



## Rochelle Metcalfe

**G**ENE HAZZARD has managed to make headlines again! The former political candidate is a former restaurant owner, and now for the past year owner of "Thrift n' Things" furniture store on Grand Avenue that has become the CENTER OF ATTRACTION and embroiled in controversy! Hazzard's landlord does not want to extend his lease beyond August 31, 1995, when Hazzard is expected to vacate the premises. SEEMINGLY ALL BECAUSE OF THE GAME OF CHESS — that masterful thought-provoking sport that requires great concentration of the mind.

If you stroll or drive around the lake past the 500 block of Grand you will notice a gathering of those sitting at a table in front of the store, near the curb, playing chess. You might see Hazzard sitting among them or greeting folks in conversation or helping a customer interested in his wares — antiques, collectibles, records and an assortment of used items.

Hazzard's landlord, JOHN HOWARD, has put his attorney on the case for Hazzard is fighting to have his lease extended for another year! According to him, Howard approached him about the activities (chess and domino games) on the sidewalk, and his dislike for this kind of activity in front of his property. Howard is in his rights as a landlord to refuse to renew the lease contract, perhaps fearful that there may be trouble, and he would be responsible as the property owner.

Hazzard expressed that the games have created large crowds of individuals, which have included lawyers, ministers of local churches, nationally ranked chess players to name a few, as well as neighborhood youths.

Hazzard considers his store (544 Grand) to be a resource center for many neighborhood residents, whatever their social, economic or ethnic background. I was not aware of the flack surrounding Hazzard and CHESS until driving past the store, and attracted by what was going on. I became curious and parked and surprised to see Hazzard, and to know he owned the store. The last time we talked he'd lost a political seat he was running for in Oakland, and fighting the election results all the way to the Supreme Court.

The scene was captivating — there were three tables, about nine people seated, heads bowed in game play. Two teenage boys were waiting their turns to participate. I was cheered by the orderly scene, and enthused by the positive happening; a communication of the minds — solidarity! Hazzard was excited over the congregation, and the attention he's received from the media and others in what started out as an innocent pastime playing chess with an interested partner, not suspecting it would mushroom!

An art gallery is located within the block, as are several businesses — a busy hair salon, ZZA's Restaurant where I sipped a glass of wine and observed the scene comfortably seated at an outside table where Hazzard joined me. MARTIN REYNOLDS, reporter with the *Oakland Tribune*, was on the scene with his photographer interviewing folks on the scene, including myself.

Something good appears to have come out of the controversial chess game, for the action may be moved across the street from his shop and near the jogging path around Lake Merritt. I might note that \_\_\_\_\_ has planted about 10,000 flowers near Grand and Lakeshore Avenue.

✂ MICHAEL LANGE of Oakland Park and Recreation, MELVIN ROBERTS (NATIONALLY RANKED chess player) and Hazzard have written a proposal that has been presented to CLEVE WILLIAMS (director of Oakland Parks and Recreation Department). According to Hazzard, the proposal will not only develop a citywide chess club, but would also provide facilities to accommodate this obvious demand.

MEANWHILE, Hazzard is STILL wondering if landlord Howard will extend him another year on his lease "in light of the developing efforts to find suitable accommodations" for his business and chess games. So it remains to be seen if Hazzard will get his extension! He's A DETERMINED MAN IN WHATEVER HE SEEKS OUT TO DO!