

Activists recall their best, worst moments in the Tenderloin

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The day Original Joe's burned

DAVID BAKER
Resident and activist

DAVID Baker was just a block from Original Joe's when the wail of fire trucks caught his attention. He immediately ran to investigate, only to find the favored Tenderloin restaurant engulfed by fire and water.

"When I came upon the fire, I thought, 'My god, no!'" said Baker, a longtime resident and activist. "I kept telling myself, This can't be a real bad fire. But it was."

The fire erupted around 11 a.m. Oct. 13, 2007, when a member of the kitchen staff lit a charcoal burner. Flames and smoke quickly spread upward through an exhaust flue, forcing residents of the Moderne Hotel upstairs to flee.

"I didn't linger. I thought at the time that the damage would be limited," said Baker. "How wrong I was."

The Tenderloin icon was predicted to be closed only for a couple weeks, but a dispute with the insurance company put those plans on hold. It's been closed ever since.

"The fire at Joe's was not just an isolated incident but affected the area's identity, the positive aspects of it anyway," Baker said.

Original Joe's originally opened in 1937 and currently is owned by John and Marie Duggan.

"I guess when we talk about memories, we're thinking of pleasant memories. But, you know, the Tenderloin is sort of hard living," said Baker. "And when something disappears that conjures good feelings, well, that hurts morale, that hurts community morale." ■

—DYLAN LIENHARD



David Baker, when he saw the flames: "I thought, 'My God, no.'"



First time in the Tenderloin and TNDC's Don Falk gets in the middle of a gunfight.

Newbie's harsh introduction

DON FALK,
executive director, TNDC

FOR the last 16 years, Don Falk has been developing affordable housing in the Tenderloin for low-income residents, but his first experience in our gritty neighborhood could have scared him off for good.

Falk was overseeing a housing program in West Oakland, and heard about a job opening at Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corp. He ponied up \$25 to attend TNDC's first fundraising Pool Toss, figuring he'd find out more about the job.

Nothing eventful happened until he was walking back to BART with a friend and all of a sudden: "Rat-a-tat-tat."

"It was gunfire on the street and we quickly ducked behind a car," says Falk. "As we looked around, people were clearing the sidewalks and hiding."

Falk peeked over the car and saw men with guns running right at them. He braced himself, and then the armed men passed right by.



Hastings CFO David Seward's moment was when something bad could have happened, but didn't.

"It's ironic that that was my first experience in the Tenderloin and it could have stopped me from joining TNDC," said Falk, adding that was the only time he has ever seen or heard gunfire in the Tenderloin and considers that fact a sign of how far the Tenderloin has come. ■

—KRISTAL PEAK

Fish story with a happy ending

DAVID SEWARD,
chief financial officer,
UC Hastings School of Law

DAVID Seward enjoys roaming the Heart of The City Farmers' Market at U.N. Plaza each week.

"It is the best in town," says Seward, who works two blocks away.

But one Wednesday afternoon three years ago stands out in Seward's mind.

"I was attacked by a gentleman wielding a dead fish," he remembers.

Seward was walking around the market and reached the fish truck. He was checking out what looked freshest and started speaking



Rob McDaniels at Tenderloin Playground. He started the MacCanDo Tenderloin Youth Track team in 2004.

to a man he thought worked there. Suddenly, the man — fish in hand — came at him.

"It was a big one, too," Seward says. He got out of the way and his attacker got arrested.

"If I can be here working in the Tenderloin 30 years and only have one guy coming at me with a fish, that's not bad," says Seward. ■

—KARISSA BELL

Sgt. Kenny's games create critical mass

ROBERT MCDANIELS,
Rec and Park director, Boeddeker Park

WHAT moved Rob McDaniels like nothing else in his 20 years as a Rec and Park director at Boeddeker Park and at Tenderloin Children's Playground was the final day of the annual Sgt. Kenny Sugrue Tenderloin Games in 2001.

Sugrue, a popular Tenderloin cop who loved youth work, started the games in 1997 but died unexpectedly in 1998. It wasn't until June 2001 that Tess Manalo Dentesca, who was running a youth-oriented recycling pro-

gram, organized the games again. McDaniels estimates 500 to 700 kids participated in athletic events at both parks.

"All these organizations had come together to make it happen," McDaniels recalls. "Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, Glide, the Tenderloin after school program, Asian groups, Salvation Army, Rec and Park, the Police Department. It was five straight days of games for kids."

"The last day, I drew four lanes on the walkway at Boeddeker," he said. About 30 kids took turns racing in the lanes.

"At the awards ceremony, I was just very, very happy I was part of it. It was a powerful moment. People came up to me afterward and said we need more of this. We need to do more." ■

—TOM CARTER

When the Hilton became an ally

RANDY SHAW,
executive director,
Tenderloin Housing Clinic

ONE day in summer 1980, when Randy Shaw was a young law student trying to halt gentrification in the Tenderloin,

he and his group met with the Hilton Hotel management.

"Our committee wanted the luxury hotels to contribute to affordable housing in the neighborhood, but we definitely got a surprise that day at the Hilton," Shaw remembers.

It was around lunchtime and the Hilton managers welcomed the protesters with a banquet: An impressive array of cold cuts, vegetables and cakes for dessert.

"They had prepared this big spread. In the moment we did not really know what to do," Shaw says.

He huddled with his band of brothers, mostly Tenderloin residents and a handful of people from the Gray Panthers.

They did not want to go soft on the Hilton because of a sumptuous spread. Their goal was to signal that the Tenderloin must remain a diverse neighborhood, not become just a destination for affluent travelers. But could a free lunch be such a crime?

"We decided that we could eat their cake, as long as we kept our position," Shaw says.

Today he says it made good sense to accept the banquet. They established helpful relationships for the neighborhood. And even an activist has got to eat. ■

—JOHAN VARDRUP

Empowerment to the people

MICHAEL NULTY
The most active activist

MICHAEL Nulty remembers the ninth anniversary of the Tenants Associations Coalition in 2007.

Nulty is a TAC program director and possesses a roomful of activist hats.

As part of the anniversary celebration, the coalition party also featured the first mayoral candidate debate of that campaign season, and the party was open to the public.

"It was an opportunity for the public to ask the candidates questions; it was a really empowering moment," said Nulty, who added that the celebration is also remembered for another reason: "One of the mayoral candidates got arrested for disrupting the event by blocking doors and pulling the fire alarm."

"When you plan an event, you don't like it when unexpected things happen."

Regardless, TAC's event was a success and, most memorable of all, it even ended with food left over. ■

—JULIETA KUSNIR



Randy Shaw recalls a turning point in the neighborhood preservation fight.



Michael Nulty accepts TAC award from Housing Rights Committee's Sara Shortt.