

# HOLLYWOOD

Hollywood's Community & Entertainment Newspaper

MARCH 1995

25¢

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Children living in the El Centro Apartments bestow a certificate of appreciation to Councilwoman, Jackie Goldberg.

## Grand Opening Event of Hollywood's El Centro Apartments

### New Apartments Transforms Gang-infested Area

An innovative restoration of 15 formerly deteriorating and gang-infested bungalows built in 1923 near Hollywood and Vine had city officials, housing developers, and residents dedicating its official opening by cutting the ribbon on February 29.

The courtyard of El Centro Apartments was the site for the grand opening to what has been called a neighborhood family haven. The 88-unit complex has been restored to give residents affordable housing. It had been recognized formerly to be more like a drug traffic crossing and gang headquarters than anything even resembling a residential street.

The Charlie Award, was bestowed on

the developer Thomas Safran by the Hollywood Arts Council on January 26, 1996. It praised the architecture, and historic preservation of the California bungalows and noted the improvements made in the neighborhood. Last fall, the Southern California Nonprofit Housing (SCANPH) gave Safran its prestigious "Project of the Year" award, noting the El Centro Apartments served as a "model" for affordable housing in its revitalization of the community. Safran acknowledged former councilman Mike Woo and his staff for their support by ideally getting the community to rehab the building and keep council office behind this project and all the dealings with the city's agencies.

"We've done several buildings here in

Hollywood and would like to get the buildings across the street cleaned up if there are any funds available," said David Ferguson, Vice President of T.S. & A. He adds, "We employ residents as maintenance persons and they look after the streets for us and keep them clean and we have put trash cans on the street to make sure that neighbors don't drop trash on our property. Gangs will hang around where there is no supervision and no one cares. So we have deliberately made some of the front doors to open out to the street so that those people parking in the street will care enough to call the police. Whereas if you have a security fence around the whole complex you turn your

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back on the whole neighborhood. From day one we've been involved with the gang squad and they had three calls per night while we were doing construction and now there has only been eight calls in the

entire 1995 year."

The L.A.P.D. - Hollywood Division was represented by Captain Glenn Ackerman who stated in response to

criminal activity, "We didn't just come in here with just one police car, we came in here with several police cars because that was the only way it was safe." He mentioned, "There is a concept in criminology that is known as "the broken window", one of the cornerstones of the community based policing programs and that is the idea that if you have a home and one day there is a broken window then it doesn't get fixed the negative element in the community notices that and there is always perhaps in assuming days or weeks they'll break more windows. If there is not a message or a community apathy saying that people don't care, that it is O.K.



to do negative and dysfunctional things. Gangs get the idea that its O.K. to set up some drug dealing operations and prostitutes come down and apply their trade. What happens then is a spiral decline and decay; It was a major headache for the police and more importantly for the neighborhood. This is how we're going to revitalize Hollywood—take it back as a place where people want to live in and invest in and where tourists want to come."

The \$11 million restoration effort, launched by a \$4 million long-term loan from the Community Redevelopment Center (CRA) in 1992, was financed by complicated layers of city, state, and federal programs. Under the terms of the CRA loan agreement, principal and interest will be repaid from the percentage of profits generated by the operation of the complex or at the end of 30 years, at which time the loan can be renegotiated to continue the provision of affordable housing. Home Savings gave a permanent loan of \$2,120,000. Edison Capital Agency made a federal home loan through affordable housing program grant of \$5 million by equity contribution.

Also in compliance with the terms of the CRA loan agreement, 20% of the units, 18 in all, are occupied by residents with special needs, such as single moth-

ers, and the formerly homeless.

Another resident, Javier, had his family of four living in Hollywood for fifteen years. He was in charge of maintenance of the former apartments for many years. He stated, "My wife and daughter wanted to leave but I said wait. Now its different and they are happy. It was very ugly before. My kids after school can go to the community room to work on the computers or play outside or learn Karate. On Tuesday and Thursday a volunteer gives classes in English."

Rowena Smith, a single mother, expressed how the apartments have changed her life. "Living here at El Centro Apartments has had an impact on my life and my son's life as well in the most positive way. There is a great sense of self respect and self worth that comes with having your own place in the world to come home to... in the famous words of Dorothy from Kansas---There's no place like home!"



Thomas Safran, Developer.