

Tony beer bar, smokehouse set for tough block of Mason

Barbary Coast PR also in the building

BY JONATHAN NEWMAN

TO THE BEDRAGGLED scene on lower Mason Street, the Tenderloin's eastern boundary, add three new elements — an upscale beer cafe, a mural depicting the glory days of the street a century ago and old-fashioned police work.

A group of investors, including Alex Clemens of Barbary Coast Consulting and Chuck Stilphen, an East Bay purveyor of high-end Belgian ales, paid \$3.2 million for 34-38 Mason St., a brick-and-masonry four-story built after the quake and fire.

They say they're spending \$450,000 to renovate the top two floors for Barbary Coast, a public relations agency with clients from the Central YMCA to Jewish Home for the Aged and the Mayor's Office of Economic and Workforce Development.

The high-ceilinged, two-story-high ground floor is being made over to Stilphen's precise specifications to operate a tony beer emporium and authentic North Carolina-style smokehouse restaurant. He hopes to open before May 1 but has no name for it yet.

Barbary Coast has about a dozen employees. Stilphen says he'll need a staff of 25-30 to run the kitchen and bar from noon to 2 a.m. daily.

"A going business means eyes on the street and history shows that it brings neighborhood improvement," Clemens said during a community meeting at the site in mid-November. For residents at the meeting, Stilphen's promise that he'll keep video cameras trained on the street and a doorman/security guard during business hours came as good news.

Then a man who lives at TNDC's Ambassador Hotel across the street decided to test Stilphen: Would his new restaurant honor "an old neighborhood tradition of providing free food to SRO tenants?" he wanted to know.

Stilphen looked queasy and remained silent as others in the crowd of two dozen laughed.

"What about rowdy crowds?" someone asked. Clemens answered, "These

➤ CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

NO. 130

PUBLISHED BY THE SAN FRANCISCO STUDY CENTER

FEBRUARY 2013

BREAKING GROUND

Stars come out for St. Anthony

PAGE 2



ONE-TWO PUNCH FOR THE ARTS

Lazer, Smith's Cultural Center

PAGE 4

ART BEGETS ART

The TL Forest inspires a poet

PAGE 4

CENTRAL CITY

EXPLORA

SAN FRANCISCO

AUDUBON CENSUS



PHOTO BY TOM CARTER

Mary Liz Harris, conducting the Audubon Society's annual bird census in the Tenderloin, stops at the U.N. Plaza Fountain that, as usual, was populated by ravenous sea gulls.

BIRDS OF THE TENDERLOIN

12 species seen, but neighborhood counter is 1 of a kind

BY TOM CARTER

A RELUCTANT morning sun made it numbingly cold at U.N. Plaza Fountain one Thursday in late December, but that hardly daunted Mary Liz Harris. Bundled up with gloves and hat, she's seated on a granite slab, binoculars in her lap, next to her backpack. A gaggle of white and brown sea gulls the size of chickens stand imperiously on taller slabs, ignoring the frothy waters and Carl's Jr., yet ravenous for its fast-food refuse.

Harris is there to count these gulls and other birds and she's ready for anything. Indeed, she yearns for surprise and adventure as part of the Audubon Society's 113th Christmas Bird Count that takes place over three weeks in December and into January. This year's count in San Francisco was two days after Christmas.

"We're trying to get an idea of the kinds of species and populations," Harris explains, slipping on the backpack, notebook in hand. "But the count's not scientific." Too much territory, too few counters. "Maybe you could get an accurate count if you had one person on every block counting at the same time."

San Francisco, one of 1,739 bird census centers throughout the nation last year, has been sending avid volunteer Audubon counters into the city and northern San Mateo County since 1983. This year, 140 signed up to count birds, but only 112 showed, among them Harris, a 10-year veteran.

The Tenderloin has few parks with trees

that birds love for nesting. It makes counting difficult and certainly not as riveting as, say, bird-rich Hunters Point Park or the Presidio that may yield 50 to 100 species.

"Nobody wants the Tenderloin," says Harris, who lives on Turk Street. "I do it because it's my neighborhood, and I always find surprises." Younger people, who dominate the city's dozen other larger groups of counters, walk too fast, she says, adding that she's "a bit over the hill." She's 78.

Harris is the sole counter for the Tenderloin. Last year there were five. Her territory is Division Street to Van Ness Avenue to California, then east, taking in the Financial District. But she'll only hit five areas, while counting along the way. Counters typically gravitate to water and parks but her district, light on parks, doesn't abut ocean or Bay and hence fewer species. Her husband, Richard M. Harris, has the more interesting area, SoMa to AT&T Park, including the Embarcadero starting at the Ferry Building. She'll join him later.

Dan Murphy, one of two Audubon members who compile the city's grand totals, knows Harris' value. "She's a godsend," he says, to cover downtown, what others derisively call the "pigeon route."

Volunteers counted nearly 61,000 birds in the city last year and 176 species, the tip of an iceberg of unknown size, yet helpful to gauge avian growth and decline. The TL, which was combined last year with much of SoMa, had 38 species then, but this year has shrunk drastically.

The 2012 count will eventually be a record 179 species and 55,247 birds, a drop but well within the city's average 40,000-60,000 range. The record year was 1986 when schools of herring showed up as a "natural phenomenon" in the Bay behind what is now AT&T Park, laying their eggs on rocks, pil-

➤ CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

The building used to house the Polo Lounge, the poor man's Original Joe's.



PHOTO BY JONATHAN NEWMAN

Mason Street A 30-by-20-foot mural, depicting a band scene from an early 1900s postcard of the location, was painted on the side of the Bristol Hotel near the site of the planned beer emporium.