

# Saigon Sandwich named best little bite in S.F.

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Saigon Sandwich is a cubbyhole with a blue-and-white sign and fresh, yellow paint inside. A minicounter and two chairs for in-house dining at the street window leave just enough room inside for maybe six customers to clamor for the best-sellers, \$3.50 pork and chicken sandwiches, packed with fresh veggies on tasty buns.

However, the score at Morty's Delicatessen at 280 Golden Gate Ave., a longtime favorite of Hastings law students, is headed the other way, scores indicate. Morty's last score, Sept. 6, 2011, was a lowly 70 with nine violations, one for "rodents, roaches, flies and other animals," the phrase DPH uses in its reports, another for improper hot-cold holding temperatures.

Morty's latest score was a dip down from the 78 it received in February 2011, its only other recorded score on the DPH Website. At that inspection, there were six violations.

"You have to be on top of your game every day," says Morty's owner-manager, who has had the place six years. "I train the employees" on food safety. He calls the inspections fair and says, "Everything they brought to my attention, I deserved." When asked, he estimated Morty's most recent score was an 80, then requested anonymity when told that, according to the DPH Website, it was 70.

"But I haven't been inspected in a year and I had refrigeration problems," he said. "I know it's public information, but don't put that score in, and don't use my name."

Ironically, Morty's is surrounded by excellence. Le Pettit's Kitchen, a sandwich shop across the street at 265 Golden Gate Ave., has a stellar record — perfect in the eyes of the DPH with five 100s dating from February back to November 2009. It's a hole in the wall, but it has a fine variety of 29 moderately priced sandwiches and worth the wait in line at lunchtime.

Her string of sensational scores delights seven-year manager Gloria Farfan who does a better job of keeping the street dirt out than stopping the street people who lift potato chip bags and waltz out. "We don't argue," she says. And she can do nothing about the apartment construction next door that started in June and will go to mid-December, reducing her business by 30%, she says.

Across the street, El Castillito rated a 92 in April, down from a 94.5 average over four previous inspections back to November 2009. Its sister Mexican restaurant a block away at 370 Golden Gate, nearer the old Federal Building, is also deserving of the Symbol of Excellence. It got a 96 in July after aver-



**Gloria Farfan**, manager of Le Pettit's Kitchen, a perfect 100 times five in the health inspector's book, takes an order at the popular Golden Gate Avenue lunch spot.

PHOTO BY MARK DONEZA

aging 94 since November '09.

Even the modest All Stars Donuts & Burgers on the corner of Golden Gate and Larkin is a winner. It got a 96 this year and averaged 98-plus in five other inspections over almost three years, getting dinged for only two violations in that period.

Le Pettit, with four little tables and small counter, is the lower end of business volume among DPH's superclean eateries. Farfan says she sells more than 100 sandwiches a day.

At the higher end is Burger King at Market and Grove streets, across from the Main Library. After scoring six 100s dating back to August '09, the fast food franchise got a 96 in June. Asked how many sandwiches the restaurant sells each day, Manager Ding Mercado broke from his busy counter routine, went to the back and returned to say, "3,200 yesterday" (Aug. 15), then added, "that's just hamburgers."

Even so, the franchise is "surviving" on heavy European tourist foot traffic. "Without them we'd plunge," Mercado said. "They're keeping us alive. It's the economy."

Lafayette Coffee Shop at 250 Hyde St. is a bare-bones diner that's a favorite of many residents. Its prices won't eat a big hole in a purse or wallet. It's so drab, expectations don't run high, but in April, Lafayette got an 85 on

four violations, one for rodents, down from 88, but a nice leap up from the 77 in March 2011.

Manor House, three blocks away at 210 Jones St., may have the Tender-

loin's heaviest volume of low-income customers. Even-tempered Mimi Yee has run the cheap-food oasis for 16 years. In December, Manor House got an 88, a commendable jump from 81

## Selected TL restaurants' health scores

These 38 restaurants were selected from among the Tenderloin's 120 or so restaurants by Central City Extra as representative of the neighborhood. Their Health Department inspection scores are shown with the most recent on the left.

Restaurant	Address	Score
Abu Marrakech	419 O'Farrell	98,98,98,96,96
All Stars Donuts	290 Golden Gate	96,100,100,96,96,100
Bodega Bistro	607 Larkin	88,84,84
Burger King	1200 Market	96,100 x 6
Burmese Express	452 Larkin	82,77,82
Carl's Jr.	10 UN Plaza	100 x 5
Celtic Coffee	142 McAllister	88,86,86,89
El Castillito	248 Golden Gate	92,96,96,94,92
El Castillito	370 Golden Gate	96,94,92,92,94,96
Emperor's Kitchen	418 Larkin	84,90,94,86
Em's Place	154 McAllister	77,88,90
Farmer Brown	25 Mason	86,88,90,88
Golden Kim Tar	434 Larkin	71,82
Gyro King	25 Grove	88,92,90,88,92
Harry Harrington's	460 Larkin	84,85,80
Kusina Ni Tess	237 Ellis	94,94,94,92,88
L.A. Cafe	201 Turk	94,92,94,94,90
Lafayette Coffee Shop	250 Hyde	85,88,77
Lalita Thai	96 McAllister	94,92,90,90,90
Le Pettit's Kitchen	265 Golden Gate	100 x 5
Lee's Sandwiches	625 Larkin	90,84,86,84
Little Henry's Italian Food	955 Larkin	89,89,91,88,82
Mangosteen	601 Larkin	82,77,82
Manor House	210 Jones	88,81,82,90,
Mela Tandoori Kitchen	536 Golden Gate	92,100
Morty's Delicatessen	280 Golden Gate	70,78
New York Pizza Kitchen	127 Eddy	96,94,77,77,86
Naan & Curry	336 O'Farrell	75,73
Old Siam Thai	201 Ellis	100,96,96,96,94
Pho 2000	637 Larkin	90,94,94,92,94
Punjab Kabab House	101 Eddy	73,76
Saigon Sandwich	581 Eddy	94,100,100
Saigon Sandwich	560 Larkin	96,96,46
Showdogs	1020 Market	86,90,88,100
Soluna Cafe & Lounge	272 McAllister	85,81,84
Taqueria Castillo	86 McAllister	98,94,96,94
Tunisia Cuisine	403 Eddy	82,84,70
Turtle Tower	631 Larkin	86,84,84

Source: S.F. Department of Public Health

Central City Extra graphic



PHOTO BY MARK DONEZA

**Saigon Sandwich** often has a line at noon for its simple but acclaimed offerings.

# 6-piece blues band at Fringe

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

THE 21ST San Francisco Fringe Festival streaks into the Tenderloin Sept. 5, this year featuring 41 different shows in five venues. Solo performer,



writer and musician Wayne Harris played the Fringe back in 2004 and returns Sept. 6, 7, 8, 12 and 14 in his new play, "Tyrone 'Shortleg' Johnson and Some White Boys," directed by Mark Kenward.

In "Shortleg," a legendary but slightly inebriated blues singer is let loose on a sound stage backed by a bunch of hipsters while taping a '60s-era, second-rate TV teen dance show.

"We're trying to use the sound-

scape," Harris says, "to generate the staccato while keeping a fun, energizing rhythm and pace and taking on some important themes and questions." All "Shortleg" shows are at 7 p.m. at the 50 Mason Social House. The public is invited to the Sept. 16 Fringe closing party and awards ceremony, also at 50 Mason, 8 p.m.

Fringe producer EXIT Theatre has been presenting indie theater in the neighborhood since 1983. "The best thing about the Fringe for me is the community," says Harris, who's backed by a six-piece blues band in this show. "I like the energy around the theaters, both inside and out, and that performers, volunteers and staff are so supportive of each another. Overall, it's fun, energizing, scary, thrilling, scary, inspiring ... and scary." Fringe runs through Sept. 16. Ticket and show info: sffringe.org. ■



**Wayne Harris** plays the Fringe with a blues band at 50 Mason Sept. 6, 7, 8, 12, 14. Photo by Laura Luktsch, poster designed by Kat Parra.



# Tu Lan to remodel, take on partner

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

score never rose above 68 in that time.

Since January 2010, DPH has received four complaints of food-borne illnesses allegedly contracted after dining at Tu Lan. "We aren't able to conduct laboratory tests to conclusively establish Tu Lan as the source of the illness, but at each complaint we renewed our efforts to conduct food safety trainings with Tu Lan staff," Malhi said.

Anthony Nguyen, the young spokesman for the extended Nguyen and Pham families that own Tu Lan, which he said his uncle Thao Nguyen bought in 1977, apologized at the hearing "for all the past mistakes" and told Aragon the families have a plan to comply with the DPH requirements.

He said that they'd already bought new restaurant refrigerators and food storage units — their installation awaiting the end of ongoing lease negotiations with the building's owner. Anthony Nguyen promised to hire a new cleaning crew for the restaurant and a new pest control company to inspect the premises twice monthly. His aunt, Sandy Nguyen, promised Aragon: "Tu Lan will adapt to the times. We want to keep the permit."

For now, the joint is closed. The pork kebab, ginger fish and imperial rolls extolled in 1985 by America's reigning queen of cuisine, Julia Child, as well as all the other Tu Lan favorites, are in exile. Behind the restaurant's Closed sign the statues of Buddha and the Vietnamese God of Fortune stand in silence. No bustling lunch counter crowds, no sizzling woks and no steaming takeout



PHOTO BY LENNY LIMJOCO

**Mimi Yee:** "Restaurant work never stops."

and 82 scores, dips from the restaurant's high mark of 90 in October '09.

"Restaurant work never stops," Yee says, pausing as she wipes the Formica counter. Her day off is Saturday when the restaurant is closed. Even so, she sometimes comes in to clean after buying fish for the restaurant. And when the pest control people come three times a month, per landlord TNDC's contract for the whole building, Yee follows along, pointing to problem places they don't know about, like under the refrigerator where roaches cozy up to the warm motor.

"They don't know all the places but they do a pretty good job," Yee says. "It's not easy to keep everything clean, especially in the Tenderloin."

Four or five low- and moderate-risk violations seem to put a score in the mid-80s. Farmer Brown, the soul food eatery where Turk and Mason start at Market Street, got an 86 in January with five violations, a slip from good scores of 88, 90 and 88 since November 2009.

Up Mason Street, old doesn't mean a handful of violations. Old Siam Thai restaurant at 201 Ellis St. earned 100 in April after scores of three straight 96s and a 94 — yet another neighborhood Symbol of Excellence. ■

containers exit onto Sixth Street.

Posted on the door of Tu Lan a handwritten notice addresses the closing. "To our dear customers: We apologize for any inconvenience this has caused you and we hope to see you soon. Till then, take care, be well and be happy."

Anne-Marie Yance lives at the Auburn Hotel two blocks away. She read the sign on Tu Lan's door and asked aloud: "Why did they close it? I love this place. Do you know what it's like to go someplace they remember you, they remember what you like?"

Nguyen filed an appeal for a hearing before the Board of Appeals to contest the revocation. The hearing was scheduled for Sept. 19, but Nguyen has withdrawn the appeal.

"We sat down with the Health Department and worked things out," Nguyen says. "The family will take on a new, experienced partner to oversee daily operations, we will be doing a remodel of the space, and the Health Department will retrain all our staff," he says. It's a family investment, he noted, but he worried that once reopened Tu Lan's prices might have to rise. "Maybe a dollar or so each dish. We'll see," he said.

Once the remodeling is done and the Building Department signs off, the new manager will apply for a new license. Nguyen and his family will retain ownership.

Tu Lan is predicting a September reopening. ■

## MY TAKE

### Tu Lan true fan

Tu Lan's importance to Sixth Street and the central city is not to be sneezed at.

I have frequented the bustling establishment since March 1974, when it was already a year old. Tu Lan, along with Saigon Sandwich in the Tenderloin, were arguably firsts with Vietnamese fare in the city and certainly firsts in the neighborhood.

Excellent food, a lot of it, at a fair price is all you can expect from a restaurant. Add personable service, a warm environment and community-center atmosphere — plus a landmark-worthy history — and the place becomes a significant resource. That's Tu Lan.

The Nguyen family will have to follow through with their promise to bring the restaurant up to code, and take on an experienced partner who will keep it that way.

If Saigon Sandwich can pull itself out of a health code hole (see main story), so can Tu Lan.

On behalf of all Tu Lan's many fans and friends, Central City Extra trusts that soon we'll again be able to belly up to the counter and order our favorites No. 1, lucky Nos. 7, 29 and, can't forget that best vegetarian dish around: 74.

— GEOFF LINK, Editor & Publisher

# New survey snafu at Central Market CBD

BY JONATHAN NEWMAN & TOM CARTER

The committee guiding the Central Market CBD's permit renewal with possibly expanded boundaries met Aug. 21 expecting results from a survey supposedly mailed to 1,300 SoMa property owners. But there was zilch.

"Isn't there somebody in the office who knows about the survey?" asked nonplussed Will Thacher, chair of the CBD steering committee, as consternation spread in the Whitcomb Hotel mezzanine meeting room.

There wasn't. CBD Executive Director Daniel Hurtado was vacationing

in Indonesia, to return Aug. 29.

"I've gotten two postcards telling me to be on the lookout for the survey — but no survey," said one woman on the committee, a Howard Street condo owner. "Where's the survey? My neighbors are asking, 'Where's the survey?'"

The survey questionnaire is on the CBD Website, but can't be downloaded, said Rob Edwards, an employee of MJM Management, hired to facilitate the renewal. He said the surveys were sent "10 days ago" using addresses from the city assessor's tax rolls.

The CBD, stretching mostly from Fifth to Ninth streets on Market, then

south to include some streets between Market and Mission, wants to expand farther south at the request of several SoMa property owners, which would increase its area size nearly five times.

The 6-year-old CBD, whose assessments pay for sidewalk cleaning and security in the form of community guides, has until next May to reinvent itself with the city. To go forward in the multistage process — and to petition the Board of Supervisors — the expansion plan first needs the votes of property owners representing more than 30% of assessments to be paid. Failing that, the CBD will sunset.

The survey was originally to be sent in June, but was delayed after meetings with SoMa groups, questions were added.

James Chappell, another member of the MJM team, arrived late at the meeting and said he thought two responses had come in.

"I'll take Hurtado out for coffee when he gets back," Thacher said.

"Yes, let's take him out for coffee," said Chappell.

As of Aug. 24, Edwards said in an email to select committee members and The Extra, 20 surveys had been received. He added that Hurtado had reported that a problem at the mailhouse delayed sending the survey until Aug. 21, the day the committee met. ■