

Seniors all but snubbed by the tech tax breaks

Elders are largely left out of CBAs

By MARK HEDIN

TWO MID-MARKET tech companies enjoying a tax holiday say early in their community benefit agreements that helping neighborhood seniors is a high priority, yet The Extra has been hard-pressed to find much evidence of that.

After stating good intentions, Twitter and Advor never mention seniors again in their 2014 CBAs. None of Twitter's ballooned \$388,000 to nonprofits is targeted to the elderly.

One Kings Lane, Zoosk and Spotify don't even mention the "S" word in their CBAs, though seniors comprise at least 20% of the neighborhood's population.

City Administrator Naomi Kelly in January signed off on CBAs with six companies: Twitter, Microsoft, One Kings Lane, Zendesk, Zoosk and Spotify, the latter a newbie to the tax break, but has refused to discuss the agreements with The Extra.

Last year, Microsoft subsidiary Yammer promised to devote 15% of a \$60,000 grant program — \$9,000 — to seniors, but, according to a city administrator's office report, the money ultimately went to education (37%), food justice (9%), homelessness (33%) and the arts (21%). Seniors: 0%.

In the five CBAs completed last year, however, seniors got some help. Yammer gave computer monitors to Tenderloin Tech Lab, used primarily by homeless and SRO-dwelling elderly men; the Curry Senior Center benefited from teams of volunteers from Twitter and Zendesk; and Episcopal Community Services also received volunteer hours from tech companies for some of its services that benefit seniors.

But overall, the level of support to the elderly was and is shockingly disproportionately low.

Twitter spokeswoman Karen Wickre did not respond when asked about Twitter aid to seniors, and acting community liaison Eugene Yi looped a similar question back to Wickre.

Yammer, like Twitter and One Kings Lane a Shorenstein tenant at 1355 Market, pledges 15% of a \$50,000 grant program — \$7,500 — to nonprofit organizations that benefit seniors.

Zendesk's CBA promises to include Curry Senior Center in its volunteer efforts. Community liaison Tiffany Apczynski notes that, although "our existing CBA does not directly earmark anything for seniors, the folks at Curry and the Tenderloin Tech Lab know we are here to be supportive of the services they provide."

Tenderloin Tech Lab, operated by St. Anthony's Foundation, is one obvious nexus for the community and tech workers to collaborate. And they have.

Last year, Yammer gave the Tech Lab 60 large monitors, big enough, lab manager Megan Trotter said, to allow for the enlarged fonts her clients need. The monitors were worth \$16,000.

Zendesk and Twitter send volunteers on Fridays to either conduct the classes the lab hosts daily or offer individual tutoring, Trotter said.

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SPECIAL REPORT



PHOTO BY PAUL DUNN

Young Taek Lim is 75, one of more than 4,000 seniors 65 and older in the Tenderloin. He sleeps on a fold-up mattress in the living room of the one-bedroom apartment he shares. He applied for public housing 10 years ago, and is still waiting. **Story on page 3.**

Mid-Market milestone

Tech puts stress on old and poor in central city

By GEOFF LINK

THREE YEARS AGO this month, the Twitter tax break was signed into law, and the Tenderloin's fate was sealed. Central City Extra and New America Media are using that historic moment as a jumping-off point to examine the effects of the central city's transformation on seniors.

Twitter led the way for uncounted companies, including a slew of app makers and programming schools plus the restaurants and bars plying \$14 cocktails and other businesses that follow the money.

Market Street went from blight to boom in two years. After three decades in the doldrums, downtown began a westward march with City Place mall anchoring the block beyond Fifth Street.

Demolition and construction raise a cloud of dust over the street, jack hammers and pile drivers pound the eardrums. Market Street hasn't seen such bustle and change since the '06 quake.

Landlords and property managers — the shock troops of gentrification — have turned the boom into a real estate gold rush, relentlessly raising rents and legalizing claim jumping with tech companies taking over office space before an unsuspecting tenant's lease is up.

Nonprofits were first to be gentrified. Without commercial rent control, landlords have doubled and tripled rents at will, driving

out human service providers, sending them to East Bay and away from the central city. It's gotten so that a human service provider can no longer lease aboveground offices on Market Street.

The safety net for seniors, disabled, homeless, people in recovery and other vulnerable populations has been damaged since the Twitter tax break.

At this three-year milestone in the speedy gentrification of San Francisco's central city, The Extra and New America Media are collaborating to describe the change and show its effects on those who live and work here, especially seniors, who subsist on fixed incomes while the newcomers have seemingly limitless financial potential.

Living on this inner-city island of poverty, elders struggle to make ends meet while the sea of corporate wealth that has already swamped western SoMa surges north of Market Street, pushing the fringes toward the fabric.

Our portrait of the central city includes profiles and demographic data, housing options, and details the meager, city-sanctioned aid the seven tech companies with million-dollar payrolls dole out to seniors to mitigate the social and psychological effects of their tax break.

It's not that the CBAs haven't done some good. They have. But the neighborhood needs more than crumbs, consultation and cleaning up litter.

This report is part of a larger project by New America Media, "Growing Older Getting Poorer," that is funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies to generate in-depth coverage of issues seniors face wherever they live, whatever their ethnicity.

Our collaborative report will continue next month. ■