloin.

The D.A.'s referral rates to community courts stayed about the same, Henderson said, despite lower citation and arrest rates. Finally, the no-show rate for people electing to go to community court was up, again city-wide, which would translate to fewer cases actually being reviewed in community courts.

"D.A. Harris is absolutely committed to this program. And it's hugely important that those 702 cases didn't clog up the criminal court," he said.

The Extra took a look at police incidents reports for the last few years to see if the numbers of "Part II Crimes" — misdemeanors — were dropping in the Tenderloin. In fact, they've risen.

In 2005, misdemeanors in the Tenderloin went from 409 in January to 399 in August, a slight dip. The next year, the tally was 388 crimes in January and 379 in August. But in 2007, the crimes figures jumped from 391 in January to 451 in August.

Those figures sounded correct to TL Capt. Gary Jimenez. "My understanding about the consolidation," he told The Extra, "is that it was because the Tenderloin had fewer cases compared to SoMa, not because citations were down, at least not

in the Tenderloin."

Ellinger reiterated his position: "It's just a lot of smoke from the D.A.'s office. They know it's not politically smart to admit that they're trying to shut down the community courts by reducing the number of cases they refer to us.

"Also, it's just not true about the show rate," he said. "Our no-show rate in the Tenderloin and SoMa community courts has always been way less than 10% — so small as to be insignificant."

—MARJORIE BEGGS

## JUSTICE CENTER TRIAL RUN

The Community Justice Center will start operating sometime in January, a five-case-a-week trial run at the Hall of Justice, Mayor Newsom announced Dec. 6. Come April, the city will sign a sublease on the second-floor space at 555 Polk, between Turk and Golden Gate and plans to open the center there in July.

It is expected to hear 40 cases a week drawn from violations in the TL, SoMa, Civic Center and Union Square — where more than a third of the city's quality-of-life offenses occur, according to a mayor's office press release.

Superior Court Commissioner Ronald Albers, named to lead Newsom's fledgling Community Justice Center, said in the release that it will handle "low-level offenders," not those picked up for violent felonies or infractions.

But despite a year in the spotlight, the offenses the center will tackle weren't listed and no one The Extra spoke with knew what they would be.

One thing is sure: They won't be the misdemeanors the mayor initially intended. California law says people who get drunk or pee in public can't be taken straight into custody and marched into court, a fact Newsom didn't learn until months after he started touting the Manhattan Midtown Community Court, which operates that way, as a model. But in San Francisco, after cops cite public drunks and bowel evacuator, they give them 45 days to show up in traffic court. Other citations or arrests for misdemeanors go to the D.A.'s office, which decides whether the case should go to community court. The Justice Center will provide another option.

Paul Henderson, deputy head of administration in the D.A.'s office, says the main difference between community court and Justice Center cases is that the latter ones will be charged — that is, arraigned with a formal petition — not uncharged like those in community court.

"After the police arrest or cite someone for a misdemeanor, they draft a report," Henderson said. "Someone in the D.A.'s office reviews it and determines if it's appropriate to be evaluated in community court. If so, it's referred to community court with-

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## TENDERLOINHEALTH

a continuum of care

### Outreach and Community Events December 2007

#### Health Promotion Forum

Topic: Coping with the Holidays

Speaker: Perri Frnaskoviak, Ph.D.,

Harm Reduction Therapy Center @ Tenderloin Health

Date/Time: Tuesday, December 18, 12 pm - 1:30 pm

#### HIV Treatment Forum

Topic: Doctor/Patient Relationship

Speaker: Ruben Gamundi, Gilead Sciences

Date/Time: Monday, December 17, 3 pm - 4 pm

#### Client Advisory Panel

Come talk with Tenderloin Health's Board Client Representative(s) and program managers about plans for Tenderloin Health. Also provide input on new services and how we can improve.

Date/Time: Wednesday, December 12, 11:30 am - 1 pm;

Wednesday, December 26, 11:30 am - 1 pm

#### Volunteer and Intern for Tenderloin Health

Orientation: Sunday, December 9, 12 pm - 6:30 pm

220 Golden Gate Ave., 3rd Floor

lunch provided

You must register for volunteer trainings.

Stop in/call Emilie (415) 437-2900 ext. 234.

For a schedule of our current groups or for more information call 415.431.7476 or go to [www.tenderloinhealth.org](http://www.tenderloinhealth.org)



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**2 one-bedroom "Below Market Rate" for-sale units available in the Hales Warehouse: 410 Jessie Street, SF**

Buyers must be income eligible.

Households must earn no more than the maximum income levels below:

#### 100% of Area Median Income

Household Size	ONE	TWO	THREE	FOUR	FIVE
Maximum Income	\$63,850	\$72,950	\$82,100	\$91,200	\$98,500

**Open Houses will be held at 410 Jessie Street on the following dates:**

- Wednesday, January 16, 6pm to 8pm
- Thursday, January 17, 12pm to 2pm
- Saturday, January 19, 11am to 2pm

Applications due by 5pm on Monday, January 28, 2008 to 54 Mint Street, 5th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94103.

Please contact Martin Building Company for an application and more information: [BMRapplication@martinbuilding.com](mailto:BMRapplication@martinbuilding.com) or call (415) 348-4608. [www.martinbuilding.com](http://www.martinbuilding.com)

Units are available through the San Francisco Mayor's Office of Housing and are subject to monitoring other restrictions. Visit [sfgov.org/moh](http://sfgov.org/moh) for program information.

