

Merchants don't all back benefit claims

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

side Central Market qualifies as a benefit to the inner city.

Yammer did spend much of its claimed \$2 million in the neighborhood, most of it with a Tenderloin caterer, Green Heart, operating out of an old soup kitchen at 350 Golden Gate.

Green Heart, the only caterer in the Tenderloin, also serves workers at One Kings Lane. Owner Lisa Chatham said she does a lot of business with Yammer, but not \$2 million in a quarter, the time frame for the company's CBA report.

Yammer spokesman Jonathan Noble wrote in an email that "the Yammer team continues to try and track down an answer for you" in response to The Extra's questions about the dates.

The city administrator's project manager, Bill Barnes, nearly two months after submission of the CBA report, had no answer because he had not yet "fully completed verification of Yammer."

Chatham, a personal chef before founding Green Heart in 2009, says she began doing business with Yammer in 2011, when the tech giant was on Townsend Street and her kitchen was at 1550 Bryant.

The CBAs have been a godsend for her business, Chatham says. She has about 15 employees and they prepare 500 meals a day for Yammer from the kitchen she leases from Mercy Housing.

"I'm really into good, clean, simple food," she says, and "that involves a lot of vegetables." She spends about \$20,000 monthly at Veritable Vegetable, a women-owned cooperative on Cesar Chavez Street specializing in organic, locally grown produce; Golden Gate Meats on Seventh Street and, for dry goods such as flour, salt and beans, from Good Stuff



PHOTO BY MARK HEDIN

Ellery Abels shows a tray loaded with pizza from the Green Heart kitchen. Green Heart, the only caterer in the Tenderloin, has a five-year lease.

Distributor in the Bayview and Rain-bow Grocery in the Inner Mission.

Her lease with Mercy Housing, she said, has "completely made it possible." When her lease on a shared kitchen on Bryant Street was not renewed in July 2012, she said, she had no idea how she'd stay in business until on Craigslist she found both the Golden Gate Avenue kitchen and a one-story building shell on 20th Street in the Mission that she is weeks away from opening to serve new clients.

Originally, Chatham said, she saw the Mercy Housing site as a transitional space while she got the Mission site ready, but its proximity to the tech clients has worked out so well that last month she signed a five-year lease.

"It's just been great," Chatham, who just returned from a vacation hiking the Inca Trail, said from a perch at a balcony table overlooking the courtyard of the Madonna Residence as seniors exercised below. "We're going to stay here and be in the other space as well."

Whatever the amount, whenever the time frame, Yammer plainly spends a lot locally — Green Heart is right down the street from the new St. An-

thony's, after all. Some of Green Heart's minimum-wage workers may live in the neighborhood, and Mercy Housing has a happy tenant in what had been a vacant space. But overall, the relationship appears to be between two newcomers to the neighborhood doing business together, while life otherwise goes on around them, oblivious to their activity.

At Zoosk, the online dating site at 989 Market St., the staff eats on the company dime at least twice a week, community liaison Melinda Perales says. About 300 meals weekly are brought in from central city restaurants such as Bang San Thai, on O'Farrell, Little Delhi at Eddy and Mason, and Pakwan at 501 O'Farrell and Tian Sing on Cyril Magnin.

One Kings Lane's Community Liaison Stephanie Pettinati emphasizes that, unlike its upstairs neighbor Twitter and many other tech companies, OKL "does not provide daily meals to our employees. However, you will find our 200+ employees out and about in the local community eating lunch, having coffee, etc."

For the meals the company does cater, she said, the company they use to manage the ordering, Cater2Me,

which operates in New York, Chicago and from an office in the Financial District, has agreed to use at least one local caterer per month. So far, they've also done business with Bang San Thai, Little Delhi, Green Heart and Morty's Delicatessen at 280 Golden Gate Ave.

Kashi Serchan, owner of Little Delhi, said he was unaware of Zoosk or One Kings Lane's business, saying that if they are patronizing his restaurant, they come in just like any other customer. Serchan, who has been there seven years, said he hears a lot about the city improving the neighborhood.

"Is it really happening?" he said. "I don't see much."

In fact, he said, the area is getting worse, attributing the problem to cheap alcohol and drugs. Serchan, who is there 8 a.m. to midnight, said he sees the city crews washing down the streets, then somebody pisses on the sidewalk right after and so on into the night. He said he hasn't seen an increase in customers with the tech boom either.

Zoosk's downstairs neighbor, Zendsk, reports spending \$23,445.91 between Jan. 1 and April 30 on local catering "in our neighborhood, i.e. meals from Show Dogs, Taqueria Cancun, etc." Zendsk also hired the Episcopal Community Services' C.H.E.F.S. program to cater \$2,081 worth of meals. Zendsk community liaison Tiffany Apczynski told The Extra in late March that, in 2012, when it was the only company executing a CBA, Zendsk spent \$70,000 with the caterer Small Potatoes, which has since moved from Sixth and Stevenson to out on Seventh, down past the Hall of Justice.

It is worth noting that Zendsk's CBA report is the only one that calls the community "our neighborhood."

21Tech reported that it "continues to order all staff lunches and most client meals from establishments in the Mid-Market area," and has "compiled a list of restaurants" for its employees. As she has at every opportunity this year, 21Tech community liaison Deborah Trette did not respond to The Extra's calls and emails seeking further details on the company's CBA activities. ■

Paid volunteers pay off for the neighborhood

BY MARK HEDIN

The first written summaries of the benefits that the six tax-break companies — Twitter, Yammer, One Kings Lane, Zendsk, Zoosk and 21Tech — have been bestowing upon their mid-Market neighbors have been submitted to the city.

The companies report that much time was devoted to getting to know the neighborhood and its needs, and looking for ways to put their capabilities to use.

The first quarterly reports — for February through April — weren't publicly available till July, and the city administrator's office is still, in the last week of August, verifying them.

The devil is in the details of these reports. In the case of 21Tech, which submitted sketchy information, the details are too few to describe any benefits, and questions to the community liaison go unanswered, as if the company considers this public process that the firms have entered into a private matter.

Five companies' spreadsheets are thin on particulars and not sharply focused. Many listed goals fall outside the first-quarter time frame, and many activities seem to overlap. Nonetheless, some community arts groups have received grants, some students have been tutored, computer hardware has been donated to several sites — Tenderloin Tech Lab, Sixth Street Safety Hub and San Francisco Education Fund were three

Yammer beneficiaries — and a lot of volunteer hours have been devoted to sweeping streets, serving meals and more.

Twitter spokeswoman Karen Wickre emailed The Extra that the company had sponsored 1,461 hours by 670 employees in the first six months of the year. Twitter's quarterly report cites 400 volunteers working on its June 28 "Day for Good" alone.

All the companies pay their employees to volunteer at each employee's rate of pay. Before the enactment of the tax break, the city estimated the average tech company worker's annual salary at \$100,000, or \$48 per hour. For Twitter staff time, that's about \$70,000 pro bono. Zendsk cited 268 volunteer hours spent at Glide and the Tenderloin Tech Lab by April 30 — nearly \$13,000 at that same rate.

It's much appreciated. Dave Kne-go of Curry Senior Center said that Twitter sent a "community ambassador" to train his staff how to use Twitter to reach potential donors, volunteers, community partners and corporate sponsors.

"Volunteering is great," he said. "Yammer has been here, Twitter also served lunch to our seniors."

However, he added, "that's an easy one. You don't need professional expertise." In contrast, teaching staff how to tweet "is a higher level. We like that. I can't afford that kind of help."

Some outright grants are list-

ed in the reports. Yammer spread "over \$60k" among 13 organizations. Among them, LEVY Dance, near the Hall of Justice, said it had gotten a four-figure grant, as did Episcopal Community Services' CHEFS catering program, and Boys Hope Girls Hope, which has supported promising Tenderloin students at the De Marillac Academy.

Bill Barnes, project manager in the city administrator's office who negotiated the CBAs with the individual companies, told The Extra he expected this first-year process to be instructive.

"We want to hear from nonprofits (at the next Citizens Advisory Committee meeting) what worked, what didn't, what could be improved," he said. "Any other nonprofit that hasn't been involved is welcome to come."

Bessie Carmichael Assistant Principal Karen Francois said Twitter volunteers regularly tutored her middle schoolers in algebra during the spring semester, once they'd cleared the requisite background checks required of any adult on school grounds.

Jessica Pullano, director of communications for the San Francisco Education Fund, a nonprofit that organizes private-sector aid for public schools, said that the tech companies' focus on the two schools in the neighborhood — Bessie Carmichael and Tenderloin Elementary — feels like they "are all being super-served. We see a fair amount of requests to volunteer there. With that criteria, there

are only so many options."

Still, the "wish list" on Bessie Carmichael's Website — for computer hardware, plastic cups, mentors and sports coaches, cafeteria and yard monitors, classroom aides — remains online, unchanged.

Stephanie Pettinati, of One Kings Lane, cited background checks for volunteering as "somewhat of an operational hindrance" for its as-yet-unmet goal of helping schools.

Hiring from the neighborhood also was a contractual priority for all tax-break companies, but no full-time jobs have resulted so far. However, three interns were hired through Vietnamese Youth Development Services — Zendsk hired one and Zoosk two, S.F. State sophomore James Piring and high school junior Elaine Huang. Wickre was concerned that if Twitter limits job openings to local residents it might be considered discriminatory. And Zoosk's Perales said the company is "not getting the kind of candidates they need" from the neighborhood.

However, Twitter's Aug. 8 "Nerd Underground" networking event for job seekers was open to students and former students of the Bay Area Video Coalition, which also oversees TechSF. Guests mingled over craft beers, wine, grass-fed beef sliders and donut holes made on the spot. Yammer hosted a similar event May 22. ■

— Geoff Link and Eric Louie contributed to this report.