

Renter's Voice

Rebecca says goodbye

by Rebecca Logue-Boveé

For eight years I have been the executive director of HRC. But it is now time for change, for both the organization and myself. I want to thank all of our members for your continued support of tenants in SF, and for the staff who have worked tirelessly to defend and sustain tenant's rights. The last eight years have given me so much: A sense of belonging and a feeling that the work we do here at HRCSF really matters. I will be sad to say goodbye to all of you, but change is good and HRCSF will evolve and become stronger through this change.

Over the years many volunteers have come and gone, giving hundreds of hours of help to tenants. We have fought and won many battles. We have grown and been able to develop new programs to address problems facing tenants. We closed loopholes in local laws which have stopped evictions and displacement of seniors and families. We have perfected our ability to assist subsidized ten-

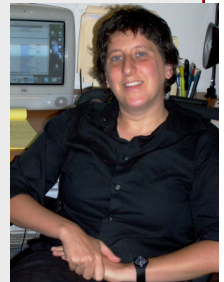
ants and mastered the intricate laws governing public assistance for tenants. As new problems arose for tenants, HRCSF was there to define them and create solutions which have saved many tenants from becoming homeless. We have succeeded because of our strong member base and commitment of our staff and volunteer counselors.

Thank you for your courage and your continued support of HRCSF. As I leave here, I take with me the knowledge that HRCSF will continue to be a leader in the tenant's rights movement here in San Francisco and that you, the members, will continue to support the work we do.

So pick up the phone and let Sara and the rest of the staff know that you will continue to work with HRCSF to make sure that San Franciscans can continue to live, work and play in our communities. We can't do it without your continued support. We need you now more than ever as we change

A shout-out from the new director

I am so excited to be taking the helm of this powerful and enduring ship which I hope will make stronger waves than ever as we continue our journey towards justice. It's a privilege to take the wheel from the long list of dedicated staff, leaders and volunteers who have brought compassion and joy to the nearly 30 years of hard-fought struggle for tenant power that we call the Housing Rights Committee.



Thanks Rebecca, Tommi, Stephanie and Hing Chee for keeping the boat afloat and giving me the opportunity to take us onward!

--Sara Shortt

In memoriam: Joe Lacey

Oakland-born Joe Lacey, HRC's beloved ex-leader and longtime local tenant activist, left us on December 20, 2006. He was 88. Joe first became involved with HRC in 1979, back when rent control was still new. HRC was then known as Old St. Mary's Housing Committee. He and his wife Faye fought long and hard for tenants. They helped organize buildings, marched on City Hall countless times, and mobilized renters to fight for their rights. Joe quickly became a familiar and much-loved figure on the tenant's rights scene in San Francisco. He served on the boards of several organizations, including the Senior Action Network and Planning for Elders. He was appointed to the SF Commission on Aging by former Mayor Willie Brown, where he served until his death. On May 10, 2007, Joe was posthumously honored by the SF Human Rights Commission for his lifelong dedication to tenant's issues. He will be sorely missed by all.



DBI & SFHA SIGN MOU

by Carrie Craig

Roughly two weeks ago, I visited the Potrero Hill projects for the first time on a site visit through our CEOP program. What I saw there, I will not soon be able to forget. The buildings were dilapidated all around, with dozens of boarded up and vacant units. The

entire development was in disrepair. While not entirely shocking due to the fact that I have received numerous repair complaints from that particular site, it was still hard to see it in person. Potrero Hill is not alone in its present state. This is an issue facing many of the projects within San Francisco. The San Francisco Housing Authority (SFHA) is the landlord of these projects and based on the state of so many of the units they rent out, they could very well be considered slumlords.

The SFHA's mission statement is to provide housing for "low-income households, while integrating housing and economic opportunities for residents and *maintaining high standards of property management*, fiscal management and service delivery. The mission of the Authority is achieved through collaboration with our residents and the greater community emphasizing teamwork, mutual respect, integrity and accountability." (emphasis added) The SFHA fails to provide the follow-through necessary to live up to its prescribed mission to the 12,000 tenants they are there to purportedly help. There is a basic set of Federal Housing Quality Standards that units must meet in order to be considered decent, and time after time our organization has seen that the SFHA does not live up to even the basic standards set out by these HUD standards. Many of these units would also not pass a city Department of Building Inspectors (DBI) inspection and would likely be considered uninhabitable. However, until recently DBI would not inspect these units.

A Memorandum of Understanding has now been put into place that recognized the need for DBI to inspect the SFHA's properties. Now that DBI officially has jurisdiction within the projects, it is necessary to report the gross violations of building codes. Every individual, regardless of class and economic status, deserves a unit that is safe and decent. By consistently reporting the dilapidated state of the buildings and units within them, it can be hoped that the pressure put on the Housing Authority from the city, the residents, organizations such as ours, and the greater community of San Francisco will force them to come up with a real and viable solution to ensuring decent housing for those in their program.

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This is not a problem that can be ignored any longer, nor is it a problem that has quick and easy solution. It is not insurmountable either. By working to shed light on the reality of the issues faced by public housing tenants we can move in the direction of making real and lasting changes. To report a building code violation in Public Housing to the Department of Building Inspectors, call Tim Mansur at (415) 558-6514. To get more information on what violates building codes and/or Housing Quality Standards, or to get help in reporting a repair issue contact us Monday - Thursday 1pm to 5pm at (415) 703-8644.

Carrie Craig is a volunteer counselor at HRCSSF who specializes in Section 8/Public Housing issues.

ON BEING AN INTERN

by Loric Sih

Aside from my own grueling housing search, the thing that worried me most about coming to San Francisco to work as an intern at the Housing Rights Committee was the prospect of being stuck in a cubicle or copy room, glued to a machine all day. I know what an intern is.

So I was surprised when on my first day Tommi casually explained that I could just sit in on a few counseling sessions and start doing it myself by next week. Ok, I thought, no worries about being sequestered with a computer but would I be ready to counsel people fighting real housing battles, people fighting for their homes?

My nerves were not calmed by my first few days of observing, as I identified a trend which only I seemed to find unnerving. A portion of the tenants coming in to receive counseling knew all the housing laws way better than I did!

Everyday I heard clients saying things like "I know since I've been in my place for more than a year, I'm supposed to get 60 days to move out", or "This 6.14 notice doesn't seem to have been filled out right, should I just disregard it?" I felt like a fool. I couldn't flip through the volunteer counselor handbook fast enough to keep up with them, how did I expect to give them advice? But what these tenants represent is not necessarily my own inadequacy but the embodiment of

one of the most important philosophies behind this organization. HRCSF doesn't solve people's problems so much as they give them the knowledge that they can fight and the weapons do so.



Though this city is in a full on housing crisis and property owners are doing some pretty slimy stuff all over the place, tenants in San Francisco still have some basic rights which can go a long way. Only a handful of American cities have things like rent control to affirm some form of commitment to renters rights and very few have thriving tenants rights movements with organizations like HRCSF.

Loric Sih is a student intern from UC/Santa Cruz who will be at HRCSF until December, 07. (l-r) Bobby Kendera, Loric Sih, Gerald Ngor, three interns and Dana Julius, one of our counselors.

Pictured above are (l-r) interns Bobby Kendera, Loric Sih, Gerald Ngor and counselor Danas Julius.

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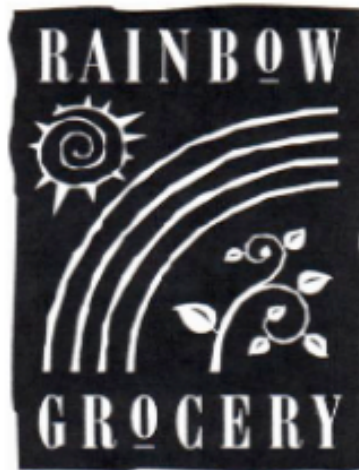
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