

Mid-Market blocks changing — some old businesses going out, new ones coming in



PHOTOS BY MARK DONEZA

The Renoir Hotel that anchors the partial block on Market Street at Seventh has been sold and now everything is temporary, including FoodLab, which features a new pop-up restaurant every 30 days and the Trailhead sidewalk planter boxes that act like an art installation plus the Trailhead store.

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afloat. But when his brother's store goes, he says, the business footprint diminishes and fewer customers will show up.

No hotel concierge is going to point a tourist in his direction, he says. He's just a hard-working guy, he says, who treats his customers right. "Call me," he tells a man who buys a Giants shirt, cap and black Levis, "and I'll send you pictures (of his latest merchandise)."

The city with its mid-Market incentives is behind the change and he's hurt by it and doesn't know if he can stay in business. But he's not sore about the inevitable revival because it's good for the city. One day, he'd like to have the mayor's ear for two minutes: "After 30 years, they ought to give us something."

A few doors away at 1011 Market, Fits Fashion owner Sandra Saybe stands at the counter, reflecting on her 20 years in business. She agrees that when Ray goes, it will diminish the block's commercial pull.

Her shop has a wide range of inexpensive clothing, from flashy white and red suits in the window to flowered tights flying on hangers in the entrance alcove. But business has been down for four years.

"Tourists are too scared to come and shop here," she says. "They stop at Fifth. Sixth to Ninth is really a tough area." The week before, she saw two teenagers across the street attack two older men, taking from one everything in his wallet.

"Money and credit cards," she says. "There goes the vacation."

Even so, she's fearless. "I'm not afraid to walk out there because God is in my heart," she says. Asked if she's making money: "I survive."

Estimating foot traffic depends on where you're standing. To Zane Kaplan of the famed Kaplan's supply store that his founding father opened in 1939, and to Al Choi at the 50-year-old Piper's Jewelers across the street — both ensconced in dark stores — things are "about the same." Unlike neighboring clothing merchants, Kaplan sees a lot of Eu-

ropean tourists lusting for Levis and Leatherman tools. "They're steady, know what they want and are good spenders," he says.

On the corner at Market and Sixth streets, though, Assistant Manager Sarah Shaw at newbie-on-the-block Pearl's Deluxe Burgers sees the outside clearly from behind her register. "There's an uptick" of techies on the street in recent months, she says, and Pearl's is catching some of that traffic, but in unknown numbers.

The Renoir Hotel's Market Street face at Seventh trumpets A Temporary Offering — three new enterprises in previously vacant spaces on the block taking the gamble: Rio Grande bar, featuring colorful cocktails crafted by the Bon Vivants; SF FoodLab, a pop-up restaurant space for a series of local culinary stars to pitch inventive luncheon fares each for a month; and Trailhead, an unusual "experimental retail project" assembled by the innovative Luggage Store Gallery that sells locally roasted coffee from Post Street's Farm:Table, denim wares sewn by Holy Stitch and pots of live herbs and plants harvested from the Tenderloin National Forest in Cohen Alley. All opened in June.

FoodLab's Gavin Crymes says the weekday 11 a.m.-2 p.m. lunches are going well. "We're getting decent numbers for lunch," he says, on a day featuring a Japanese menu by Oni Onigilly. But he's unsure what four "new-age, Mexican-style dinners" from pop-up Bueno East planned for Friday evenings in August will bring: "As you may know, foot traffic at night around here isn't too good." Crymes anticipates using the Renoir space until next spring and will soon add Saturday brunch by Crepe Madame, the next pop-up up.

Outside Trailhead's tiny space at the triangle of Market, Jones and McAllister streets are new rough wooden planter boxes created by Oakland's Hyphae Design Laboratory of TL toilet fame. They offer sidewalk seating and a streetscape of dwarf trees and tough native plants in hardpan compacted soil.

"It's an attempt to bring some of



Julian Dash tailors and trims Holy Stitch's denim streetside at Trailhead.

the natural world to the urban experience," said Luggage Store Director Darryl Smith. He says the street installation and tiny store will be there for at least six months, but he's "hoping it's more like a year, maybe two." Much depends on how long it takes the Renoir to become a boutique

hotel. Trailhead, funded by the city's Grants for the Arts and nonprofits Intersection for the Arts and SFAC ARTery Project, is readying video and art installations and looking to the future.

A half-block east, Machine Coffee has nestled into a closet-size space



Left: Chad Hasagawa Luggage Store Gallery artist, doubles as barista for Farm:Table at Trailhead. Above: Louis Cambell (left) and Little Cafe owner Abraham Wahedy fire up the grill.

adjacent to Showdogs. Its decorated with metal and wood gleaned from sound and rehearsal rooms of nearby Warfield Theatre and basic industrial lights shaded by Mason jars, touches it hopes will entice nearby Zendesk and Burning Man staffers as well as pick up some walk-up Four Barrel coffee drinkers who sip alfresco at sidewalk seating.

On the other side of Market across Sixth Street, the year-old Little Cafe now barbeques chicken and ribs on a sidewalk propane grill.

Owner Abraham Wahedy says business was horrible when he started in the longtime Preet's Cafe spot.

"There was nobody on the street. It was scary. Now, it's getting better, but there's still not a lot of people yet." He pointed down the block: "Between here and Seventh Street a lot of those businesses are dying." The propane grill won't be operating daily until Wahedy gets a portable barricade in place, as requested by the Fire Department.

Street rumor has the giant retail-

er, CVS, taking ground floor space in the Odd Fellows building at Market and Seventh streets for a major drug-store/pharmacy.

The humble Oriental Restaurant, anticipating displacement by CVS, will move from the Odd Fellows building east to 1063 Market St., site of the defunct Fotodepo, with owner Warren Li seeking ABC approval to relocate his current beer and wine license.

Demolition of half a block of Market, between Fifth and Sixth streets

is set to begin before year's end now that the bankrupt CityPlace project was rescued by Texas real estate mogul Cypress Equities and New York lender Carlyle Group. They now own the land and the preapproved plans for a five-story retail mall with 200 underground parking places, but they are changing the mall's name to Market Street Place. A rumored anchor tenant upon completion in 2015 is J.C. Penney, returning after quitting the corner of Market and Fifth streets 40 years ago. ■

GOOD NEWS for...

VOTERS The November election is three months away and Community Housing Partnership's organizing arm is looking for a great poster to help get out the central city vote. Painters, graphic artists, photographers — visual artists of all stripes — are invited to submit their ideas for the chance to win a \$100 gift card for first place or \$50 card for second place. The poster can highlight local issues like affordable housing, jobs and health care, but it can't promote any candidate or political party. Drop off your poster design at the front desk of the Senator Hotel, 519 Ellis St., or send a 300 dpi image to James Tracy, jtracy@chp-sf.org. Deadline — no exceptions — Fri., Aug. 12, noon. Info: jtracy@chp-sf.org or 260-9496.

NEIGHBORHOOD Five awards totaling \$116,980 are coming to the Tenderloin to make it cleaner, greener and more attractive, courtesy of the city's Community Challenge Grant Program. Funding for the matching

grant program comes from local businesses that designate 1% of their business tax to support it. This summer, \$832,600 in grants went to 28 businesses, schools, nonprofits and other community groups citywide for small-scale improvement projects such as sidewalk landscaping, public artwork, graffiti and litter cleanup, community gardens and gathering spaces. In the Tenderloin, TNDC got \$15,000 to restore the murals at its Ambassador and Dalt hotels. The TL CBD's \$35,000 grant will help offset the cost of installing an eco-friendly, moveable composting toilet and vertical garden, and the Market Street Association will use its \$15,000 award for its annual decorative holiday snowflake program. Also, DISH (Delivering Innovation in Supportive Housing), property managers for five TL SROs for the homeless, received two grants for pavement improvements and sidewalk landscaping: \$30,000 from the general matching program and a special \$21,980 Urban Watershed Stewardship Grant, a part of the program supported by SFPUC. Info on applying for the grants, given once or twice a year: sfgsa.org/index.aspx?page=4264.

SHOPPERS The Tenderloin may not have a full-service grocery store yet, but residents are about to get a big boost when it comes to buying fresh produce: Beginning Aug. 3, the 31-year-old nonprofit Heart of the City Farmers Market in U.N. Plaza will add Fridays to its Sunday and Wednesday markets. Now locals won't have



PHOTO BY LENNY LIMJOGO
Farmer Grace Teresi, right, at the expanding Civic Center farmers' market.

to wait more than two days to buy perfectly ripe berries and peaches, greens, mushrooms and scores of other healthy foods. "The idea came from the farmers on our board of directors — their customers had been asking for another market day to round out the week," said Kate Creps, market operations manager. Fridays promise to be as bustling as Wednesdays, with residents and central city area workers shopping for the weekend, though the hours will be cut slightly, opening at 7 a.m. but closing at 2 p.m. instead of 5 or 5:30 p.m. There'll be plenty of farmers — 45 of them, the same as on Sundays, and just seven shy of the big midweek market. Info: hocfarmersmarket.org.

GOOD EATS The lush, productive Tenderloin People's Garden, which opened two years ago at McAllister and Larkin streets, is expanding — up. Using a \$7,500 grant from the TL Community Benefit District and another \$8,500 from the U.S. Green Building Council, TNDC and the CBD are jointly launching a vertical garden project on the south-facing wall of the city's unused steam utility building. The green wall, planted with some decorative but mostly edible plants, is expected to increase the garden's productivity by up to 50%. There are challenges. "We can't mount the plantings directly on the building because it has landmark status," says Dina Hilliard, CBD executive director, "so we'll have to construct a separate structure that slides up against the existing wall." Materials and labor, structural engineering costs, an irrigation system, stipends for residents to work the garden, plants, and a mural on the wall contribute to the project's \$29,000 price tag. Steve Woo, TNDC's community organizing manager, says they're trying to raise the rest of the money and hoping to get donations of materials and professional services. Local architect Geoffrey Barton has been the pro bono project manager since its inception. Permitting for the project is under way and the wall is expected to be ready for planting by late fall. ■

If you have some good news, send it to tom@studycenter.org or marjorie@studycenter.org.