

Word from the editor

BY CAROL FEINEMAN/CITY STAR EDITOR



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I like meeting locals such as **Ronald O'Connor** and **Sheila Wood**.

They remind me of the importance of setting down roots and being happy with the consequences.

Ronald and Sheila have worked for Real Estate Financial Services for 19 years. He is vice president and she is president of the real estate loan business located at 1902 Van Ness Ave.

While they've worked side by side since founding the company in 1988, Ronald and Sheila have also become good friends for that many years.

Ron was originally set to be featured in *The City Star's* Cornerstones, a daily feature that spotlights local businesses in a few paragraphs and photos.

He didn't want to do the interview over the phone.

Ron instead wanted to do it in person, with his partner beside him, sharing the limelight and kudos.

That says a lot to me about an individual's integrity.

The two are well-suited for helping prospective San Franciscan homeowners obtain realistic and appropriate loans.

Not only has Ronald lived in the Twin Peaks area all his life, but he moved only one mile away from his childhood home.

He loves living in San Francisco that much.

Ronald also likes giving back to the community; he was a Lakeside Homeowners Association board member and regularly volunteered at the schools his four children attended.

Moving here from Syracuse, N.Y., 42 years ago, Sheila definitely considers herself a San Franciscan now.

Sheila, who for 12 years has been a California Association of Mortgage Brokers-San Francisco Peninsula Chapter board member, wants clients to be as ecstatic as she was in owning her first home here in Bernal Heights.

Enjoying a great personal rapport, Ronald and Sheila also share the same business principles.

On Monday, as they inevitably finished each other's sentences, Ronald and Sheila said the most important part of their job is to be a trusted adviser to clients making their biggest investment ever.

More specifically, it's "to help people realize their dream of home ownership," Sheila said, to which Ronald added, "and informing our clients and being objective about the pluses and minuses of the different loans out there and making them aware of the responsibilities of an impending

purchase."

He explained the partners want to make new homeowners aware of the additional responsibilities they will acquire because of the new purchase.

"We make sure borrowers aren't put into loans they can't afford," Ronald said. "When we have someone buying a house, we look at it objectively."

In this particularly unstable national housing market, it's reassuring to know Ronald and Sheila are doing what they have done nonstop for almost two decades.

And they enjoy helping others in the process.

That's an old-fashioned concept I like seeing regularly.



EDWARD WOODS/CITY STAR STAFF

Ronald O'Connor and Sheila Wood have been working together at Real Estate Financial Services for nearly two decades.

North Beach Inside Out

BY ANTHONY F. GANTNER/SPECIAL GUEST COLUMNIST

Anthony F. Gantner is a former president and current treasurer of the North Beach Merchants Association. Gantner, a part of North Beach for more than 30 years, is counsel for the Piazza St. Francis Association founded by Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Gantner can be reached at AFGANTNER@aol.com.



For part one of Anthony Gantner's column, see Thursday's City Star.

Al looked out over the park and resumed his story. He described an elaborate plan to catch the miscreants.

"Every night between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m., a dozen men were stationed in buildings adjacent to the church, in the church rectory and in the alley, back of the church. Some of the men were dressed as women, some appeared as worshippers . . . some were sent into the church in large laundry and bread baskets. An electrician devised an elaborate system of phones, call-bells and buzzers to link the men on guard. Every morning before church opened for Mass, all the telephones were unhooked and put away, in order not to tip off any possible spotters."

I asked Al if the stakeout worked.

He shrugged, "No, not initially. So announcements were placed in various city and out-of-town newspapers that the police guard had been relieved of duty. In fact, it hadn't. Nearly two months passed. Then early one Sunday morning, March 1927, the police noticed two men approaching the church. One man walked in front of the church holding an object beneath his coat. The other man stayed on the opposite side of the street and kept watch."

Al shifted his position on the park bench. The expression on his face was deadly serious.

"From the window of the church rectory,

the police saw the man lay his package down against the entry wall. He struck a match, which flared, then died out. The man struck a second match and this time lit a fuse. The police ran out of the church and cut the fuse. They opened fire on the bomber. He was shot dead."

I shivered and asked Al about the accomplice.

Baccari pointed across the grass, "The lookout tried to flee across the park. Detective Sgt. Louis De Mattei, who was in charge of the investigation, yelled for the man to halt. He ignored the warning, De Mattei fired, the man, Celsten Eklund, fell wounded to the ground. He survived for several months and maintained his innocence until he died in August of that year."

I was curious what possible motive could have driven these men to such heinous acts.

Al responded, "They never were able to determine the name of the bomber. Over five months, 7,000 people viewed the body in the coroner's office. No one was able to identify him. The accomplice, Eklund, had been an agitator in Seattle during World War I. There may have been some sort of anti-clerical bent to their acts."

Baccari shook his head, "In the end, there was never a satisfactory explanation why these men did what they did."

I looked up at the church. The peregrine, agitated, shifted atop the golden cross.

It spread its wings.

With a piercing screech, the falcon flew away.

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