

Visitor policy violated at most SROs

Residents' rights denied, many desk clerks extort a fee

BY TOM CARTER

It was prearranged. Jason Foley, who lives at TNDC's West Hotel, told the desk clerk at 8:30 p.m. that he would have an overnight guest. What he didn't say was that the friend, Allen White, and he were testing the West Hotel's version of the city's Uniform Visitors Policy, which is uniformly disregarded at most of the 503 SROs in the city.

White arrived at 11:15. He was stopped at the door by the desk clerk and the night manager. They wouldn't let him in. They said Foley hadn't followed the SRO's procedure.

On the contrary, White said, whipping out a copy of the 2007 Uniform Visitors Policy for SRO Hotels and citing the rule that proved his case. The manager stood firm and said the West's rules rule.

A passing police beat patrol stopped and got involved. But, White says, the cops did not believe him and sided with management.

White walked away disgruntled and disillusioned.

A fair and consistent SRO visitor policy has become White's passion, and the March 27 incident at the West is but a single example of his tireless effort. Confusion over the right of 30,000 SRO residents to have overnight visitors — just like apartment dwellers — is causing consternation throughout the SRO population.

Some hotels like the West have multistep procedures for residents to follow and — if they don't — their visitors are turned away. Others charge visitors \$5 to \$20, basically whatever the clerk thinks he can get away with.

The Uniform Visitors Policy, authored by Supervisor Daly six years ago, decrees rights to visitors. But the ordinance includes no practical enforcement and SRO residents are left helpless.

Daily abuses are seldom reported because of fear of retaliation, activists say.

"I go into SROs when I get complaints," says Sheryl Abbeduto, a veteran advocate with S.F. Mental Health Clients' Rights Advocates. "I take a copy of the visitors policy with me and it's the first thing I look for. If they don't have one up, I give them one and tell them to follow the law and get it up."

"Another common complaint is having to pay for guests."

To combat the problems, the SRO Central City Collaborative this month starts leafleting TL and SoMa SROs about the residents' right to have visitors. Also, the SRO Mission Collaborative is finishing a month-long survey of tenants' gripes in the 55 SROs in that neighborhood. Even before the results are in, the organi-

"(Ours) is not a satisfactory remedy. People want their rights, not so much the money."

Delene Wolf
RENT BOARD DIRECTOR

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PHOTO BY LIZ PAYNE

Mary Ann Boyd won't hang it up even after having 51 jobs in her 47 years.

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PHOTO BY LENNY LIMJOCO

Barbara Michaels rehearses her street play, "The Doormen," in a doorway on O'Farrell Street.

Theater unleashed

4-wheel performance, gay sex with Dad, missives from Mission, and 45 plays more

BY HEIDI SWILLINGER

ALL the world's a stage, but people who like their theater on the edgy side need look no further than the Tenderloin and West SoMa for the next two weeks.

The 17th annual San Francisco Fringe Festival, a showcase for uncensored and

decidedly nonmainstream works, runs through Sept. 14. With 48 separate shows on the roster and a combined total of 286 performances, this is the biggest festival in recent years.

Play topics are all over the map — figuratively and, in some cases, literally. Most performances last an hour or less and take place in nine theaters scattered throughout the central city, but others are performed in nontraditional venues.

One offering, entitled "theatre that Moves," takes place in a van that tours some of the Tenderloin's hidden gems. The piece is the brainchild of Mercedes Segesvary, an employee of a San Francisco tour company whose owners let her use their van for the show.

During her years hauling tourists to Yosemite, Muir Woods and the Wine Country, Segesvary has closely observed passengers, as well as other tour drivers who congregate while their passengers take in the sights. She's come up with a comedy that highlights, in part, "all the things that can go wrong as a tour driver." The show came about when she realized how much energy she puts into her tour patter. "I'm not just driving," she says. "I'm also putting on a one-woman show."

"Doormen" is another site-specific performance set in doorways along a two-block stretch of the Tenderloin. Playwright Barbara Michaels leads the audience on a walking tour that explores how encounters with others can change our lives. (See sidebar.)

Many other plays are set in San Francisco. "Lost and Found in the Mission," by Rowena Richie and Susie Hara, is based

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