

# Martin's Volunteer Newsletter

July/August 2004

## How to Respond to and Defuse Conflicts at Martin's

In the last issue of this newsletter (May/June) we talked about preventing conflicts at Martin's and gave the guidelines for asking a guest to leave. This article addresses the important issue of how to respond to a conflict and defuse the situation.

Before going into specific aspects of intervening in conflicts, a couple of guiding principles need to be stated. First is the need to stay centered and grounded. Second is remembering that the purpose for intervening is not to judge the guilt or innocence of conflicting parties, but to be a peaceful presence in the midst of hostility.

- 1) **Be yourself.** Be real. If your natural style is quiet, speak quietly but directly. If you tend to be loud, use your voice but not provocatively.
- 2) **Do not react to violence with violence.** Avoid touching people; it is often construed as threatening, whatever your intentions.
- 3) **Validate people's feelings** with such phrases as, "I can see you're really angry (or scared) about it, but ...."
- 4) **Remind the people that they are at Martin's** and that this is not a place to fight.
- 5) **If a shouting match carries on, repeat yourself often.** It may take a few tries to get through to them because they're so caught up in putting out their rage.
- 6) **Get the potential combatants to look at you** rather than at each other. Your eye contact helps calm them and reminds them of where they are.
- 7) **Getting between the people in conflict** helps break their flow of abuse. Separating attacker and victim or two combatants is vital.
- 8) **Have one worker per combatant to distract them, de-escalate them, get them apart.** The more people the better, but don't ignore the rest of the place either. Not everyone needs to get involved. Generally, the first intervener should call the shots.
- 9) **If bystanders comment on, berate, or encourage those in conflict, briefly tell them to let you handle it.** Be aware that sometimes voyeurs prolong the tension. Be aware of the people around you. Guests will sometimes try to protect us in ways that may make matters worse.
- 10) **Don't try to resolve their conflict.** It's not a mediation; it's a de-escalation.
- 11) **People need to have an escape route.** This is especially important with paranoid personality types. Be spatially aware. Don't crowd folks.
- 12) **Don't get a false sense of the finality of the conflict.** Stay focussed.
- 13) **If a guest has been violent,** responds to provocation with violence, or continues being hostile, ask him or her to leave. Obtain the support of other volunteers while escorting guests to the door.
- 14) **Someone should be prepared to call 911** from the office or pantry. Note descriptions of the participants in as much detail as possible. This information is vital for us to have if someone needs to be 86'ed for a while or for the police if they come.

-Jim Haber

**Remember Summer Closing!**  
**July 31 to August 10**  
**Martin's reopens for lunch on**  
**Wednesday, August 11.**

## Volunteer Potluck on September 12

Mark your calendar for Martin's annual all volunteer potluck. Everyone from all crews is invited. Have a wonderful time visiting with other volunteers, eating great food and talking about things that concern us all. Bring a dish to share. We open at 5:30, eat at 6:00 and meet at 7:00.

## Open Mike on Friday, July 23

**Bring your talent to Martin's on Friday, July 23 from 7 to 9 pm. Whether it's poetry, song, dance, spoken word, stories, original or not - here's your chance to share it. Remember, it's OK to be the audience, too. For more information, call Charlie at 552-0240. Coffee, tea and refreshments will be served. No drugs or alcohol, please.**

## Domestic Violence: What should we do?

We have noticed an increase in domestic violence in the recent past. Although the violence does not necessarily happen at Martin's, we often see the aftermath and often see the victim returning to the person who has inflicted the violence.

We do what little we can.

The window of opportunity for many of these situations is very narrow. We try to refer the victim to a safe house, a program or some other place away from the abuser. Sometimes the person is willing, but often is not. The services are limited and there is not always a place immediately available.

We definitely intercede if the couple is fighting at Martin's, but we must proceed with caution. We have learned by experience that these situations can be some of the most difficult to defuse.

Those of us who have been at Martin's for a long time find these to be among the most frustrating and disheartening things we have to deal with. It makes us face our own helplessness and impotence. At these times, we need to do what we can and let go of the rest.

*-Charlie*

## WHAT WE NEED... Got Printer?

Martin's needs a color printer that is compatible with an iMac. If you can donate one, or know someone who can, call Charlie or Jim at 415-552-0240.

## Peaceful Retreat space

Every one needs to get away occasionally - even, or maybe especially, the core group working at Martin's year round. But where to go? Martin's is looking for space - a cabin, an area for camping, someplace within an hour or two of the city for up to 15 people for a retreat once or twice a year. If you know of such a place or know someone willing to let Martin's use his or her place for a short stay (two or three days), call Charlie at 552-0240.

**Martin de Porres House of Hospitality  
225 Potrero Avenue  
San Francisco, CA 94103  
415-552-0240**

