

Architects play role in nonprofits' survival

1% Program links pro bono pros with groups in need

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

THE faux wood floor is smooth, almost silky, a far better surface for the multipurpose room in the Study Center's new digs than the stained beige wall-to-wall carpet it replaced.

The flooring — 879.6 square feet of oak-colored Deco Advantage Luxury Vinyl Plank — came to Study Center free, thanks to an innovative online program that lets nonprofits match their design or renovation needs with architectural firms willing to pledge at least 1% of one employee's annual billable hours to pro bono work. That averages about 20 hours a year.

In the last year, five other central city or mid-Market nonprofit projects have used the resources of the 1% Program, which joined the latest public-private push to revive the grungy area on Market Street between Fifth and 10th.

The 1% idea is the brainchild of Public Architecture, a 10-year-old nonprofit at Eighth and Folsom streets. In six years, 571 nonprofits nationwide have searched for help and 1,011 architectural firms have made the pledge.

De Meza + Architecture + Interiors Inc., founded by Gregg De Meza in 2001, is one of those firms. The Study Center's floor project was a far cry from De Meza's other architectural and design efforts — mansions, yacht interiors, corporate cafeterias locally and in New York, Hawaii and other countries.

"Our clients are high-profile, but I've always wanted to give back to the community," says De Meza. His staff suggest ways to do this, and as a result regularly participate in National River Cleanup Day — last year it was San Francisquito Creek in Palo Alto — as well as a Christmas gingerbread house decorating party for the kids at Edgewood Center for Children and Families. The firm also donates to Muttville, a San Francisco rescue organization that places older pets in foster and adoptive homes.

Eighteen months ago, a staffer told him about the 1% program. De Meza pledged 1% and has been involved in three projects. Mostly the 1% program is self-directed, with nonprofits and architects making the matches themselves. Like many matches, not all are made in heaven. Two of the three didn't pan out.

"One project was a Native American clinic out of state," De Meza says. "We didn't have a lot of experience with that kind of facility." The other was the Project Artaud theater renovation, right across the street from De Meza at the time. "They went with a firm that had a lot of theater design experience."

But the Study Center's project was a perfect fit, he says. "It was quick and fairly easy. We do office space planning for clients every day. Also, it was a natural progression for us — we have all these connections with vendors who can supply materials pro bono or at cost."

Study Center Executive Director Geoff Link heard about the 1% Program last year at an S.F. Arts Commission gallery opening when he met Amy Ress, 1% Program manager. Ress was working with the Arts Commission's ARTery Project and was actively involved in encouraging matches that would benefit mid-Market revitalization.

"Part of our work," Ress recalls, "was to direct organizations to our program that wanted to make mid-Market their home. I stepped in when the Study Center started looking for a match."

Link, following 1%'s online protocol, first posted the project, listing Study Center's need for help planning the offices, then picked three likely architectural firms.

"De Meza was one of them, and Gregg got back to us fast," Link said. He and Jennifer Gustafson, the firm's director of interior design, met with Link at the old office in the Grant Building to see how Study Center used its existing space. Then, at the new office, they sent out interns to take photos and measure the space. They toured the new quarters with staff of Office of Self Help and Mental Health Clients' Rights Association, which are part of Study Center, took more photos and drew space plans.

The floor in the large multipurpose room and adjoining kitchen area, used by OSH for client



PHOTOS BY LENNY LIMJOCO

De Meza architectural firm is one of hundreds nationwide in the 1% program. Firm founder Gregg De Meza, right, and Jennifer Gustafson, director of interior design, helped Study Center in its relocation.

groups and arts sessions, needed a tougher surface for all the wear it would get. Gustafson contacted Shaw Industries in Georgia, among the biggest flooring manufacturers and a Fortune 500 company, and Welker Bros. in Milpitas, America's largest flooring contractor.

"We got involved with this project through Gregg, who we've worked with for 15 years," said Eric Borg, a senior account executive at Welker Bros. "Jennifer asked if we wanted to participate, and I was glad to do it."

The job, he said, was expected to take one day of removal and a day to install, but the schedule took a hit when the old carpet came up. Like an archaeological dig, layer upon layer of old flooring underneath had to be removed to create a level sur-

face," said SAGE Executive Director Amy Rassen. She had heard about the 1% Program last year through her membership on the board of directors of the Northern California Community Loan Fund, which helps nonprofits find funding and resources, including real estate, in areas needing revitalization.

The loan fund has been an important player in plans to create a mid-Market arts district and, through that connection, began working in 2007 with the Luggage Store gallery at 1007 Market St. Leiasa Beckham, the fund's real estate consultant, oversaw the project to make the first-floor rental space ADA-compliant, working with architects from Asian Neighborhood Design and managing project funding from two city agencies, Grants for the Arts and the Mayor's Office of Economic and Workforce Development. Hospitality House moved its Community Arts Program into the space in 2010 while its 146 Leavenworth St. location is being renovated.

Darryl Smith, Luggage Store co-director and founder, says the next stage of its work with 1% will be to make the galleries, which opened in 1991, more accessible to the public. That might include adding an elevator and interior stairway and making the rooftop usable.

"We're working with Jensen Architects now and it's been very easy," Smith said. "They toured our building with Leiasa, asked how they could best serve us and assessed what we needed most." Jensen, a high-end firm with offices in mid-Market, designed the SF MOMA rooftop garden and California College of the Arts' new graduate center and studios. For the Luggage Store, it's creating a full set of CAD (computer-aided design) drawings of the entire building, an expensive but essential first step to any renovation.

Public Architecture promotes its matching program on the premise that architectural excellence should be available to all and that sophisticated design can be applied to real problems.

Its 1% Program is a first-of-its-kind architecture-related public service, following in the footsteps of other professions like law and medicine whose members donate their time to civic and social efforts. Established in 2005 with a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, the 1% Program has received pledges of more than 300,000 pro bono hours worth \$38 million annually. Services include analyzing potential new locations, enhancing the aesthetics of an office, creating drawings for capital campaigns, evaluating ADA compliance, building out new offices or renovating old ones, and much more.

So far, 308 matches have been made, 73 of them complete, 164 in progress, and another 70 or so just beginning the matching process. Also, more than 570 architectural firms have used the Website to report projects they found in their community on their own, outside the 1% Program. Nonprofit projects are in every state, and the pro bono services come from one-man shops up to huge firms: Gensler alone has pledged 43,000 hours annually.

In January, the American Institute of Architects signed a partnership agreement with Public Architecture to promote the program to its 78,000 members in 300 chapters nationwide, "a huge step forward for us," Ress says. ■



The finished floor gleams in the Office of Self-Help's multipurpose room at 944 Market St. Inset: Welker Bros. installer levels the floor before laying the vinyl.

face for the vinyl. "In the end," Borg said, "it took six man days, or 48 hours."

Another mid-Market nonprofit involved with the 1% Program is Hosteling International, parent company of the City Center Hostel at 685 Ellis St., just off Larkin, a seven-story, 88-room Deco building constructed in 1927.

The hostel, says Sam Hussein, hostel manager, is "a really beautiful building but we struggle to get people into the Tenderloin. We're looking to redesign the common lobby, fine-tune the space so it's more inviting and feature our neighborhood amenities." Three weeks ago, Hussein posted the project, requesting planning assistance and help purchasing materials, and now is looking for a good match among the designers.

He's optimistic. "The process is so easy and the people at 1% are so helpful. Within hours of my posting, I heard back from them."

SAGE — Standing Against Global Exploitation — is another nonprofit that just posted its request. The 20-year-old organization sold its building at 1275 Mission St. and moved at the end of February to a leased space at 68-12th St.

"What we need help with is simply space planning at this stage — where to best put furniture and people — but we haven't contacted any designers