



## 'Sober houses' under legal review by city

Kenneth J. Cooper

The Roxbury development that has become Safe Haven Sober Houses started quietly enough a decade ago when a one-man real estate company based in Hull bought an undeveloped parcel on the eastern foot of Fort Hill.

That was about the last quiet moment. The ongoing saga has seen the project shift from single-family townhouses for sale to multiple-occupancy bedrooms for weekly rent sober houses.

Some neighbors and their elected representatives have criticized the development — in both its forms — as too dense. The original plan was to erect 22 modular townhouses on a little more than an acre and a half.

The courts have been kept busy with lawsuits, appeals and a criminal prosecution that the city is now pursuing against Safe Haven's operators on charges of converting garages and basements into bedrooms without building permits. The permits the developers did have were issued in 2003 on a unanimous order from the State Building Code Appeals Board after the Boston Redevelopment Authority sat on the application for more than four years.

More than 100 tenants recovering from substance abuse live in 11 or 12 townhouses on Washington, Juniper and Guild streets, Safe Haven states in a recent court filing.

"The development went up as a condo development, not a sober house," said City Councilor Chuck Turner when asked to distill his concerns about Safe Haven. "Another concern is the quality of services."

Turner, state Sen. Dianne Wilkerson and state Rep. Gloria Fox, in separate interviews, recited a litany of concerns: fatal overdoses on site, residents' purchases at a liquor store a block away, serious sex offenders among the tenants and, as Wilkerson puts it, "such a high concentration" of recovering substance abusers.

Unlike residential treatment programs, sober houses by definition provide only housing — not services to help tenants move beyond their addiction. The staff is supposed to collect rents, assure safety and enforce rules, but is not charged with monitoring individual behavior. Support and peer pressure from other former addicts is supposed to keep residents on track.

Because they do not provide treatment, sober houses are not licensed or regulated by any level of government. They enjoy the protection of state and federal anti-discrimination laws, which define recovering substance abusers as disabled.

Some sober houses in other states, reacting to bad publicity or proposed regulation, have banded together to impose quality standards on themselves.

California has two such groups: the Sober Living Network, based in Santa Monica, and the statewide California Association of Addiction Recovery Resources (CAARR) in Sacramento.

The Banner asked the directors of both organizations, and Douglas Polcin, a national expert on sober houses, about the concerns cited about Safe Haven.

Though they disagreed on some points, all three characterized most of

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**Special Report**



State Sen. Dianne Wilkerson makes a new friend at the Boston Family Shelter Playspace. Horizons for Homeless Children has installed Playspaces in 140 shelters across Massachusetts to assist the 96,000 Massachusetts children that experience homelessness every day. Each week, the Playspaces will give 2,000 homeless children educational and recreational opportunities to help develop certain necessary skills. (Photo courtesy of Horizons for Homeless Children)

## Clearing a Wall

The story behind the misidentification of Rev. Bruce Wall's son

Howard Manly

As armed robberies go, this one was pretty tame.

On Nov. 9 at around 2:30 p.m., two young black men crossed paths with three other young black men on West Street near Cleary Square in the Hyde Park section of Boston.

A conversation started when one of the teens from the first group asked the teens of the second group for a cigarette. According to state-

ments made later to police, the conversation took a different tact when instead of a cigarette, the questions — demands, really — turned to money, then marijuana.

All of sudden, a cell phone rang. That is when someone flashed "a black colored firearm," and said, "Empty your pockets."

Two cell phones were quickly turned over, and for the next month, the life of 15-year-old Jeremy Wall, the son of longtime community activist Rev. Bruce Wall, became distorted, transforming like a Picasso painting from the age of innocence to the age of guilt.

The story has a good ending — at least for Wall, his son and his family.

On Dec. 1, one of the victims of the armed robbery was eating at Papa Gino's on Hyde Park Avenue when he saw one of the teens who robbed him come into the fast-food restaurant. He called his father, who then called the police. Before long, a group of officers walked into Papa Gino's and, after a brief struggle, made the arrest.

But this is a story about the process, and how an innocent kid could be named as a suspect in an armed robbery.

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(From left) Berklee College of Music students Ayeisha Mathis from Dorchester, and Abraham Olivio of Hyde Park, rehearse with R&B star Bobby Brown at Berklee for the the Boston Music Awards. Mathis and Olivio are part of the Berklee City Music All-

Stars, a group of urban Boston students who are studying on full-tuition Berklee City Music scholarships. The All-Stars performed a medley of Brown's hits before being joined by him for the tune "Roni" at the Orpheum Theater. (Phil Farnsworth photo)

## West rethinks lopsided agricultural subsidies

Chris Tomlinson

NGIRESI, Tanzania — Farmer Loi Bangoti picks corn by hand on the lush, cool slopes of his land, nestled under the cloudy shadow of Africa's highest mountains.

Half a world away, farmer Tim Recker drives his combine through the famously flat, open cornfields that stretch out in the sun across the plains of Iowa.

For all their differences, both men rely on a complex global food market that decides how much their corn is worth and who will buy it. And the lives of both — along with millions of other farmers — will be affected by a grow-

ing movement to change one of the biggest forces shaping the market: subsidies.

Many experts agree farmers need help to grow food year in and year out, but Western farmers may get too much and African farmers too little. Western farmers receive billions of dollars in subsidies every year, which makes their food cheap to grow and sell. African farmers are left on their own because of decades of anti-subsidy policies pushed by the World Bank and others as a condition for aid money.

Now, Africans are fighting back. Some African countries are con-

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