

that date back to 1906, earthquake days. Many people of color owned homes in the Fillmore in the seventies. There were many jazz clubs dating back to the fifties and sixties. Then the area got more gentrified and became more a blended community with many races and nationalities. Right now I'm commuting from Vallejo, but I'm used to commuting even farther. I've taken jobs in San Rafael and Walnut Creek.

**Do you have children?**

Just one daughter. She's 24 years old and we live together in Vallejo. She loves to cook, so I bring her culinary creations in my lunch.

**What's your favorite food? We're a very foodie area here.**

I love everything. Soup is my favorite—minestrone, won ton, hot and sour, chicken and dumplings. I also love portabella mushroom sandwiches.

**You mentioned that you're spiritual, not religious.**

I come from a Seventh Day Adventist home religion. I consider myself a Christian, but feel some religions divide. My faith in God carries me, and I'm a meditator.

**We hope you're happy here. Some folks call our city "Bezerkley," and say it's full of elder activists.**

I'm right there with them. My daughter says I should have been a hippie.

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# MEET MYRA WALLACE: OUR NEW MANAGER

Interviewed by staff of *The Review*



**Myra Wallace our newly appointed Property Manager, center, with members of the Residents Council. On the left side of the photo: Cynthia Johnson and Miriam Berg, Co-chairs, and on the right, Bruce Moody, Secretary and Julia Bazar, Treasurer.**

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*By Diane Hira Rose and Vi McFall*

*We presented our new property manager with the past issues of The Review. She was pleased and said she looked forward to reading them.*

*On her desk she had two vases of beautiful flowers. One bouquet was a gift from the Residents Council given to her July 20 at our first tenants meeting with her. The other was from Willem Kamal, who tends a lovely garden of flowers and our fish tank in the courtyard. Willem promised to keep her vase filled with flowers from the garden.*

**Where did you work before coming to Redwood Gardens?**

I worked in tenants' rights for people in subsidized housing, many on Section 8. In fact, my family had Section 8 housing and my Mom didn't understand her rights. In order to help her, I committed myself to learning to understand social services. At one time, I actually worked for the organization that wrote the Tenants' Rights Manual.

My work life has been spent in various types of service. For two years, I served as a Vista Volunteer, which offered me the opportunity to set up

tenant organizations for nine Bay Area counties. I was good at it, so the government agency that funded Vista hired me to work for the Community Housing Partnership, a San Francisco affordable housing organization. The whole idea was for management to work alongside residents.

### **What were some of your other jobs?**

San Francisco is a city of refuge. People in their addiction need lots of help. I was staff advisor for Central City Hospitality House, a drop-in center in the Tenderloin for people on drugs. We hired those in recovery to help them get stabilized; with a roof over their heads, they do better in all areas of their lives.

I was at Central City for three years. It takes a strong person to be able to work in that environment. I saw a lot of emotional things. You have to be strong. You have to be able to come back the next day and carry on. By the grace of God, I chose different than they did, yet we are all susceptible. I understand that anyone can get addicted—doctors, lawyers, professional people—so I don't judge. I have a brother out there, but God always gives us hope.

After Central City, jobs in property management came along. One of my property management jobs included working on Treasure Island from 2004 to 2012 with Island Bay Homes, which is part of the Community Housing Partnership. I had the privilege of moving 42 military families into housing. Many had credit problems or had been evicted, so it felt great to put a roof over their heads. Without a roof over your head, it's hard to function.

Currently I'm in school getting my BA in Social Services and Policy Making. It's important to me that policies are made to fit with the reality of what people are going through. Although I started my career as a preschool teacher's aid, I soon found out that working with kids was not for me. My emphasis is on the senior population.



**Myra Wallace introduces herself to residents at the July 20 Get Together.**

### **What are some of your goals as you work here with seniors and the disabled?**

The place where I worked just prior to coming here was Crescent Manor, a historical hotel in the Tenderloin of San Francisco that was home to a 94 seniors and disabled folk. You guys are vastly different than those in Crescent Manor where some residents were actively "using." Those residents counted themselves lucky to be in apartments with their own full bathroom and kitchenette. The population there was 75% Asian, so there were language difficulties.

**We also have a large Asian population, so we need help with translation. Our Residents Council meets once**

***"It's important to me that policies are made to fit with the reality of what people are going through."***

### **a month, but the Chinese seldom attend. If we had a translator, we could include them.**

At Crescent Manor, I worked closely with our Service Coordinator to have a translator come once a week. I discussed this with our Service Coordinator Andrea Brown, and we hope to do that here at Redwood Gardens.

### **Residents here have wanted more communication with management.**

I think that's why they brought me here. There's a gap that needs to be filled. A monthly meeting is something I'm instructed to make happen, so I plan to have a meeting with the residents every month to find out what their needs are. I can also provide information about what's going on with management. I'm supposed to roll it out next month, so you'll be notified.

### **Would you say that one of your strongest suits is in working with people?**

Yes, my connection with people is important to me. I can still tell you "no," but it's the way I say it. My position is not one of power. Who am I to sit on a throne? That's not why I'm here. My approach is let's have a conversation so you can understand the rules. I don't make them. HUD does. I always quote from the "4350," which is the HUD Bible that guides us in what we can and cannot do. Anyone has access to it. Go to the HUD web site and you can find it.

### **What's the best way to contact you?**

I like to make appointments to be sure I'm available during that time. It's frustrating if you need to see me, but I can't take the time right then, so I prefer appointments. Make them with Saane.

I like to dedicate time to each person, so I feel bad if you knock on my door and I'm not available. Sometimes you may knock on my door and I do have a minute. But if my door is closed, it's not because I don't want to speak to you. It's work that I have to do. I have to be accountable.

### **It seems like a match made in heaven that you are here at Redwood Gardens.**

I know what it's like to be a resident, and I have also developed skills in management. My background in tenants' rights enables me to help tenants be in compliance and understand their leasing agreements. Service comes naturally to me. With property management, I get a chance to use my management skills, and I still get to work with people.

### **What attracted you to Redwood Gardens?**

When I saw the gardens and the artwork, it made me feel like this is the place for me. It's going to help me get back into my own artwork. I enjoy painting, especially with oils. Acrylic dries too fast. I just love art! I think it's therapeutic. Because I'm an insomniac, that's when I paint. I also write poetry. Next is pottery.

**Some of the residents here would love to set up an art studio where they could work.**

Now that's a conversation I can have with my supervisor.

***"I plan to have a meeting with residents every month to find out what their needs are."***

### **Have you always lived in San Francisco?**

I moved to San Francisco when I was three from Chicago. My family lived in the Fillmore district near the "Painted Ladies," the colorful Victorian homes