

OBITUARIES

JOHN JANONIS Safe Passage artist

Tenderloin strollers won't see John Janonis' colorful Thanksgiving window drawings this fall, but schoolchildren and other pedestrians may soon see his vivid green sidewalk design that will mark the neighborhood's Safe Passage route.

The proposal to paint the 11-block route, based on a design Mr. Janonis created last year, was at the Arts Commission awaiting approval when he died Aug. 3 in his SoMa hotel room. Cause of death has yet to be determined. He was 67.

But the painting will still get done, pending design approval, expected in October.

"We can still do this to honor the design he created," said Dina Hilliard, executive director of the TL

Community Benefits District, which made the proposal and budgeted \$6,000 for Janonis to do the painting. "We'll be hiring an artist to do it."

Safe Passages, a pilot project involving the CBD, police and several community groups, provides kids with an 11-block safe route to and from Tenderloin schools along Golden Gate Avenue, Turk, Eddy and Ellis streets between Leavenworth and Jones streets, with an additional block on Ellis extending to Hyde. Volunteers and police will be present at some intersections.

Mr. Janonis' death further delayed the project that had already run past its June deadline. Hilliard said the CBD will "regroup on the timeline."

Mr. Janonis, at 6-feet-2 and 240

pounds, was a bearded bear of a man who lived 16 years at the Covered Wagon Hotel on Folsom Street. He did commercial sign work, sets for small theaters, silk-screen T-shirts, murals, buttons and, according to his resume, was a street vendor five years. He also was a professional dog-walker.

For years during the holidays Mr. Janonis had contracts with clients including TNDC to paint Thanksgiving and Christmas scenes on their street-level hotel windows. Thousands saw his work.

Jeff Buckley, Central City Collaborative executive director, knew him six years. Mr. Janonis attended collaborative meetings as the Covered Wagon Hotel's tenant representative. Last year he redesigned the collaborative's logo, but the Passages design, Buckley said, was by far Janonis' best work.

"It was his crowning jewel," Buckley said. "It's like the yellow brick road, and it has things written in it for kids to remember. He was so talented. And, unofficially, he was our artist-in-residence."

The project calls for slip-resistant material over acrylic green, red, blue and yellow paint, to be donated by a local paint store, that will go down on one sidewalk of a block. Mr. Janonis' design will be fixed using three plates, or stencils, none larger than 3-by-5 feet. Each block will take 15 to 20 stencils.

Mr. Janonis looked "like a lumberjack," an incongruous sight when walking six or seven dogs on leashes. He was also an avid gardener, a former coordinator and a member of SoMa's Howard Langton Community Garden at Folsom and Langton streets.

"I was looking forward to seeing



John Janonis

the look on his face when Safe Passages was completed," Buckley said. "It's sad he won't see it."

The project is designed to end June 2012, or earlier, if the paint fades out. Then, the CBD will determine from feedback if the community felt that it was served and proceed accordingly. Even so, one of several community give-back requests to California Pacific Medical Center is that it bankroll making the design permanent by "burning it into the concrete," Hilliard said.

A memorial for Mr. Janonis is planned by his family members for Dec. 14, Buckley said. It will be held at the Langton garden. ■

— TOM CARTER



A section of John Janonis' design for the Tenderloin's blocks-long Safe Passages route.

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