Multimedia festival taking Tenderloin digital

Dozen new ways participants can experience the neighborhood

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

IF you want to understand the Tenderloin's services and amenities in the most modern way possible — digitally — mark your calendar for June 13 and plan to drop in at the Tenderloin Technology Lab, 150 Golden Gate Ave., 3rd floor, between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

There, on the lab's computers, you can play a new game called TenderVoice, the creation of digitally savvy media designers and lab staff aimed at residents who are both experienced computer users and newbies.

Here's how one part of the game works: You sit down at a computer and open the TenderVoice Website. Click on any one of five boxes at the bottom of the screen and you'll hear a 10-second sound clip — the real voice of someone from a real Tenderloin agency describing its core mission, but the voice and agency are anonymous. The upper part of the screen is a neighborhood map with names of a couple dozen organizations at their exact location (think Google maps). The fun part is trying to make the connection, dragging the box and its clip to the correct organization.

Other elements of TenderVoice include full interviews with organization reps, some 10 minutes, some up to 40 minutes. In the longer ones, the game-player can click around "chapters" to hear different aspects of the organization's work and see photos of staff and clients.

TENDERVOICE INTERVIEWS

The TenderVoice team is still collecting interviews — for the record, San Francisco Study Center with its 2009 HELP directory of neighborhood resources will be one of the featured organizations.

Jake Levitas, co-leader of the TenderVoice project, says they have seven hours of raw audio interviews from 15 organizations so far and may go after another five. Each long interview has to be edited down to 10 minutes, then 10 seconds.

"What we're trying to do is give people a first-hand look at community work, to educate and maybe inspire them," said Levitas. "This can be a new tool for making community activism more compelling."

When TenderVoice launches June 13, it will be one of 12 projects in Gray Area Foundation for the Arts' four-day blowout digital event, "City Centered: A Festival of Locative Media and Urban Community."

Levitas defines locative media as "art that connects to its environment," though it's not a term he uses often, he says. Neither does freelance computer educator Kari Gray, a festival organizer whose surname is a coincidence: "I understand it as people expressing their sense of place through media."

Gray says planning for the festival, free and open to the public, began more than a year ago. "TenderVoice is perhaps the best example of what the festival is about," she said. "It's community-based, includes a variety of agencies, is a good demonstration of how people work together in a neighborhood and uses an innovative media platform."

Besides TenderVoice, the festival will feature

Every Step: Participants don an armband that has a camera — pointing up — and a pedometer mounted on it. As they walk around, every step triggers a shot of whatever is above them at that moment. Afterward, the images are loaded into a software program that creates a frame-by-frame animation with a soundtrack that the walker takes home on a DVD.

In The Wireless Landscape project, a GPS collects and maps wireless access points in the neighborhood. Residents can use the information to become aware of what's hot and what's not around them, and artists can use it for media projects that need specific information about wireless access locations.

O'FARRELL ST. TIME CAPSULE

Block of Time: O'Farrell Street is based on the writings of Harriet Lane Levy, who lived at 920 O'Farrell (just off Van Ness) from 1867 to the 1880s. Levy wrote about her childhood neighborhood when she returned from Paris, where her artistic circle included Gertrude Stein, Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse. The project, say its creators, "will make the walls talk, literally, as well as the alley ways, storefronts and apartment buildings."

Other festival projects are Tender Secrets, Urban Remix, [no where now here], Tomorrow's Time Capsule, The Transborder Immigrant Tool, Beyond Boundaries, Sensors/Uncensored Exhibition and Insights/The Tenderloin. (See citycentered.org for details.)

The festival is sponsored by Gray Area Foundation — whose mission, it says, is to build social consciousness through digital culture — and Access Now, KQED Digital Media Center, the Center for Locative Media, Conceptual Information Arts Department at S.F. State University and the Berkeley Center for New Media.

The festival kicks off June 11 with "Whither Data Visualization," a symposium at KQED. June 12, media practitioners and others interested in hearing about the latest in digital culture gather for a day of speeches and panel discussions, also at KQED.

DIGITAL DAY IN TL

Sunday June 13 features more interactive events at the Tech Lab, Gray Area gallery at 55 Taylor St., Luggage Store at 1007 Market, Central YMCA at its temporary location at 387 Golden Gate Ave. (outside in the garden), and the 900 block of O'Farrell. Gray Area's Website says festivalgoers will be able to "experience the Tenderloin community through wireless technology, the Internet and walks led by artists and community members."

The festival ends the following weekend, June 19, when KQED hosts six three-hour free workshops: Community Journalism: Hands-on Interviewing and Editing; Media Making in the Field Using Mobile Technologies; Community Mapping Using Online Tools; Digital Storytelling in Haiku Form; Exploring Wireless Community Networks; and The Basics of Data Visualization.

The workshops are limited to 15 people, says Leslie Rule, producer at KQED Digital Media Center and co-director of the Center for Locative Media; sign up at citycenteredworkshops.eventbright.com.

"Events like City Centered happen more in Europe," said Rule, one of the festival's organizers, "but in the U.S. it's unique — the idea of putting artists and community organizations and community people together to create art." ∎
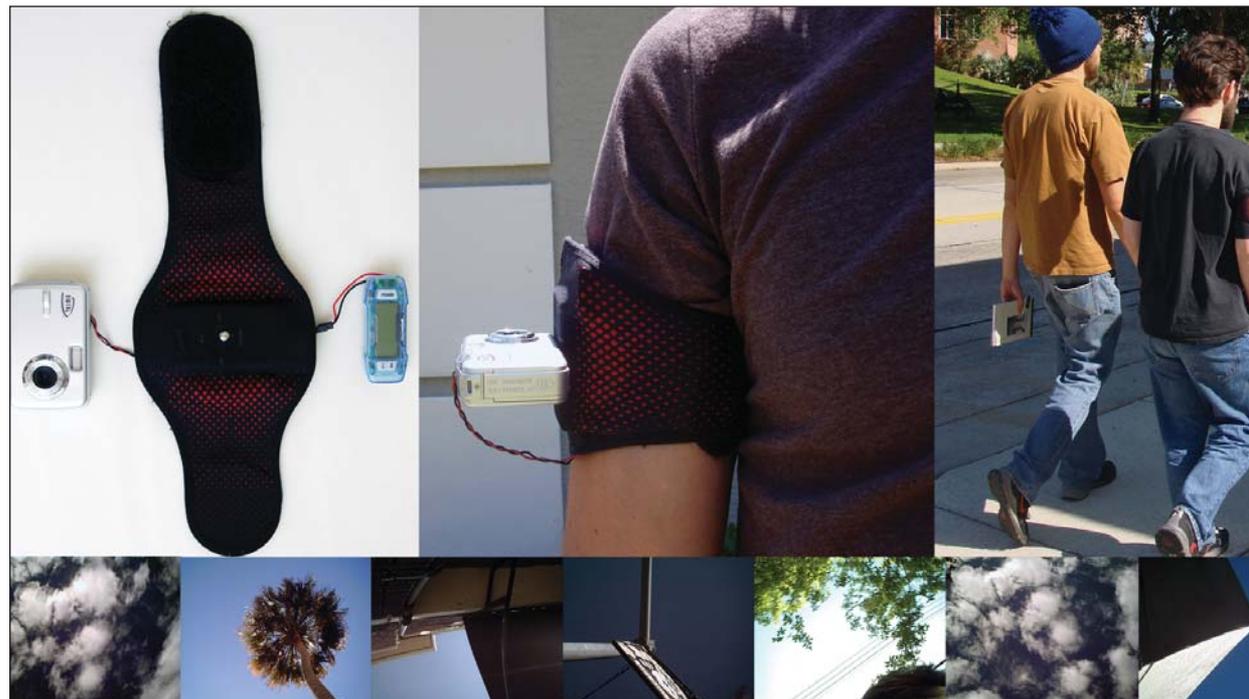
PHOTOS BY MATT ROBERTS

Don an armband *mounted with a camera and pedometer and every step you take becomes part of an animated journey in Matt Roberts' Every Step, one of 12 City Centered Festival projects.*

Bulk SRO mail delivery may hurt census form return rate

City Attorney Dennis Herrera said the move was "immoral" and "illegal," and violated the agency's own code. He sued the Postal Service last May.

Woo said his canvassers reported that the dumped stacks of census forms became burdens to hotel managers.

"One manager had a stack of forms and didn't know what to do with them," he said. "She was going to throw them away. At the Elm Hotel, we met with the manager who had the forms and we worked with him to distribute them. When it was possible we did that."

Hotel managers may share the blame for lost forms. Last summer 300 census workers canvassed the city to find how many people lived where. In SROs, they asked for resident totals to determine the number of census forms to mail. If they could, they got managers' commitments to distribute the forms after they arrived.

"In most cases managers cooperated," says Sonny Le, census spokesman. "But some were more helpful than others. "

The 2010 census chose the Tenderloin as one of several neighborhoods for special outreach. It formed partnerships with local organizations and nonprofits such as Glide and TNDC to enhance efforts to contact the poor, multicultural population suspicious of government intrusions and challenged by language.

Chinatown, another targeted neighborhood, also experienced delivery problems. In a March 26 sidewalk press conference outside a Chinatown SRO, Herrera stressed the importance of the city's suit against the U.S. Postal Service in view of census-taking complications. At the 91-unit hotel at 866 Commercial Alley where Herrera stood, mail was being delivered in a pile on the reception desk counter.

USPS spokesman James Wigde said he could not comment because of the lawsuit.

Census forms were mailed mid-March. In an effort to catch up with people who hadn't filled them

out and returned them, an April 17 rally sponsored by TNDC and Glide was held at Boeddeker Park to put forms under uncounted noses. Woo said 200 residents filled out the 10-question census forms.

But two days later, at a sidewalk census rally at 230 Eddy St., Woo was worried. The neighborhood's participation rate was low and canvassers said stacks of the mailed forms were being strewn on SRO floors and others were lost. About 20 SROs had problems, he estimated.

"The Tenderloin has a 52% (form) return rate now," Woo said, "way below our goal of 70%."

It was, however, a lot better than the 46% in 2000.

The problems the census canvassers found "are issues we've been seeing for a long time," said Jeff Buckley, collaborative executive director. The collaborative, the Tenants Union and the Housing Rights Committee are co-plaintiffs in the city's suit.

"We'd like to present the U.S. Postal Service with a bill for all the money that the city's lost because of the forms lost in mail deliveries," Buckley said. ∎