

# SRO organizers' next big thing — desk clerks

Hottest topic at the annual convention

BY TOM CARTER

**W**HAT make SRO residents feel safe are good desk clerks. What make them feel unsafe are bad ones.

Clerks are undertrained, underpaid, surly, threatening and inattentive. Or they're not.

These were the dominant feelings that surfaced June 25 at the annual Tenant Convention. As 100 SRO residents scrutinized a dozen quality-of-life topics, desk clerks emerged as the residents' primary safety and security concern.

Desk clerk training and hiring will be a focus of activists in 2009, if the complaints are heeded.

Desk clerks, perched just inside an SRO front door, are a hotel's immediate monitoring authority with a wide range of responsibilities. They make low wages and their effectiveness seems to ride almost entirely on the strength of their personality and attitude. They rule in the city's 500 SROs.

"The buildings are great from 9 to 5," said Peter Masiak, the neighborhood organizer leading the discussion for the sponsoring Central City SRO Collaborative. "I

hear that all the time. After that, they (the clerks) are stretched too thin."

Loitering and drug dealing are common complaints, made worse when the night people get inside an SRO.

"But the Board of Supervisors can't legislate the many

things that make you feel safe," Masiak said.

The aim of the convention was to help plan tenant activism for next year. It was held in a crowded ground-floor room at 259 Hyde St., the collaborative headquarters. Created seven years ago by the Tenderloin Housing Clinic, the collaborative is composed of 25 tenant representatives and four staff members who work to enforce and improve laws that affect the SRO community and to empower the residents. But collaborative staff said it faces a \$40,000 budget cut, which would limit its organizing work.

Dissecting the clerk conundrum enlivened the session. When Masiak compiled "safe" and "unsafe" responses on an easel in front, it seemed everyone had experiences to fill out both categories.

The main thing that made residents feel safe was dealing with understanding clerks who knew about "street justice" and were communicative. At the top of the unsafe column was lack of surveillance cameras and staff with low standards and inferior training. But people loitering outside the building at night were highly undesirable, too, and just beyond the purview of the desk clerks.

Masiak detailed the factors responsible for bad staff. "Good work equals good money," he said. Desk clerks make about \$9 an hour on the graveyard shift, "and that won't do it." Imagine, he said, if they

**"Get louder. If the problem continues, get louder."**

Peter Masiak  
NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZER

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## FANTASY OF THE FUTURE

\$63,000 mural not yet on drawing board

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## ART BEATS GUNS IN TENDERLOIN

A Meditation by Ed Bowers

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**Three-year** regulars Robert Mathena (foreground) and Johnny Martin find the restaurant their egalitarian home away from home.

# CENTRAL CITY

# EXTRA

SAN FRANCISCO

## EXCEPTIONAL EATERY



PHOTOS BY LENNY LIMJOCO

**Manor House** owner Mimi Yee celebrated 12 years in business on Jones Street on June 25, after learning the hard way the tough ways of the Tenderloin.

# Jones Street gem

## Manor House: good food and a fair shake

BY TOM CARTER

**I**F there was a prize for America's best skid row eatery, Manor House restaurant, famous among its in-crowd, would be the heavy favorite. Its dedicated management who survived a rocky beginning to win over the neighbor-

hood celebrated the exceptional eatery's 12th anniversary on June 25. And it continues to improve.

It's a small, clean, well-lit place and easy to miss. Its name outside is in small black letters above the door, and it's forgettable as a pale green storefront at the back of Antonia Manor, a 10-story, TNDC hotel.

It's on Jones Street next to the Pink Diamonds strip club, and less than 100 yards from the Tenderloin Police Station on the Eddy Street corner. Earlier this year, the police connected five nighttime shootings in four months to the strip joint. But Manor House, open at 7 a.m. Sunday through Friday, closes at 4:30 p.m.

Daytime, it's comfort food and chit chat. The neighborhood changes after dark.

Breakfast and lunch menus are on the door and on weathered pages taped to a small sandwich board on the sidewalk. This Thursday, the lunch specials are corned beef and cabbage, ½ spring chicken, ½ barbecue chicken, or fried fish sticks (eight). Homemade mashed potatoes and gravy come with it, and corn. You also get a choice of salad or soup — today it's cream of cauliflower. Dessert's included, ice cream or homemade custard. \$4.95.

Welcome to the tail end of the restaurant food chain, and the poor people's bountiful choice in the city's poorest and sketchiest neighborhood. When you get to know Manor House, you can see that it is the heart of the Tenderloin.

Manor House is unsurpassed in the hood but hardly known outside of it. It's respected, even revered, by steadfast regulars for whom the bottom is the top. The measuring stick goes well beyond food.

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