

GOOD NEWS for...

INDOOR FARMING Project Open Hand daily delivers 2,500 meals and 400 bags of food to homebound people in San Francisco and Alameda County. By fall, the group's 16 culinary staff will be able to pick fresh-as-can-be herbs and greens for those meals by simply walking from their ground-floor kitchen at 730 Polk St. to an adjacent room that will be transformed to an indoor greenhouse. The 285-square-foot room will be a "truly 21st century" kitchen garden, says Maria Stokes, director of communications. Open Hand is purchasing four hydroponic Volksgarden units — large upright mechanized wheels, each with 80 built-in planters that rotate around special lights. The online publication Gizmag calls Volksgarden a "hi-tech Ferris wheel." Because the wheels are upright, the units take up little space, and plants grow evenly and quickly as they rotate around the lights. "We know this garden isn't going to offset the costs of providing food to our clients," Stokes says, "but it will contribute, and it gets us all in touch with knowing where our food comes from." Open Hand's Room to Grow campaign was seeded with \$10,000 from PricewaterhouseCoopers and its funding goal reached through Indiegogo, an online crowdfunding tool. "We raised \$22,000 in just 37 days," Stokes says. "Everyone here's excited about it. Tim Hathaway, our staff accountant, started his own indoor, hydroponic garden in his work area and is growing cherry tomatoes, chili peppers and basil." ■

MENTAL HEALTH CONSUMERS Cats have nine lives, and Hyde Street Community Services has two. The Tenderloin agency has been serving San Franciscans for 37 years, yet just celebrated 10 years of life No. 2, this one as an independent entity. Hyde Street opened in October 1975 as Tenderloin Outpatient Clinic under the Bayview-Hunters Point Foundation. Ten years ago come July, the program incorporated under its address, then the next year moved to 134 Golden Gate Ave. The clinic has a drop-in center, offers peer-run groups, a bank of computers and teaches the art of microwave cooking. Many people remember it for its popular Clubhouse experience, but that got cut out of the city budget in 2006, when Behavioral Health adopted a medical model that frowned on such standalone socialization services. Now 600 clients a month avail themselves of Hyde Street's menu of help. But board President Roy Crew is looking forward: "The last 10 years was only the beginning." ■



PHOTO COURTESY OF VOLKSGARDEN

Open Hand is growing herbs and greens inside hydroponic wheels.



PHOTO BY TOM CARTER

Mattresses are found often on Ellis, making the cobblestone solution questionable.

Uncomfortable answer to park's wedge problem

BY TOM CARTER

BOEDDEKER PARK construction workers will lay uneven cobblestones along an indentation in the park's northern fence running next to the Ellis Street sidewalk, a ploy to discourage derelicts and drug dealers from hanging out there.

The granite cobblestones are to make it "uncomfortable to stand or sit," Alejandra Chiesa, Trust for Public Land project engineer, explained at the Friends of Boeddeker Park meeting in April.

The thin triangular wedge of space, about 60 feet long, starts as a mere point near the Youth with a Mission building to the west, widening as it goes eastward. It's 7 feet across as it nears the park's emergency rear gate, big enough to invite trouble. The fence indentation is necessary to accommodate an emergency side door out of the park, a fire department requirement.

At the Friends' March meeting, activists pointed out that the wedge would create a haven for street people to congregate, relieve themselves and throw garbage over the fence, for dealers to sell drugs and for some homeless to sleep. The design had been in the blueprints since 2010, Chiesa said, and couldn't be changed. But she promised to announce some solution at the next meeting, asking for suggestions.

The cobblestones were the suggestion of Tim Svoboda, Chiesa said. He is director of Youth with a Mission, which is next to the park. But other ideas from the public were unworkable, "and would have made things worse."

It won't work, said Trevor Long, the youth worker who had first identified the problem with the wedge in the fence. The cobblestones may be effective during the day, Long said, but they won't stop overnighters. The homeless

will just toss a mattress down. There's a constant encampment on this block of Ellis anyway, so mattresses are easy to come by.

"I think the cobbles will help to discourage this type of behavior," Chiesa said later, "but this problem is not new and it is not going to be completely solved overnight with the cobbles."

Another vulnerable design aspect, but one that drew little comment, was the ADA accommodation at the gate. As the cobblestone wedge flares out going west to east, it ends abruptly 6 feet from the emergency gate and becomes a smooth concrete pad 7 feet across, perfect for wheelchair egress but also ideal for hanging out, while the gate offers some cover.

COSTLY SAW RIPPED OFF

In other park business, Rec and Park's Jake Gilchrist announced that in March, a \$2,000 concrete saw weighing several hundred pounds was stolen in broad daylight from under the noses of workmen.

The foreman was just a few feet away from the saw, Gilchrist said, "and when he turned around it was gone."

The theft was reported at once at the police station across the street.

"We sent someone out right away," Capt. John Garrity said. "But we couldn't find it."

Someone obviously planned the heavy-duty heist well in advance, Gilchrist said.

The \$6 million redo is on schedule, Chiesa said. TPL and Rec and Park plan two public outreach meetings and invite other organizations, besides the Friends, to join an advisory committee to consider future park programming and other topics. The first meeting will be in July. No date is set. ■

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