

Tony beer cafe being readied on Mason St.

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will be beer geeks. They are different.”

By day the junction of Market, Turk and Mason streets is a site for low-level drug dealing, usually quiet sellers — despite their ominous hoodies and busy cell phones — and tranquil buyers.

That first block of Mason Street is also home base for six or seven street drinkers. Most days find the group down on the sidewalk sharing pulls on tall-boy malt liquors or Royal Gate or Taaka vodkas, their backs propped against the Bristol Hotel or 50 Mason Social House next door. As the drinks kick in the crummy metal pipes appear and somebody passes along a hit.

At night the play gets more serious. Dealers are in competition, buyers seem desperate. Voices rise, arguments spill from the sidewalk past parked cars out into the street. Threats of death and violence are openly shouted. It's a mess, but if you're not on Mason Street to buy or sell drugs, or sex, you can sidle past the action.

Sean Lee, who lives in his condo at the nearby Garfield, is familiar with the problems of Mason Street. “It isn't the prostitution so much, it's the drug dealing that makes it difficult,” he said. After Clemens' and Stiphen's brief presentations, Lee left the meeting satisfied: “It would be good for the street to have another well-run business.”

The building used to house the Polo Lounge, the poor man's Original Joe's, back when restaurants served ample portions and nobody was there simply because the chef was having a quarter-hour of fame.

Years after Polo's succumbed, Terrance Alan, then an Entertainment Commission member, opened his Blue Cube at the site. The Cube was known primarily for its glass-walled smoking room that snubbed its nose at city officials bent on enforcing tobacco bans.

But the Blue Cube faded to be eventually replaced by the Crash Club — three floors of music and bars — described by one clubgoer as “a true cesspit” — that lasted less than a year.

Crash Club's two-story-tall electric sign remains hanging over the street. Clemens says he likes it, so it'll stay.

At Eddy, Academy of Art University students led by instructors Carol Nunnely and Martha Wade are finishing a 30-by-20-foot mural at the base of the Bristol Hotel. The students have re-created a promotional postcard from the early 1900s depicting the Breakers Cafe at that corner and its orchestra led by Rigo, a self-styled “Hungarian Gypsy.”

The mural is a project of Uptown Tenderloin Inc., a 3-year-old nonprofit that touts the historic architecture and cultural outlets that once flourished in the Tenderloin, and the Bristol Hotel, whose owner donated the paint. The Main Library's San Francisco History Center supplied the postcard and fleshed out the historical data.

Passers-by have stopped to kibitz and to praise the work. “People seem genuinely pleased to see the mural and a scene of a part of their neighborhood from long ago,” Nunnely said.

TL Capt. Joe Garrity announced in

a recent newsletter: “An all out effort has been made with plain clothes operations in the Turk and Mason corridors to abate the street level drug dealing by outsiders.”

Using information residents provide as well as observations from a “vertical patrol” of police stationed on the fourth-floor roof area of the Warfield Building at Market and Taylor, foot and bicycle patrol officers from Tenderloin Station have targeted dealers at Turk and Mason. Also, plainclothes officers have been conducting drug “buy and busts” on Mason.

Garrity expressed confidence that the arrests coupled with the stay-away orders, will help ease the problems near the beleaguered intersection.

“I urge people to call in the activity on the street. You don't have to leave your name, just a call-back number. We'll get working on it,” Garrity told The Extra. “You know, the vast majority of people we arrest for dealing don't live or work in the Tenderloin.” ■

Blue-ribbon beginning for St. Anthony's new digs



PHOTO BY TOM CARTER

A grand crew of celebrities, including Mayor Lee and Rep. Nancy Pelosi, descend into the pit where St. Anthony's once stood to conduct a celebratory ground-breaking for the new building. Father John Hardin blesses the ground.

BY TOM CARTER

The building of St. Anthony's new dining hall officially began when ground was broken Jan. 24 before a big neighborhood crowd, staff, financial supporters, a few supervisors, Mayor Ed Lee and Rep. Nancy Pelosi, who once brought her children and grandchildren to volunteer as food servers at the old dining room.

The new building with a bigger dining room on the main floor will rise 10 stories above the Golden Gate Avenue and Jones Street intersection. The first two floors will also have a free clothing program, a social work center and an

emergency food pantry. Above that, St. Anthony's partner, Mercy Housing California, will manage 90 units of housing for low-income, formerly homeless seniors.

Officials called the \$22.5 million project a “miracle,” but were quick to add that it still needs \$2.5 million more to complete, which they expect to raise by June 13, the Feast of St. Anthony's.

After speeches, the entourage traipsed gingerly down the soft dirt road to the bottom of the site's pit where gleaming shovels awaited. Father John Hardin blessed the ground. Completion is expected in fall 2014. ■



PHOTO BY MARJORIE BEGGS

A fond farewell to Tom Carter

This issue of Central City Extra is the last with Tom Carter as our full-time community reporter, the backbone of our award-winning operation. Tom is retiring after eight years to spend more time with his young grandson and the rest of his family, and to work on his personal writing. Tom will continue to write for The Extra, but his daily presence will be sorely missed.

— The Staff



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