

Needy seniors get what they want for Christmas

BY TOM CARTER

LONELY and needy Tenderloin seniors will receive gifts of their choosing, and a little companionship too, Dec. 19, thanks to Curry Senior Center and Walgreens, which are collaborating with Home Instead Senior Care.

For Home Instead's "Be a Santa to a Senior" program, Curry center identified isolated elders from among its clients, many of them Tenderloin residents, who then could request a gift. Those requests, along with the senior's first name, began showing up Nov. 28 on carded ornaments dangling from Christmas trees at 11 Walgreens throughout the city.

Holiday shoppers snapped up the names and bought the gifts, and turned them back to Walgreens. As a tree lost names, more were added. By Dec. 15, the presents had all been sent to Curry center where volunteers recruited by Hospice By the Bay gift-wrapped them and wrote cards.

Seniors unable to pick up their present at the center Dec. 19 get theirs delivered by case managers who planned also to visit awhile. Last year, 200 San Francisco seniors received presents, up 50 from 2009, the first year Curry was involved.

Home Instead Senior Care, based in Omaha, Neb., is a network of international franchises begun in 1994. It describes itself as "the world's largest provider of nonmedical in-home care and companionship services for older adults."

The San Francisco office expects higher numbers of gift requests this year.

"One law office, Bingham McCutchen, called and doubled last year's number of

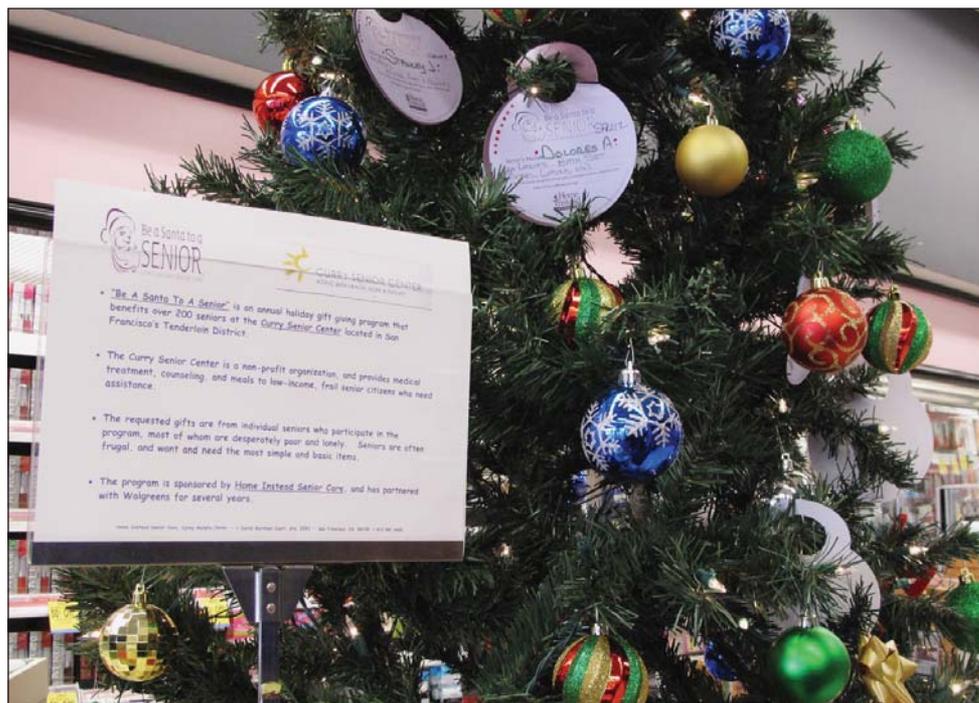


PHOTO BY TOM CARTER

The Be a Santa to a Senior tree at the Market and Ninth street Walgreens is one of 11 city-wide helping to match senior's needs with gifts from generous shoppers.

ornaments they wanted for their employees," said Laurette Foggini, Home Instead's community services representative.

On Dec. 2, the Walgreens at Market and Ninth had 13 names left on its tree. Requests ranged from a rain poncho and handkerchiefs to shaving cream and Depends for women. But the sign alongside explaining the program neglected to give directions on how to participate.

The giveaway arrives as seniors' dollars continue to shrink. According to the Annual Survey of Senior Costs from the Senior Citizens League, seniors have lost 32% of their buying power since 2000, Home Instead said.

In seven years, Home Instead says it has delivered 1.5 million Christmas gifts to needy seniors in the United States and Canada. ■

Where to put a porto-potty in the TL?

Most anywhere, people tell CBD, 'there's a crying need'

BY TOM CARTER

THERE was no lack of suggested locations for portable public toilets in the Tenderloin at a public brainstorming meeting. Who hasn't been offended by human waste on the neighborhood's streets and sidewalks?

The Nov. 10 meeting, sponsored by the Tenderloin CBD, featured the staff of

Hyphae Laboratories. They explained their goal to build an ecological toilet prototype, then asked a crowd of 25 in St. Anthony's Poverella Room to recommend a site.

In the CBD's campaign to address the human waste problem within its 30-block boundaries, it has given the small West Oakland firm \$20,000 seed money. But \$80,000 more will be needed to complete the project in the next few months, according to Hyphae Labs founder Brent Bucknum.

During Bucknum's presentation, he showed an "incident" map of the top 15 outdoor waste sites people used in the Tenderloin in 2010, as compiled by Clean Cities, the outfit the CBD pays to clean its sidewalks. (See "Top 10 for No. 2," November Central City Extra.)

"Put a toilet at all of them!" blurted a man in the audience.

Two staff of nonprofits said they would welcome a toilet in front of their buildings.

"That was really good to hear," said Gia Grant, Clean Cities executive director. She said property owners generally oppose porto-potties anywhere near their business.

Grant has been pushing for more public toilets for several years. Last year, she was able to track "incidents," giving the CBD ammunition to bolster its campaign. In March, the CBD contracted with Rescue Mission to open its toilet to the public, and in June signed a contract with Hyphae to build a compostable, "dream" toilet.

"There's a crying need for them in the Tenderloin," said Michael Browne, Youth With a Mission staffer who favored a toilet in front of its drop-in center at 357 Ellis St. Its toilet is open to the public weekdays. "From the time we open at 9:30 a.m. until we close at 4:30 p.m. someone has the toilet key in their hand — maybe 45 people a day."

"Our plan is to use parking places, have the toilets open 24/7 and have them movable," Bucknum said. "We need to find the places and design (a toilet) around the

immediate area."

Jan Couvillon, a senior peer advocate at Tenderloin Self Help, said her clients would also welcome a toilet in front of 290 Turk St. Her facility has three toilets and a urinal that had to be replaced two months ago because someone jammed a piece of steel down it. The toilets are flushed 45,000 times a month, she said, causing big water and plumbing bills. Her own poll of 40 clients, she said, recommended toilets at Turk and Jones, Turk and Leavenworth, Leavenworth and Golden Gate, and Leavenworth and Eddy. They also advised that the toilets be "made of steel."

Another often-recommended site was near the Jones and McAllister Muni stop.

One man said no matter how great the design, a toilet will need "a human presence" to monitor usage so people aren't "camping out" inside. Bucknum agreed.

People were seated at five tables. Each table had a 24-by-34-inch aerial map of the Tenderloin on it plus a stack of smaller, less detailed maps. Attendees were asked to place color-coded dots on the little maps indicating where they felt safe, where people gathered during the day and at night, their favorite place to be, and where they had seen human waste.

Terry Zukoski, Glide's facilities director, pored over the big neighborhood map to find a niche to recommend. Glide has about 2,000 clients a day using seven toilets and two urinals. What's needed, Zukoski said, is an outdoor portable at the southeast corner of Glide's parking lot on Ellis, near Taylor.

Hyphae sprung for a nice spread of sandwiches of cold cuts and cheese and sodas for the 2 p.m. session and one at 5:30 p.m., which was expected to be bigger but drew only 10 people, according to the CBD.

Bucknum said he plans to meet in December with city officials on safety issues and with design and business model experts. He will report the results at a public meeting in January, he said. ■

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