

## In SF it is All About Who Your Advocate Is

C.W. Nevius blog – San Francisco Chronicle

Lots of response to today's column about the nonprofits in San Francisco, how many of them there are, how much the city spends to fund them, and whether or not some of them need to be cut.

But reader Riley VanDyke in the Outer Sunset offered an interesting example of how things really work in the city. To the surprise of no one, it is all about bringing the pressure from the right source. If you don't have the right political juice, nothing happens. If you do . . .

Here's his story:

VanDyke says a house near his became vacant about a year ago. The owner passed away and, for various reasons, it has been empty ever since. One of the house's primary features is a covered porch, which quickly became a shelter for homeless people in the area.

"One homeless woman in particular was an especially hard case," he said. "She established herself at the foot of the stairs then proceeded to live in her own waste."

VanDyke called the SFPD, who said they could move her along periodically, but "without one of those yellow 'No Trespassing' signs on the property they claimed they couldn't do anything more than that."

Then VanDyke had the idea to call his supervisor, Carmen Chu.

"Wow," VanDyke says, "talk about turning on the figurative lights."

Suddenly city officials couldn't do enough for him. The police station, it turns out, had a homeless outreach officer. Two separate service agencies called because they couldn't locate the woman and wanted VanDyke's help.

"In the end it was sorta funny," VanDyke said. "Once the SF government agencies had been alerted they were almost competing with each other to 'win' some sort of services-delivery contest. But it required Supervisor Chu's office to locate them and energize them."

It's a story that makes two points. First, service agencies know that supervisors have the clout to get their programs funded. So when Chu speaks, they listen.

And second, it points to a problem that is mentioned over and over in these situations. There is rarely any coordination between agencies. In a perfect world, the police would be hooked into the city services grid and there would be a coordinated response to a squatter like this.

Instead, it is all a matter of finding the correct button to push.

Posted By: C.W. Nevius | June 24 2010

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