

TACOMA

Daily Index



Published Since 1890

**OFFICIAL
NEWSPAPER
OF THE CITY
OF TACOMA**

*Devoted to the Courts,
Real Estate, Finance,
Industrial Activities,
and Publication of
Legal Notices*

Visit our Web site at
www.tacomadailyindex.com

**INSIDE:
LEGAL NOTICES
BANKRUPTCIES
LIENS
ORDERS
FEDERAL COURT
AUDITORS OFFICE
NEW BUSINESSES**

editor@tacomadailyindex.com

A Voice From the Winthrop

*In downtown Tacoma's
most notorious building,
Otha Adams finds
independence*

**Article and Photos By Todd Matthews,
Editor**

Otha Adams is just like a lot of other 20-year-olds in Tacoma.

He is a student at Tacoma Community College, where he studies graphic design and hopes to start a career in the next couple years that will both pay the bills and also fulfill his passion for art. He has a part-time job working 30 hours per week at a UPS store in University Place. He is learning the ropes of living on one's own: filling out rental applications, paying bills, and finding bus routes that will get him from home to school, to work, and back. And he has saved up enough money to make his first trip abroad (Adams is headed to Germany next month where he will backpack around the country for a year).

What sets Adams apart from his peers is where he lives -- in a one-bedroom apartment in the 12-story, 85-year-old Winthrop Hotel in downtown Tacoma. The Winthrop has earned a mostly notorious reputation. The Tacoma Police Department (TPD) reports it is the number one location downtown for emergency service providers responding to calls for assistance. The Business Improvement Area (BIA) has reported that one in five downtown incidents that BIA bike patrol

**CONTINUED
ON PAGE 2**



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1 officers respond to occur at or near the Winthrop.

"People always talk about how bad the Winthrop is," says Adams, who lives on the fifth floor in a unit overlooking the Pantages Theater. Wearing a blue T-shirt under a green hoodie, puffy vest, and casual khaki pants, Adams spoke to the *Index* recently about his experience living at downtown Tacoma's most notorious address. "When I meet people, I always talk about what's going on with my life before I tell them I live in the Winthrop. So instead of someone making the assumption that I'm probably a bad guy because I live there, I like to tell people this is what I'm doing -- I'm finishing TCC, going to Germany -- and they say, 'Oh, that's cool. Where do you live?' I tell them I live in the Winthrop and they're like, 'What?' I want to let people know there are lots of really nice people who live there."

Many people have quick opinions on what to do with the building: restore it as an historic hotel; shut it down; or find other housing so residents aren't concentrated in one location. In recent years, developers have considered returning the building to its early use as an historic hotel. Last month, Tacoma Housing Authority (THA) announced that it was asked by Prium, the current building owner, if it wanted to purchase the building (see "THA weighs Winthrop building purchase," TDI, 05/29/09). THA is expected to make a decision on it this summer.

What has not been told through local media coverage is the residents' story. What do some of the people living in the Winthrop think of all the focus on their building? What is it like to live in the Winthrop? What are some of the residents' perspectives related to the building's safety and future development?

To that end, the *Index* recently spoke with Winthrop resident Glenn Grigsby about the 15 years he has lived in the high-rise apartment building (see "A Voice From the Winthrop: After 15 years at downtown's most notorious address, Glenn Grigsby has seen it all," TDI, 06/16/09). Since then, Adams and other residents have expressed interest in speaking to the *Index*.

Here is what Adams had to say about his life

"There are a lot of people who want to return the Winthrop back to a hotel. But there are a lot of really nice hearts and souls in that building, I wouldn't like to see that go away."

and experience living in the Winthrop.

"You still have the potential to do a lot of good things."

I was born in West Palm Beach, Florida, but we left when I was five months old so I really technically was raised here. We lived on the Hilltop when I was a kid; we lived on the East Side. I've come from a really not-so-good up-bringing associated with drug abuse, alcohol, and all that other stuff. There were some really bad issues with drug abuse when I was younger. It forced my older brother to run away from my parents house at a young age. Because I came from such a bad background, it could have been really easy for me to turn out like a lot of the unfortunate people I see every day. It wasn't that I was always really positive. It was that my mind was always open

to seeing things from different angles, it was just about having a balance and self-control and discipline. There are a lot of people who look at me as an anomaly because I came from that background and I'm still being so positive. But really, to me, I think it's just mind over matter. I'm also trying to set an example to let everyone know, 'Look, you might have it worse off than me. But you could still make lemonade out of lemons. You still have the potential to do a lot of good things.'

"I was about to get evicted, had I not actu-



ally searched for the Winthrop."

I graduated from the School of the Arts in 2007 and have lived at the Winthrop for two years now. I moved out [on my own] at the end of my senior year [of high school] and moved in with a roommate [to an apartment] on Second and St. Helens. Unfortunately, he didn't have his stuff together. He up and left in the middle of me trying to pay bills. At the time, I was working at Jack In The Box down on 24th and Pacific. A friend of mine was talking to me about where she lives. She was telling me about the Winthrop and how it was a nice place to live and very affordable. At the

time, I was kind of at a crossroads: I was in my senior year and moved out, and I was thinking it would kind of be foolish to try and move back into my parents' house. By my roommate moving out randomly, I didn't have enough money for rent, which was about a grand at the time. I was about to get evicted, had I not actually searched for the Winthrop. I decided to go and fill out the appropriate papers [at the Winthrop] to try to do one of the very first adult things by myself. I don't know if you know this, but there's actually a really long waiting list to get into the Winthrop. I was lucky. It took only a week to process my paperwork and I got in there. I don't really know why. I probably just got in there at the right time, or maybe there were just too many people who had too many changes of plans. But I'm really fortunate and really lucky to be living there.

"I just wanted to be down here."

When I was a kid, I was kind of the adventurous guy who liked to go out and do things by himself. I always wanted to go downtown when I was a kid. The reputation people had about it at the time, in the 1990s, was really bad. When I started going to Tacoma School of the Arts, that's what attracted me to downtown -- being in that kind of school environment where it's so free and you have 20 minute passing periods to get from Building A on 19th to get to Building B on 12th and Commerce. I just wanted to be down here. I thought about when I moved out, where did I want to move? I didn't want to be too far away from my family and friends. But I also don't want to be in a place that's too close. You always have to have that nice medium where it's convenient if I go to their house and come back, but I didn't want it to be so far that I didn't feel like going. This is actually the perfect distance. You can catch the bus from here to anywhere you want to go.

"I'm an artist at heart. I really like liv-

ing downtown."

Basically, my passion is graphic design. I have a great big art studio in my apartment. I have a one-bedroom, and I use the extra room as a place to do screen-printing and shirt designs. I'm an artist at heart. I really like living downtown. I finished all the graphic design classes I need to take for now at Tacoma Community College. When I graduate, I will have an Associates Degree in Graphic Design. I work at the UPS store in University Place. I usually work 30 hours a week. During school, classes started at 9:30 a.m. on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday and Thursday. I would then head straight to work from school because the bus I catch actually stops at TCC before it heads to University Place. My rent right now is \$125 per month. The way it works is that, depending on your wages, they will do whatever calculations they need to do to [establish] your rent. Here's the kicker, though. If you are not making any income, your rent is \$25 flat. I understand where a lot of people are coming from when they say there are a lot of bad people [in the Winthrop] because they don't have jobs and they just want to live in a place that costs \$25 per month. But there are, for example, old ladies who don't get their checks in time or have to go about their own means to survive. [This one] person I know whose on the 10th floor, she's in a wheelchair, and I think she only pays \$25 a month because she doesn't have a job.

"I do think there are some issues that need to be resolved."

I heard a little bit about the Winthrop [before I moved in]. I didn't hear anything too drastic, just that there were a lot of people pulling fire alarms and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2 elevators breaking down. That actually happened to ring true. At the end of last week, the elevators started working again. People push all the buttons at once and that burns up the motors. Personally, [I feel] it's not that the Winthrop has a bad reputation and it's associated with criminals, it's just its location. You have the park across the street, I think that's what people are affiliating it with. Even I know there are people down there who aren't really doing what they should be doing down there. Because they are so close in proximity, people assume that since they are hanging out at the park across the street, there must be bad people at the Winthrop. People don't realize there are a large number of nice people who live in that apartment complex, whether bad things are said about the people who live there or not. But I do think there are some issues that need to be resolved. There have been cases where, yes, I've seen someone go out on a stretcher. It's kind of unnerving, but that's the circle of life. That's how it goes. There are people who do have their biases and ideas about the building. I can't really say because I haven't been exposed to a situation that bad.

"I don't hesitate to talk to anyone."

I actually know a lot of people in the Winthrop. I know practically everyone on my floor. I decided I didn't want to be one of those rowdy people who really disrespects others. I like to talk to all the tenants about anything that I can, I like to keep up with everyone. There are always people sitting in the lobby kind of watching out and seeing if everything is OK or just because they are bored. I don't hesitate to talk to anyone, actually.

[For example] I know a kid who lives there and his grandma wants to learn how to do Photoshop. She was asking me things about that.

"I really think the Winthrop should stand tall."

There are a lot of people who want to return the Winthrop back to a hotel. But there are things they have to realize, too. It's a generic saying, but what's inside is actually what counts. There are a lot of really nice hearts and souls in that building, I wouldn't like to see that go away. I really think the Winthrop should stand tall. On top of that, downtown Tacoma is being rebuilt into a nice metropolitan area. But the amount of people who actually come to visit and need to stay in a hotel -- do they really need to revamp the Winthrop to be able to do that? It's going to take a

lot of money to do that on top of there not being that much tourism. Tacoma does have its tourism, but it's not to the point where we need to actually revamp that building all the way. If it does happen, because it may be something that we all can't control, I would really like to see the situation where they would split the building up into different uses and still keep affordable housing going. I would hope that it would still be used as a convenient place downtown for people. There are a lot of handicapped people who aren't able to just up and move 50 blocks, it's not that easy. There are a lot of things, a lot of different angles you have to look at before you actually say, 'Well, let's just disregard all these people in the apartment complex and turn it back into a hotel.' You already have Hotel Murano and Courtyard Mar-



riott, you have plenty of places.

"I'm very grateful for having lived there as long as I have."

I plan to live at the Winthrop as long as I feel it's necessary. I know this is just the beginning of my life. Where I'm at in my life, this is perfect. Give or take a few more years, I would still like to live down here. But I don't think that it would be where I want to live forever. Not because it's not a good place to live, but [because] there are other people who could utilize the space besides me. I'm very grateful for having lived there as long as I have. But just like someone who doesn't want to overstay their welcome, I feel like I've been really privileged to be able to live there as long as I have.