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Where in the world is Yvonne Burke?

Steve Lopez

July 29, 2007

'That's a big house," Sterling Wright said when I showed him a photo of **Los Angeles County Supervisor Yvonne Burke's four-bedroom, five-bath manse in the Mandeville Canyon section of Brentwood.**
Wright was working the front desk at Simply Unique By Regina, a beauty parlor in the Florence-Firestone area north of Watts. That's in Burke's district, and it's a long way from Brentwood.

"I thought she lived in Inglewood," said Regina Garrett, who owns the beauty parlor.

Actually, Burke has lived in Marina del Rey and claimed to have been living in a Mar Vista town house of late. But apparently neither neighborhood is good enough for the supervisor, **who has been sleeping in Brentwood rather than in her own supervisorial district as required by law**.

In interviews with my colleagues Jack Leonard and Matt Lait, Burke initially said she stayed in Brentwood only on weekends and special occasions. But over a three-week period, my mates saw the supe make only brief stops in Mar Vista each day and retire each night to Brentwood.

"I'm getting more depressed about this now," Garrett said as she cut a customer's hair.

If it makes her feel any better, I told Garrett, Burke promised our reporters she'll begin sleeping in Mar Vista "if that'll make you happy."

The idea of an empty pad in Brentwood made Garrett happy.

"She can give it over to me," the hairdresser said.

It's got a swimming pool and tennis court, I noted, asking Garrett if she played tennis.

"No, but I can learn. I don't snowboard, either, but I could learn that too," she said. "You know, the rest of us poor people are starving down here and she's in Brentwood. Who does she think she is?"

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Burke's explanations are kind of hard to keep straight. Just before the story broke, she issued a news release maintaining that her primary residence is indeed in her district.

But this is the same person who said that in more than a year as owner of the Mar Vista town house, she has only stayed in it "maybe a month or two." On another occasion, she said she wasn't staying in the townhome of late because it was being remodeled "to get it up to my par."

Does this mean she's having a miniature golf course installed?

Burke also claimed, at one point, that she felt she was satisfying residency requirements by merely visiting her town house.

"I'm going to send her a special e-mail invitation," said Rob Kadota, a Mar Vista resident and community council chairman who is organizing a celebration marking the neighborhood's 80 years as part of Los Angeles. "We're kind of an up-and-coming place to be," Kadota added, with more than enough million-dollar homes and "a ton of good restaurants."

There wasn't nearly as much good will toward Burke at 88th and Figueroa, which is roughly in the center of her district.

"She's in Brentwood while we're out here sleeping on the streets?" said Devin Cain, who said she's been homeless for months. Cain was gathering cans and bottles to take to the recycling center on 88th Street.

"How's she going to know anything about her district if she isn't living in it?" asked Patrice Vaughn, who emerged from a sidewalk tent she said she's lived in for five months.

Vaughn looked at a photo of "Brentwood" Burke's spread and remarked on the number of homeless people living near 88th Street.

"You think we can squat in there?" she asked.

I told Vaughn I'd look into it.

Lots of prostitutes work that area of Figueroa, but I don't know if that would be a problem in Brentwood, where the Burke home is shielded from public view by foliage and has a gated drive. Back when the Burkes used to rent out their house, an adult film star lived there for a while and boasted of using the place as a movie set.

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The supervisor's husband, by the way, is William Burke, a heavyweight politico who often makes news of his own. Earlier this month, Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuñez appointed him to another term on the California Coastal Commission, roughly a year after Nuñez's wife got a $125,000 contract from the South Coast Air Quality Management District board that Burke chairs.

Isn't that all nice and neat?

On Friday, I e-mailed Burke spokesman James Bolden to say I would take up the supervisor on her offer to give the media tours of the Mar Vista town house. But I wanted to see the Brentwood home as well, and Bolden told me that was not going to happen.

When he called me to discuss it, I asked if I could speak to Burke, but Bolden said she was "out of the loop." No argument here. As she cruises into the twilight of her career, Burke seems to be missing in action at times.

Bolden insisted The Times had botched the story about his boss and lost its credibility in the process. If anyone had a credibility issue, it seemed to me, it was Burke.

I had been tipped off that she was living in Brentwood, and later realized my colleagues were already on the case. My tipster had said Burke had long owned the Brentwood home but "just didn't live there blatantly like she is doing now."

While I was speaking to Bolden on Friday, Burke suddenly got on the line. I guess she'd just returned from being out of the loop.

"I haven't finished decorating," she said when I asked if I could see evidence that the Mar Vista town house is torn up and unlivable. "I'd be embarrassed if this house was dusty."

I told Burke I was having trouble following her many explanations. She said she didn't want to argue with me. She said she "may have stated it in such a way that gave you the wrong impression," but "I'm now giving you a view of what I meant."

To be honest, though, I didn't follow her any better than I had earlier.

"I'm trying to cooperate," she said, and then she hung up.

I'm telling you. The nerve of these people from Brentwood.

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