Election posters for Daly, others still up illegally
Violators must pay for removal but DPW mum on the billing

BY TOM CARTER

For months, John Nulty had noticed the raft of election posters in the Tenderloin that were outdated, irrelevant, and, as of last August — unlawful.

A city ordinance passed a year ago to counter visual pollution on utility poles and streetlights stipulates that 13-inch-high and taller posters and signs can be put on them to exchange information, but they’ve got to come down in timely fashion.

Specifically, election posters must vanish within 10 days after an election — the Nov. 7, 2000, election, in this case. And who he found not heeding the law, Nulty said, were District 6 contenders Chris Daly, Matthew Drake and Rob Bland.

Neighborhood activist that he is, Nulty decided to take action.

The morning of June 11, Nulty delivered copies of his terse letter to the Department of Public Works, the Elections Department and the Government Audits Committee of the Board of Supervisors. The letter cited six TL addresses where posters on utility poles violated the ordinance. By chance that day, when Nulty delivered his letter to the clerk, board President Aaron Peskin was lingering in the main chambers. He took a copy and looked it over. Peskin had authored the legislation.

A few minutes later, during public commentary, Nulty complained to the committee that the North of Market-Tenderloin CID, which cleans sidewalks and graffiti, was “not doing a good job” because it had ignored what he considered illegal eyesores. He also gave a copy of his letter to CID Manager Elaine Zamora.

Three days later, DPW Assistant Director Frank Lee emailed Nulty that the removal was complete. He thanked Nulty for notifying DPW. He also pointed out that Nulty could have headed up a citywide campaign to remove illegal posters.

“The posters are all over the neighborhood.”
John Nulty
TENDERLOIN ACTIVIST

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Shot putting TL
4th-grader wins dozen medals

BY TOM CARTER

At age 10, Crystal Webb made track and field history this summer when she put herself and the MacCanDo Tenderloin Youth Track Club in the national record books.

With an on-hand threat, Crystal threw a 6-pound metal ball the length of a good-size living room to become the Tenderloin track team’s first kid ever to qualify for the USA Youth Outdoor Track and Field Championships. Specifically, the shot put event in the Bantam Girls category.

Boedecker Park Director Robert McDaniels, known as Coach Rob, couldn’t have been happier. It has been three long years of official team practices at the park, at Kezar Stadium and Ocean Beach, after ignoring skeptics who said a track team in the Tenderloin wouldn’t fly. McDaniels, a competing high-hurdler still, after starring at San Francisco State in the mid-1980s, wanted to get neighborhood kids off the street and into something productive.

“Crystal is the first to go,” McDaniels said. “She works hard.”

In a summer where she traveled with the track team to a dozen towns, most in the Bay Area, Crystal qualified at a sectional meet in Reno with an 18.2-foot toss. Two weeks later in Sacramento, she improved to 19.2 feet and surprised everyone by qualifying in the mini javelin throw, as well.

Crystal is big for her age, 5-foot-1, yet nimble and energetic, a busy, goal-oriented girl besides. She comes from a family of six. Two older brothers are off making a living and her third brother, Isaiah, 13, is at home, a track team member, too. Her father is disabled and bedridden. Yvonne Webb, the mom, says Crystal is unusual not just because of what she accomplishes but because of her personality.

“She’s very outgoing and has positive energy,” Yvonne Webb says in the Boedecker clubhouse. “Everyone who meets her likes her.”

Yvonne Webb is Crystal’s teacher through California Virtual Academy (CAVA) home schooling. Crystal takes school tests on her home computer, gets regular visits from a supervising teacher and goes on three field trips a month with other CAVA students. She got first place nationally among CAVA’s fourth-graders in February when she creatively put her name to work with a science project on the crystallization of crystal groups.

She has two cats and a pit bull and wants to be a veterinarian.

Since age 6, Crystal was part of a cheerleading team for the Seahawks, a PAL football team. But her mother decided a year ago that the discipline — demanding pushups from kids — was too strict and pulled her out. She found the MacCanDo club through Rec and Park.

“Coach Rob said do your best and there are no punishments,” Yvonne Webb said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

Photo by Natalie Foerab
City will pick up hazardous waste free

Toxics specialist spreads word about new law

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

Cynthia Knowles from the S.F. Department of the Environment was one of the speakers at the July Tenderloin Futures Collaborative meeting with a positive message for residents about hazardous materials.

The department’s program to help people get rid of hazardous household items, formerly known as grants for seniors only, became free for all city residents July 1.

“Everyone’s equal in this — home owners, apartment renters, SRO residents,” said Knowles, the department’s toxics reduction specialist. “But you do have to make an appointment — call 355-3777 — and you have to be home at the scheduled pickup time.”

Even in a tight-squeezed SRO, a resident is likely to have some of these hazardous materials: insect sprays, rodent poisons and baits, house plant insecticides, mercury thermometers, aerosols, hypodermic needles, bathroom cleaners, bleach, nail polish remover, flammable liquids, mothballs and batteries.

These shouldn’t be tossed out with the garbage or poured down the drain. Knowles said all have special disposal to protect the environment. The city contracts with Norcal Waste’s S.F. Recycling and Disposal Co. to do the pickups.

On appointment day, the resident brings the items in, says, a cardboard box or bag to the apartment or hotel entrance, and hands them to the driver.

“People who are elderly or unable to walk or carry heavy items should let the scheduler know ahead of time — they’ll make special arrangements,” Knowles said.

Knowles’ only bad news had to do with prescription drugs, which used to be on the list of hazardous collectibles.

“Unfortunately, just three weeks ago, Norcal stopped accepting expired and used medications,” she said. That leaves a critical hole in the program.

Last year, the Department of the Environment and other residents organized a Bay Area-wide two-day pilot with Walgreens Drug Stores to accept used and expired meds.

To see if local Walgreens had continued on its own, The Extra called four in the central city. Only one pharmacist, at Geary and Taylor, said he still accepts dud meds but is rarely asked. The last time was four months ago. At the other stores, the pharmacists recalled the two-day pilot, but said if asked today, they couldn’t accept used or expired meds.

After the meeting, one SRO-dwelling Collaborative member told The Extra he didn’t think he could make an individual appointment for hazardous waste pickup because his building manager has such tight rules.

Knowles said her department would do everything it could to make the program work, including talking to managers, monitoring if developer-owners and tenants reps about organizing a whole-building pickup, if that’s what it takes.

The idea of general collection is great,” she said. “It may be a function of reaching out to SRO managers, but from our point of view, it doesn’t have to be organized — it can be individual.”

The Extra asked a local vendor, TNDC’s facilities manager, if his organization had any objection to tenants taking the initiative.

“Absolutely not,” he said. “In fact, we’re working with Department of the Environment. Ideally we could set up a system that they right now to customize recycling collection for all our buildings, including pickup of hazardous household waste.”

Meantime, he added, individual initiative is appreciated.

“In case it seems little things don’t mean a lot when it comes to hazardous waste, consider the old-fashioned, nondigital thermometer. It contains one gram or less of mercury. Environmentalists say that’s enough to contaminate a 20-acre lake. A person who breaks a mercury thermometer risks breathing in and absorbing vapors that could cause neurologic damage.”

FUTURES COLLABORATIVE GETS THE GREEN LIGHT

It’s official, said Tommie Moss, TNDC community organiz- er and Collaborative recruiting secretary: “Folks are still interest- ed in the Tenderloin Futures Collaborative and voted to contin- ue it.”

In May, she sent an email sur- vey to 125 people who’ve attended TFC meetings recently. District 6 in SF message board carried the survey as well. Of the responses, 33 said TFC is “a valuable resource to the community.”

But 78 said it wasn’t. Twenty-one also said they were no longer active in TFC, while 86 didn’t reply.

A summertime meeting? Thirty-six were for, 24 against. And if meetings were held in the vac- tion months, 19 said they would attend; 21 wouldn’t.

The meeting schedule — the second Wednesday of the month at 10 a.m. — was still okay for 30 responders, but not for 20.

“Now we want to put together a steering committee,” Moss said, “to decide future directions. And we want to thank Glenda, who’s done a terrific job and keep- ing this informational and neu- tral.”

Glenda Hope, S.F. Network Ministries executive director, has chaired TFC since its inception in October 2001.
Women in SROs: Group brings safety, confidence

In residential hotels, males outnumber females up to 20-to-1 or more

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

B reak the Silence, a monthly discussion group, tackles hard issues for women living in residential hotels—violence, being stereotyped as prostitutes, isolation, depression, sexual harassment, intimidation.

The group, part of the Central City SRO Collaborative’s Women’s Safety Campaign, has been meeting each third Wednesday since January, at 4:45 p.m., at 259 Hyde. The Collaborative is a project of Tenderloin Housing Clinic. The attendance numbers are an ebb and flow, depending a lot on our outreach,” said Leanne Edwards, volunteer campaign coordinator and a tenant rep of her TL SRO.

“At our first meeting there were 25, at our last in July there were 17, but we’ve had as few as five or six. They’re always diverse—mothers, single women, transgender women, seniors. The ages range from 22 to 60 and almost all are permanently homeless.” Edwards says the gist of the meetings is “supportive empowerment,” critical to a population that’s an overwhelming minority in SROs, at least in THC’s master leaseholds. For example, at the Elk Hotel on Eddy, only four women live in the 88 units, down the street at the Jefferson, 15 women reside in the 110 units, and at the Vincent on Turk, there are 25 women and 178 men. On Sixth Street at the Seneca, 38 women live in the 203 units.

“We hear constantly about the lack of respect that women get from management and male residents,” Edwards said. “There’s just this assumption that they’re all hookers.”

She said she’ll continue to collect info about the ratio of women to men in other nonprofit-owned SROs where the Collaborative has tenant reps—Crescent Manor, Lawrence Hotel, Ritz Hotel, Drake, Baldwin House and Hotel Hurley.

The SRO Collaborative trained Edwards, other volunteers and interns in facilitation skills. They take turns facilitating the meetings and share that role with any interested woman in the group. Group members also can take the Collaborative training, if they wish.

The next few meetings are Aug. 14 (first-time departure from the regular Wednesdays), Sept. 19, Oct. 17. For information, Leanne Edwards, 775-7110 x3102.

Photos by Louis Barkanida
Supervisor Chris Daly poster at 30 U.N. Plaza
Candidate Matt Drake poster at 335 Leavenworth.

Peskin takes action on posters; 311 takes its time

Continued from Page 1

report illegal postings by dailing 311. He would be given a tracking number, and a work order would be forwarded to DPW, which would spruce things up and bill the offenders.

The 311 system, which is supposed to make government more responsive to complaints, was activated in February. A Mayor Newsom pet project since the mayor was a supervisor — 311 is designed to reduce 911’s nonemergency calls and simplify access to city services, for which combined there are 2,500 phone numbers.

When the service expanded its hours to 24/7 on March 29, Newsom called it a “powerful tool for holding government accountable.” The city expected 80,000 calls a month, “with volumes growing over time as constituents grow familiar with the service and public awareness campaigns begin this summer,” a mayor’s office news release said at the time.

Response was way underestimated. In April, the first month, 122,000 calls rolled in, according to S11 Executive Director Ed Reiskin. July’s count, Reiskin estimated, would be around 170,000. The original estimate, he said, maybe didn’t include folks who called city services and hung up before they got their question answered.

Peskin was happy about Lee’s message. Momentarily. For when he went back to examine the poles, he found splat, ugly decal facsimiles. The posters had been peeled to the poles, not taped or bound by string, which the sign ordinance stipulates. Scraping posters off, which DPW did, takes paint with it, leaving a mess.

So Peskin sent an email to Lee saying he looked forward to DPW enforcing the code section that charges offenders for the city’s cleanup costs, plus a 50% punitive fee.

“The city’s been removed from all six locations,” Peskin wrote. “But this was just the tip of the iceberg.”

Peskin was in an interview with activists and associates. Then he decided to take Lee’s advice. On June 26, he called 311 with four more sites, all brandishing graffiti — four posters, one on Eddy. Meanwhile, the city repainted the scarred poles.

“Rodney,” one of 44 customer service reps and the one who answered Peskin’s 311 call, took the new particulars — Peskin could add his name to the tracking number.

“I’m not finished,” Peskin said. “I want to be informed by DPW when these are taken down and (when the city has) collected for them.” He cited the code reference; Article 484-1a (b), and left a phone number for a call back. Payment is due from the misdemeanants 10 days from the billing date. Filing the city can lead to civil penalties.

On the evening of June 26, the TL Police Station held its monthly Community Room fonam. Graffiti abatement experts were high on the agenda. Officer Christopher Putz, who heads SFPD’s abatement program, said “stickering,” the random slapping of adhesive stickers — some the size of a hand — was very popular now on public and private property. It is pure vandalism, he said, and convictions would lead to probation and multiple repeats would warrant civil action.

In answer to a question about old political posters, Putz quickly replied, “I don’t deal with that at all.”

Indeed, the city won’t lift a finger unless someone files a complaint. And the TL, as it turns out, has a disproportionate share of the city’s visual pollution.

Peskin said he’d heard of SFPD abatement officers cover 11 districts, Jonathan Vaing, the DPW representative, told the group, and the Tenderloin gets policed the least time.

“We depend on community policing, and then we send a crew,” Vaing said. “Call 311 to get things removed. We get on it as soon as it’s reported. There’s a 48-hour time gap. More than 48 hours is unacceptable.”

On July 10, Peskin, having heard nothing more about his second request, again lengthened the tip of the iceberg. He called 311 with three more sites. Two were on O’Farrell and one at U.N. Plaza. All were Daly political posters. The reporting process took 10 minutes and Peskin got his tracking numbers.

“Is there anything else I can help you with?” the employee who answered asked.

“Is there a way to find out what’s happening with the other request I had?” he asked. He gave her the details.

DPW has only one inspector for the whole city, she explained, and the posters can’t be removed until they are inspected. She said the deadline to have the work completed was July 16 — three weeks from receiving his complaint. She confirmed that all of Daly’s previous sites were in the system, except a Larkin address that coughed up a blank screen. Surprised, she said she’d consult her supervisor later and then issued a new number for it.

Peskin settled back to wait.

On July 18, two days after DPW’s deadline, Peskin trudged over to Little Saigon to check one of the poles. At 625 Larkin at Willow he beheld a disappointing irony. Skipped over the transgressing pole’s political poster, and heavily taped, were two pink DPW notices. They announced in Aug. 1 City Hall hearing on changing the city’s street cleaning times for 15 nearby sites, including Willow. The Daly poster beneath them was now deeply embedded. DPW had thwarted its own progress.

What next? Daly wondered.

By July 25, he had heard nothing.

How then did he explain his early success?

“I embarrassed them,” he said, referring to buttonholing Peskin.
Tenderloin’s Sanctuary, a pot club

BY TOM CARTER

LISTENING to the Planning Commission’s deliberations on ACT UP’s cannabis dispensary was white-knuckling for Michael Welch whose pot club was also under scrutiny on July 26. Opposition can crop up anytime and the commission is particularly sensitive to competing proposals.

The Planning Department had recommended approval of the ACT UP dispensary at 1864 Market St. and Welch’s Sanctuary at 1669 O’Farrell St. partly because they had zero neighborhood opposition until a man at the hearing unexpectedly went to the microphone. He complained that the smell of ACT UP’s marijuana is “obnoxious” and fills his next-door apartment.

But that was thin stuff to the commissioners. By a 5-4 vote, they approved ACT UP’s dispensary. Then after hearing from Welch about the good things Sanctuary does, including a support letter from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the commissioners’ approval was unanimous.

Still, a case of nerves over rejection isn’t good for an HIV patient, which Welch is. He doesn’t look sick but he could have used a hit of his own calming medicine, perhaps the popular Bubba Kush strain.

“I was scared to death,” he said. “I’ve never been to a public hearing and stress is a major factor in getting sick. It could go to AIDS.”

The approvals brought to 14 the number of dispensaries the commission has ok’d since Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi’s legislation passed in December 2005. The measure set tougher regulations for the burgeoning cannabis dispensaries and required them to be relicenced.

But the licensing process is jammed up. Not the dispensary has been licensed under the new regulations. Dispensaries continue operating beyond the July 1 licensing deadline because closing them all wasn’t a consideration.

Besides, rules are still evolving.

Supervisor Michelle Alioto-Pier’s measure to extend the deadline to March 1 is to be heard for the second time before the supervisors’ City Operations and Neighborhood Services Committee on Aug. 9. Her extension contains other important changes, including one that addresses the Big Oil-like profits common in the drug world.

“One of medical cannabis for excessive profits is explicitly prohibited,” the measure says. “It requires the dispensaries, ‘under penalty of perjury,’ to annually provide a statement to the Department of Public Health that they are compliant.”

The measure removes the SFPD’s role to inspect and approve a dispensary’s security, work that Chief Heather Fong said the police wouldn’t do anyway. So no dispensary gets a police inspection. None got the go-ahead from the Department of Building Inspection, either. But several received the necessary Fire Department approval.

Now, to address ADA-access issues, Alioto-Pier’s ordinance adds the Mayor’s Office of Disability to the chain. All of these departments have to inspect the premises.

“It has been a massive delay,” says Larry Klatt, DPH senior environmental health specialist who oversees the licensing. “No clinic has been licensed because none has gotten the necessary other department approvals. Now, there’s an extension to March. A lot of people are waiting for exemptions from construction standards.”

Major construction costs could knock some dispensaries out of business. But in an amendment resulting from effective lobbying, the Alioto-Pier ordinance provides for new minimum standards “a dispensary can’t meet the new construction standard for disabled access.”

“The measure changes the equation,” says Kessler. “It has to pass or there will be no permits. And it will probably be amended some more.”

Some dispensaries that have received commission approval, Besides Sanctuary, are Tenderloin’s Sanctuary Senior Apartments, which get support from a license, Tariq Alazrak, who operates the club out of his Cafe context, has two other clubs, is trying to change the landlord’s mind. “Regardless,” he told The Extra, “we will be open until March 1, 2008.”

Among the city’s 30 dispensaries, Sanctuary is one of five called ‘compassion’ of a dispensary—patient-owned and operated — cooperatives. Three are in District 6: Sanctuary, ACT UP and Hope Net at 223 Nicks Glorietta. Sanctuary is a major supporter of Axis of Love, a compassion lobby for patients that has greatly influenced Francisco and state cannabis legislation.

Sanctuary serves about 90 patients a day. Welch estimates 80% are from the Tenderloin. Some come from the Central District and beyond. There are 60 special compassion, patients, most with HIV or cancer, who get free medicine once a week.

At a District 6 meeting on July 10, Welch handed out Sanctuary’s two-page treatment. It says that many poor patients suffer because they can’t afford the medical marijuana and Sanctuary’s compassion program helps them.

“A medical marijuana dispense has the potential of being nothing more than a storefront for drug dealers, or it can be a valuable asset to the community it serves,” the statement says. “Many dispensary owners have already become millionaires in the few short years that medical marijuana laws have been in effect. The Sanctuary, however, is set up to run as a patient’s cooperative and a non-profit, putting all its surplus income back into the hands of the patients that need it most, thus making the whole community rich, not just a select few.”

On a recent Monday before noon, Sanctuary’s compassion patients began coming in one by one for free marijuana. Dooorman Luis Samayoa checks identification after buzzing them through the electrically locked wrought-iron gate and then through the storefront’s door.

Patients enter a castle-like anteroom. A chandelier and eight crystals dangle from gold stars on the ceiling and catch the light. On one side of the room is a small aquarium, two stools and a little table with a volcano on it — a mini-size appliance with a detachable transparent bag that heats pot into vapor for easy inhaling. On the room’s other side is a large wall mirror and floor air conditioner. The door, a bay, a window love seat is usually occupied by Toro, a large black and white American bulldog. An SPCA adoption, he yields gracefully to customers who smile, coo and scratch him.

The marijuana medicine is in 17 clear plastic containers on top of a 6-foot-long glass case. There’s no menu board. Welch doesn’t believe in them. Patients explain their affini out of detail to any of Sanctuary’s half dozen employees, all patients themselves. Employees say which strains are popular, which are euphoric, explain combinations or “kush” blends, and what their personal experience with each has been.

Edibles and hashish are behind the counter. There’s no tincture, the dark liquid THC laced with alcohol, because the health-conscious Welch won’t carry anything with alcohol.

From the ceiling, two rowing red curtains he made are parted, revealing a 2-foot high black signs on the back wall that says Sanctuary in big gold letters and in smaller letters under it “on earth as it is in heaven.”

“We wanted it to look like a sanctuary,” Welch says, “something pleasant and relaxing away from the hard streets.”

A man with a long white beard, floppy hat and using a cane comes in. He immediately
bends down to scratch Toro. He lingers briefly to get his medicine, turns, says goodbye to Toro and is out the door in less than three minutes.

Regular hours are noon to 8 p.m., seven days a week and several clients arrive first on Mondays, when compassions start. They receive 1/8th of an ounce — 5 grams — free in a baggie, sometimes edibles, too, but not enough to last a week. If they don’t pick it up during the week they can lose the privilege to someone on the 4/20’s waiting list.

“When we started I thought wouldn’t it be great if the medicine could pay for the people rather than the other way around,” Welch said. “To legalize and tax it would pay for a universal health system in a few years.”

NORML estimates that California could bring in $120 million from medical marijuana sales based on 350,000 patients, the top current estimate, from $2 billion a year gross.

Welch came to San Francisco five years ago, sick with HIV complications. East Coast doctors had prescribed 28 different pills for him and the side effects were killing him. He was drained of energy, bedridden 16 hours a day, yet unable to get enough rest. A doctor he saw in Miami said maybe he could try pot as an option to pain pills.

He did, and it was some relief, but it was illegal and hard to find.

Welch had visited San Francisco before, and he beckoned. Here, AIDS Housing Alliance found him an apartment. It and other groups subsidized his cost until he got a waiter’s job in the Castro. With a doctor’s recommendation, medicinal pot was saving his life, he says.

He gained weight he lost from vomiting and diarrhea, the pills’ side effects. Now he takes three pills a day, two for HIV and one for blood pressure, plus he “self-medicates.”

Welch expected to be dead by age 35. He’s 41. And he’s grateful for the West Coast society that saved his life and propped him up. Neuropathy in his legs and a lack of stamina made long days tough and painful as a waiter. He wondered what his next move could be and asked Brian Basinger, president of the Harvey Milk Club, who had helped him find an apartment.

Basinger told him to “find something close to your heart and do it.” Welch said. “He made it sound so easy.”

A tall, middle-age woman in a long cotton dress comes in. She’s happy and chatty as she goes to the counter. She brings a present for the dispensary, a Mickey Mouse cookie jar. She picks up her medicine and pauses to gossip a minute before leaving.

Welch began asking about having a not-for-profit pot club, a legal distribution system since the state’s voters approved medical marijuana in 1996. His landlord owned a building across town with a storefront vacancy coming up. It was a small smoke shop on O’Farrell with 200 square feet that the owner had neglected and abused.

“It was a mess,” Welch said. “Holes in the walls. We didn’t have a choice, though. The landlord was understanding and totally cool, as long as we follow the rules. And ever since we opened we’ve had a compassion program.

The dispensary didn’t make money for eight months after opening in March 2005, a month before the moratorium banning new ones. But Sanctuary did well enough to extend compassion to food and housing. Now, three times a week Welch buys trays of fresh food in the Castro and takes them to the Annex of Love at Ninth and Howard for afternoon meals for about 60 of the poorest patients. Sanctuary helps people find places to stay and subsidizes rents too. Toro people receive rent help up to $600 a month from Sanctuary, he says. There’s a waiting list of 14. Welch says he has saved four people from eviction.

“We ask for disability papers, rent receipts and contact the landlord and tell them we’re subsidizing a part of the rent,” Welch says. “We send the rent directly so it gets in the right hands.

And landlords are very happy. We’ve had no issues with that and we review each case every six months. I hope one day to do this full time.”

The architect of Sanctuary’s compassion is Shona Gochenour, 87. She is also the executive director of Axis of Love, which she says has 1,500 members and 50 activists. She is a lead advocate for four of the more than 40 long compassionate dispensaries. And although she facilitates several peer support groups each week, she spends the majority of her time influencing lawmakers.

Six months ago in a San Francisco café, state Sen. Carole Migden, who sponsored Gochenour the most urgent issue facing the dispensaries. The State Board of Equalization had just notified the dispensaries that they were liable for sales tax. They complied at once and others didn’t, afraid of getting hit with back taxes.

The heft of back taxes, Gochenour told the senator, would kill all the dispensaries that put their money back into compassion programs for the poorest of the sick and needy. Migden’s subsequent bill eliminates the threat of back taxes for those that pay now. NORML supports it.

More recently, she conferred with Alastor-Pier on the ADA section of her ordinance. Gochenour said the proposed new construction standards could bankrupt any of the dispensaries. The supervisor’s resulting amendment provides new “minimum standards.”

But what Gochenour revels in as much as anything is the fallout from the Dec. 21 “on the town” compassion tour she arranged for Planning Commissioners Katharine Zirin and Christina Olague. They went to all the compassion dispensaries, she said, and the commissioners asked questions.

“Now every dispensary that comes before the commission gets asked if they have a compassion program and what other things they offer,” Gochenour says. “It’s amazing for us to hear.”

The two commissioners now have “become like rock stars” to the compassion movement, she adds.

“Chris Daly loves us,” says Gochenour.

“We stay true to the course. He knows every single advocate at Axis of Love and he asks about how patients feel about the compassion we provide to protect our patients. City Hall is asking us! But you’ve got to be there every day and know how to get behind closed doors.”

Welch is lower key but just as passionate. “I never thought what we were doing was ‘amazing,’” he says, sitting on the love seat with Toro. “I’m just trying to leave something behind. In my youth, I was a little more selfish.”
PORTER VANMETER

Basketball buff

Rudy Jimenez’s daily drinking buddies were a no-show at his memorial July 30, but he got Vanmeter, a sendoff from people who didn’t know him.

“He was a nice guy when he wasn’t blundering and then he’d talk a bit about base- ball,” said Ray Bosaccii to the small gather- ing at the West Hotel. ‘But when he was, which was 80% of the time, he wouldn’t talk to you.’

‘Two or three friends of his would show up every day to go drinking with him. And he’d come downstairs in his wheelchair. I dunno, maybe he had the money.’

The West’s re- sidents didn’t see much of Mr. Jimenez, a two- year resident. Even when he was around and look- ing beat-up — with black eyes, Bosaccii remem- bered — he would talk about the either or his suffering.

Mr. Jimenez had been in the hospital since early spring. He died at Laguna Honda in July of liver failure, Bosaccii and others figured, but the cause of death was unknown. He was 60.

I’m here because I saw his picture,” said one man. “Although you don’t know a person here, you say hello anyway — it might make someone’s day.”

A Polaroid picture of Mr. Jimenez with his room number on it was on a table with a candle and small bouquet of flowers. Bosaccii said there are too many liquor stores around with cheap booze.

“You can get a half pint of vodka for $2 and a quart of beer for $1,” he said.

Three groceries within a half block of the hotel sell alcohol. Two doors away, one sells hard liquor, too. That afternoon, during the memorial, a drinking crowd of a dozen was partying on the sidewalk in the middle of the block.

PORTER VANMETER

Gospel singer

The mouth-watering aroma of Porter Jimenez’s soul food often filled the hall- ways of the Francisco Towers over the years but cooking, good as he was at it, wasn’t as close to his heart as gospel singing.

“We first met when we were singing in the Glide Gospel choir,” said Amanda Turks, a resident since 1985 who lives on the fifth floor. “When he lived here at Halieh House we’d sing all the songs together. He was my closest friend.”

A little alcohol, or sometimes a lot, only made the good times better, she said with a laugh. And when Mr. Vanmeter, a tenor, moved to Francisco Towers 15 years ago, their singing continued.

In the last two years, about the time Bank of California, bad health plagued Mr. Vanmeter. He had trouble with water in his lungs and was in and out of Pacific Medical Center four times recently; friends said at his July 20 memorial. He died there on July 15. He was 65.

Mr. Vanmeter, who came from Detroit, held several jobs in the neighborhood until his health started failing. He stayed mostly in his fourth-floor studio, one of 165 studios, two-room and 1-bedroom apartments equipped with bathrooms and kitchens. Besides he remembered that he loved to cook spicy soul food dishes in his room, how he kept his money in a sock and washed through the halls in his blue and white hospital robe, a cheerful presence known for his pet phrase: ‘Don’t worry about it — it’s going to be taken care of.’

A woman fighting back tears said Mr. Vanmeter looked after her son and took him plumping and other kids, too. She blew him a farewell kiss.

He was a good friend,” said Danny, who knew him for 15 years. “He helped me whenever I needed it and he was shy about asking for help himself. He kept to his business and didn’t get into anybody else’s unless he was invited. I loved the guy.”

Burks, who uses a wheelchair, said any- time she called Mr. Vanmeter and asked him to go to the store for her, even in the middle of the night, he would go.

“Burks said, ‘When I called him he asked me to get the cops to get him out of the hospi- tal. He wasn’t quite right then in his head.’

‘But he was always there for me. And one day I’ll meet him in heaven and we’ll sing like we never sang before.” —TOM CARTER

MARLON RODRIGUEZ

6 years at the Cadillac

Marlon Rodriguez’s case manager at the Cadillac Hotel was surprised when a resi- dent ran into her second-floor office and said that paramedics were in the building and wanted information on Mr. Rodriguez before they took him to the hospital.

But Mr. Rodriguez, originally from Nicaragua, a quiet man with a long black beard who could not stop drinking, did not make it to the hospital. He died in his friend’s room in the presence of his three friends and case manager that afternoon, July 12. He was 56.

The paramedics worked on him from around 12:40 p.m. to about 1:20 p.m.,” said Marion, the case manager. “When they stopped and pronounced him dead, his friends became very emotional,” she said. “He was a very good man.”

Mr. Rodriguez, a six-year resident of the Cadillac, used a walker to get around during his final days after suffering from a fall. He got his food and clothing from Glide and St. Anthony’s, Lopez said.

He never talked about his past in Nicaragua,” she said.

Mr. Rodriguez’s memorial, attended by a handful of mourners and conducted by the Rev. Glenda Hope, was held July 30 in the lobby of the 99-year-old hotel. Initially, the service was translated into Spanish by Lopez. Later, Magali Echevarria, the hotel director, took over as interpreter.

A large bouquet of red and white lilies was in the cen- ter of the altar.

“He was an alcoholic and I’m one too,” a middle-age man dressed in a blue T-shirt and blue buggy shorts said in Spanish. “I feel sorry for him. We were not friends. We offended each other. I feel sorry about that, I know it’s late.”

Lopez said Mr. Rodriguez was survived by at least one child, a son, and had nieces and nephews in San Francisco. “When they heard about his death, they all came to the hotel.”

He was a Nichiren Buddhist and chant- ed every day in his room,” said Echevarria. “He was a gentleman, a quiet-spoken per- son.” — JOHN GOWS
Crystal Webb, left, is also a prime performer in McDaniels Dancers, a dancing and cheerleading squad of 20 girls.

Crystal and her biggest fan, mom Yvonne Webb.

School and that’s not all she can do

Notes on 6th St.: Positively fair

Orbee Webb, on tenor sax, right, and his Smooth Blues band lit up the 6th Street Fair Saturday, Aug. 4. The annual event drew about 1,000 people to Minna Alley, between Sixth and Mary to hear live music and watch hip-hop and rap performances on two stages, get free haircuts, eat hot dogs and cotton candy, get free bags of produce, play board games, and socialize with friends and neighbors. At 35 tables, fairgoers learned about social services that could change a life, or at least improve it. Among agencies: South of Market Child Care, San Francisco SAFE, Central City SRO Collaborative, Black Brothers Estate, Tenant Associations Coalition, S.F. Mental Health Association and the D.A.’s office.

—Marjorie Reggs

Crystal Webb, on tenor sax, right, and his Smooth Blues band lit up the 6th Street Fair Saturday, Aug. 4. The annual event drew about 1,000 people to Minna Alley, between Sixth and Mary to hear live music and watch hip-hop and rap performances on two stages, get free haircuts, eat hot dogs and cotton candy, get free bags of produce, play board games, and socialize with friends and neighbors. At 35 tables, fairgoers learned about social services that could change a life, or at least improve it. Among agencies: South of Market Child Care, San Francisco SAFE, Central City SRO Collaborative, Black Brothers Estate, Tenant Associations Coalition, S.F. Mental Health Association and the D.A.’s office.

—Marjorie Reggs

Crystal Webb, left, is also a prime performer in McDaniels Dancers, a dancing and cheerleading squad of 20 girls.

Crystal and her biggest fan, mom Yvonne Webb.

for it,” her mother says. “It’s a minute-and-a-half of constant moving.”

“I’ve been dancing all my life,” Crystal says.

Asked what advice she’d have for other 10-year-olds, she answers with the aplomb of a Joseph Campbell.

“Follow your dreams and do your best,” she says with a toss of her head. “That’s been my motto since I was five.”

MacCanDo funds helped Crystal and her mother go to the national meet at Benedictine University in Lisle, Ill., July 3-8. More than 2,000 youth participated. Crystal competed against 15 other 10-year-olds in the shot put.

Her throw was 23 feet 4 3/4 inches, her personal best by a foot. The winning toss was 27 feet 3 1/4 inches. The national record is 34 feet 4 inches, set by Amber Curtis of San Jose in 1995.

Yvonne Webb called McDaniels right after the event. Crystal came in third and won the bronze medal. She edged out fourth place by a mere centimeter. She finished out of the top five in the mini javelin.

“Then she put Crystal on the phone and she was crying because she lost,” McDaniels said a week later. “I said, ‘Hey, you got nothing to cry about — you put Crystal Webb on the map and the Tenderloin and the MacCanDo team, too?’

Now a 2-by 2 1/2-foot handmade purple sign is propped up on a Formica table in the clubhouse. In yellow-painted, roughly formed letters it’s titled “MacCanDo” and under that it says “Crystal Webb Awards.” Below it are 12 medals, hanging by their bright ribbons, the tangible sum of Crystal’s summer of 2007.

Crystal Webb, left, is also a prime performer in McDaniels Dancers, a dancing and cheerleading squad of 20 girls.

Crystal and her biggest fan, mom Yvonne Webb.
Glide, partners open $2.3 million health clinic

BY TOM CARTER

Glide Health Services held a grand “re-opening” in July of its community health clinic, after a $2.3 million renovation into a dazzling state-of-the-art facility in the heart of the Tenderloin. It’s expected to annually serve 6,500 residents, double the previous caseload.

The new clinic opened June 27 on the sixth floor of Glide’s offices at 350 Ellis St. is roughly the same size as the old clinic on the fourth floor but has more rooms.

Glide Health Services and its partners Catholic HealthCare West, St. Francis Memorial Hospital, UCSF School of Nursing, plus multiple donors and public funds, are responsible for the new 10-year-old clinic. Open Saturday through Thursday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., the clinic is a training ground for UCSF nurses who see upward of 80 patients a day. More than 60% of the clients are homeless.

“IT’s the palace on the sixth floor,” said Glide’s new CEO, Wilma Seldon, at the July 15 news conference. The clinic’s reception was crowded with several dozen staff and health care representatives.

“We’re striving to create a healthy community that improves spiritual, physical and emotional health in order to break the multigenerational cycle of poverty and low well-being,” Seldon said.

Built over nine months, the clinic has seven medical exam rooms, four mental health therapy rooms, two complimentary care rooms, two HIV counseling rooms and a nursing case management office.

“We can offer an integrated approach and wrap the client in a net of services under one roof,” said Patricia Dennyhey, director of Glide Health Services. Plus, there’s more privacy, she said.

The Rev. Cecil Williams, Glide Memorial Methodist Church’s minister, was the catalyst for the collaboration.

“Until I had to go and get taken care of myself, he said, he didn’t know how important a state-of-the-art clinic was. He said he is successfully battling to keep his cholesterol count down.

“This is a good day,” Williams said. “Thousands will come through these doors. We’re making history because we care.”

Though operational, the clinic still needs $500,000.

“We’ll be knocking on doors,” Williams said. The clinic has a $2 million-a-year budget and a staff of 25.

Janice Mirkritkan, Williams’ wife and founding president of Glide Foundation, recalled the early days when Glide was trying to raise the health care concepts in the neighborhood.

“We held rallies to get people in here — people weren’t interested in their health,” she said. “Twenty-five years ago, we gave 15 women mammograms in the parking lot.”

Dr. David Smith, founder of the Haight Ashbury Free Medical Clinic, presented the clinic with a check for an undisclosed amount.

Ribbon cutters: (from left) Lloyd Dean of Catholic HealthCare West, Tom Hennessy of St. Francis Hospital, Kathleen Davico of UCSF’s School of Nursing and from Glide, Jan Mirkritkan, Wilma Seldon and the Rev. Cecil Williams.