



Roxbury residents protest sober homes

Yawu Miller

Shortly after the Fernandez II liquor store removes its safety grate for its 9 a.m. opening time, a small stream of foot traffic emerges from the newly constructed townhouses at Washington and Guild streets to make the half-block commute.

When they emerge, grasping paper bags, another day has begun on the eastern edge of Fort Hill, where the Safe Haven Sober Houses lodges an estimated 110 recovering drug addicts in its 12 three-bedroom townhouses.

"There is no other community in Massachusetts that has a compound of sober houses. That really multiplies the impact in a way that hasn't occurred anywhere else."

— State Sen. Dianne Williamson

adds up to a mass of angry Roxbury neighbors who have met eight times since February in an effort to get city and state officials to bring order to what may well be the state's largest complex of recovering addicts in a residential neighborhood.

"We have a unique situation in Roxbury," said state Sen. Dianne Wilkerson during a meeting last week. "There is no other community in Massachusetts that has a compound of sober houses. That really multiplies the impact in a way that hasn't occurred anywhere else."

The proliferation of drug and alcohol abuse in the area came shortly after the units opened. Sober houses are not marketed as drug treatment facilities, but rather a safe environment for people in recovery from drug abuse and alcoholism.

Sober house operators in Massachusetts often market their units in courts and receive referrals from pro-

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Baritone Dana Whiteside (center) performing with The New World Chorale singers and the Boston Landmarks Orchestra at the recent Opening Night of the Landmarks Festival at the Hatch Shell held at the Hatch Shell on Boston's Esplanade. The Boston

Landmarks Orchestra is performing every Wednesday night through September 5 at the Hatch Shell on the Esplanade. The next performance will be held July 31 and will feature composer Larry Bell. (Photo courtesy of Michael Dwyer)

State insurance commish puts premium on fairness

Dan Devine

Questions still linger about the impact of recently announced changes to the state's car insurance system on drivers in urban areas like Roxbury and Dorchester.

While the state Division of Insurance maintains that rates will decline in 2008 "for good drivers, irrespective of where they live," consumer advocates and elected officials — burned once before by the onset of competition in the auto market — remain skeptical.

The ongoing debate was renewed last week after state Insurance Commissioner Nonnie S. Burnes announced her decision to allow insurance companies the freedom to set their own rates.

Burnes' decision was made after a series of hearings, during which she was warned by state Attorney General Martha Coakley that allowing insurance companies freedom could mean higher rates for drivers.

Based on industry calculations, Coakley's office reported, premiums in Boston might increase by about 20 percent. The increases could be as high as 35 percent in Roxbury and Dorchester, and as high as 20 percent in Lawrence, Chelsea and Brockton.

Burnes disputed those numbers in an interview with the Banner. She said she hired a consultant to determine a reasonable estimate for the impact on those neighborhoods.

"We did not see anything like 20 percent or 35 percent," Burnes said. "In fact, we saw decreases."

While the numbers may not be in agreement, one thing is clear to Burnes.

"I have the authority to make sure that rates are fair and reasonable and that the companies must treat every insured [person] equitably, and if the rates come in and they don't fall into those parameters, then I will disapprove them," she said.

Though the commissioner does have that authority, consumer advocates are still troubled.

"I would be very concerned about what will happen to my rates [if I lived] in any urban community," said Deirdre Cummings, legislative director of the Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group (MassPIRG), a local consumer advocacy organization.

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Nordstrom hosted a cocktail party for 500 guests last Tuesday night at the State Room to kick off the September opening of its first store in Massachusetts at Natick Collection. Special guest Andre Leon Talley, Vogue editor-at-large (center), takes time out for a picture with the fashionable members of The Links, Inc., a nonprofit organization of women of color. (Photo courtesy of Allan Dines)

Female PM seeks first popular election

Peter Ischyron

KINGSTON, Jamaica — Portia Simpson Miller is a popular grassroots politician.

The 64-year-old took over for P.J. Patterson as prime minister last March, making her Jamaica's first female head of government. But her rise to the top of Jamaican politics was the result of an internal election among the ruling People's National Party (PNP).

Now Miller has launched a bid to become the first female elected after a popular election, and she is confi-

dent that she will survive the upcoming elections and lead the ruling PNP to an unprecedented fifth straight term in office.

"Are you ready for the first time to give Portia, a working-class woman and leader of the winning team, her first full term as prime minister of Jamaica?" she asked supporters as she announced the Aug. 27 election date at a public meeting earlier this month. "Are you ready to give to Jamaica a woman of courage, a woman of determination, a woman of the people, from the people and for the people?"

Patterson, who himself faced the difficult task of succeeding the charismatic Michael Manley, said his successor, who became Jamaica's seventh prime minister since independence 45 years ago, has done well.

"I gave her the baton and she has been carrying it well," he told PNP supporters.

Opinion polls consistently show that the prime minister is more popular than her main contender, Bruce Golding of the opposition Jamaica Labor Party.

Some show her level of popularity as high as 53 percent, compared to Golding's 41 percent. When respondents were asked who would do a better job as prime minister, Miller again outscored Golding, 40 percent to 34 percent.

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