

# Don't give a clue to who's in the loo

Women say safety trumps transparency in design of toilet

BY TOM CARTER

IT WAS made quite clear at a meeting in December that any new public toilet — green or not — created for the Tenderloin better not have transparent or translucent walls, or women won't be using it.

Those were the strong feelings voiced at a neighborhood meeting hosted by the TL CBD and Hyphae Labs Dec. 15 to hear what the public wants for a free toilet on the street, especially safety features.

Hyphae founder Brent Bucknum, who got \$20,000 seed money from the CBD to build the prototype, said the walls would probably be "polycarbonate and bulletproof" with "rounded" corners for easier cleaning. For security reasons he suggested they be translucent, showing a shadowy image to anyone outside, without revealing any physical features of the user inside; the blurry body outline would suggest what the user might be doing, sitting down or shooting up.

A woman who works at St. Anthony's pooh-pooed that.

"Women in the Tenderloin wouldn't want transparency," she said. "Too many have been victimized. It would be risky and they'd feel unsafe."

It was the same reaction Bucknum's informational talk drew at the Tenderloin Collaborative in November

when women reacted negatively to being seen through a bathroom wall, no matter how indistinct the figure inside. They said they wouldn't compromise their privacy to use it.

Conversely, impenetrable walls, which the city's JC Decaux toilets have, make policing difficult.

"Our concern is when there's a need in there," said TL Capt. Joe Garrity. "You hope it's a medical emergency, but sometimes it's not."

Portland addressed that problem with its four public loos, using slant-

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PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PORTLAND WATER BUREAU

The Portland public loos allow only a skin-high view of the person inside.

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CAUTION-COLORED KIDS' ROUTE

Safe Passages on mean streets

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BARMAN A STAR IN TENDERLOIN

Frank of the iconic 21 Club

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# CENTRAL CITY

# EXTRA

SAN FRANCISCO

## TENDERLOIN



PHOTO BY C. MALCOLM THOMPSON

Bernard Barton poses with his sons in their 320 Turk St. apartment, where he lived until his death in 2000. In 1978, he was interviewed for Study Center's Neighborhood Oral History Project, of which this is an excerpt.

# Bootlegger at 16

Resident recalls the central city of decades ago

**B**ERNARD Barton was living at 320 Turk St. in the Tenderloin with his two sons when Isabel Maldonado interviewed him in May 1978. Born in Denver in 1915, Barton came to San Francisco five years later with his parents and three brothers. They "landed at" the Terminal Hotel at the foot of Market Street, then moved to a house in Bernal Heights and from there to San Bruno, "just a wide stop in the road" down the Peninsula, he said. He recalled a San Bruno roadhouse called Uncle Tom's Cabin, "a bootleggin' joint, French dinners and a real lively place." The family moved back to the city in 1926 to Irving Street near 48th Avenue, then to Sunnyside on the other side of Glen Park. A series of depressions leading up to the 1929 stock market crash were, he said, "bad years for our family" and there was "a lot of bootlegging going on everywhere." Prohibition, instituted in 1919, wasn't repealed until 1933.

**Were you involved in bootlegging?**

Yes, in the early 1930s. I was 16 and my girlfriend and I would drive down to

Morgan Hill, all undeveloped then, on the other side of San Jose. There was an Italian ranch where I'd pick up a load of brandy and wine every Sunday afternoon and drive it back into San Francisco. I [delivered it] to a private bootlegger who had a house out in the Sunset, and he'd give me five bucks and a gallon or two of wine. His house had a sub-basement wine cellar. People would come right up to the house to buy the stuff — \$2 for a half-gallon of pure alcohol with the juniper juice right in it, and a dollar a pint for good whiskey, three months old maybe. It was pretty good stuff, made up in the hills in Oakland. They didn't put too much red pepper in it. I did the deliveries for a couple of years.

**What other work did you do as a young man?**

My father was a mattress maker, an independent contractor, though his business was wiped out when they invented spring mattresses in the 1930s. I worked at that when I was a kid, 13 or 14 — a dirty job,

but I'm thankful for it because it developed me physically and gave me a motivation to work and stick to a job, no matter what. We used hair for the mattresses. Long horsetails were the best but cheaper grades mixed in pig bristles. Then there was Egyptian sta-

ple cotton, the best grade of all, beautiful, almost like floss. Mattresses were made and remade. And there was moss that they gathered from trees, but the dust from the moss was terrible. My father had the contract for

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Neighborhood  
**ORAL**  
HISTORY PROJECT