



SHOW NOTES & TRANSCRIPT

EPISODE SHOW NOTES

Episode Title: The Vendome

Episode # & Date: Episode #17 – February 20, 2020

About this Episode: Ever notice the well-kept building named “The Vendome” on 2nd Ave. and South Claremont across the tracks from the Main Street Garage? This historic building is a key part of San Mateo’s solution to the homelessness problem. Judy explores its history and how it became a model for the Bay Area.

Episode Web Page: <https://sanmateofocus.com/the-vendome/>

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

I’m Judy Gordon, and *this* is San Mateo Focus.

In the late 1800s the Vendome Hotel, downtown on 2nd Avenue, provided both a bar and overnight lodging for guests, many who were traveling to San Mateo on Stagecoach. Like most hotels of the era, several rooms shared a common bathroom. As the city grew up around the hotel, and trains, automobiles, and streetcars became common, people wanted more modern lodging, and over the years, the hotel fell into disrepair. It was sold a few times and eventually it turned into a single room occupancy hotel, or an SRO. It wasn’t very well managed, and people who lived there caused problems downtown. For the police, in the penal code, 415 meant disturbance, so the police officers would joke that the address of the Vendome, 415 – 2nd Avenue was very appropriate, considering the type of activity that was going on at the hotel during those years before the owners put the hotel up for sale in 2006.

Around that same time in 2005/2006 the city had created the Homeless Outreach team, which consisted of police officers, San Mateo County mental health and medical professionals, and San Mateo non-profits. They had a housing-first vision for working with the homeless downtown. Their experience had shown them that progress can be made if those who are homeless are moved into permanent residences, where they can be case-managed, and professionals can work on the root cause of their homelessness. But first, they needed to solve the problem of where to house San Mateo homeless, and with the Vendome up for sale, it was a very good solution. The Vendome would not be a temporary shelter, it would offer long term stable housing to the chronic street homeless of San Mateo.

The hotel was purchased by the city using state redevelopment funds. Since the hotel had not had much structural work done in over 100 years, it needed a complete remodel and refurbish. When they began the work, they discovered that even the nails holding the property together were from the late 1800s. When it was complete, it included a communal kitchen with commercial-level appliances, a common space, separate bedrooms, and offices. Today, the 16 residents who live at the



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Vendome have access to health care and counseling through the homeless outreach non-profit: LifeMoves. And they can live there for the rest of their lives if they want. The residents pay rent based on their income, but most of the cost is subsidized by the Federal Government and donations.

Robert Anderson, a retired downtown San Mateo police officer, was on the original team that worked to bring in the first residents of the Vendome. He says that each resident comes to the Vendome from a different life journey. They are homeless because of drug or alcohol abuse or have mental health issues that have caused them to make bad decisions. He says that the Homeless Outreach Team has learned over the years the need to vet the potential residents. They will be living in the Vendome long term, so although they do not need to be social, they need to get along with others, follow house rules, and have good hygiene habits. All of the residents were homeless for years before they began living at the Vendome.

Every city is different, and a program that works in one city might not work in another. But, because San Mateo was proactive, has handled the homeless problem in a humane way, and it has been such a success, other Bay Area cities have visited to understand what San Mateo has learned from the housing-first method of working with the homeless here.

During the holiday season, San Mateo Police hold a holiday event at the Vendome for the residents. Officers cook a traditional meal in the Vendome kitchen, and each resident receives a gift. The Vendome has a support committee of volunteers from the community. Steve Carey, the manager at the Vendome, can be contacted at (650) 340-6733, for people interested in becoming a part of the committee. Steve is available to answer questions about the Vendome, and to discuss appropriate donations of clothing and food.

The Vendome can not provide housing for every single homeless person in San Mateo. The Homeless Outreach Team works with those clients. Some are offered short term housing in one of the homeless shelters in San Mateo County, and some will receive housing vouchers. To provide assistance to the permanent residents of the Vendome, or to some of the other shelters in the area, *here's the deal*: The non-profits, LifeMoves, St. Vincent dePaul, Samaritan House, and 2nd Harvest are on the front lines in working with the homeless in San Mateo County. All accept donations of your time and money. Donations to LifeMoves can be made with a specific request for funds to be used to support the Vendome.

Okay, that's all the time we have for this episode. Have a great week. Thanks to Jack Radsliff for the original music to this podcast. If you'd like more information about our sponsor or the topics in today's episode, go to sanmateofocus.com.



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HELPFUL LINKS:

[Article: League of California Cities - The Vendome](#)

[Article: Downtown San Mateo Association - The Vendome](#)

[LifeMoves Website](#)

[Society of St. Vincent de Paul Website](#)

[Samaritan House San Mateo Website](#)

[Second Harvest Food Bank Website](#)

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PODCAST SHOW NOTES

Podcast Name: San Mateo Focus



Description: Whether you're new to San Mateo, California, or a long time resident, the San Mateo Focus Podcast is the place to learn about local history, good eats, and things to do.

Website: <http://www.sanmateofocus.com>

Email: info@sanmateofocus.com

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Producer/Co-host: Peter Radsliff

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