

# Zendesk foundation launches with TL grant

BY JONATHAN NEWMAN

**Z**ENDESK, which sells customer service software and was the first Market Street tech company to reach out to the Tenderloin, last month launched a global charity — Zendesk Neighbor Foundation. Its first gift: \$100,000 to St. Anthony's Tenderloin Tech Lab.

The 501(c)(3) foundation opens with \$1 million in 11 grants for neighborhood renewal in San Francisco and the 10 other cities where Zendesk operates.

As Twitter tax break's first beneficiary, Zendesk has negotiated annual community benefit agreements with the city administrator's office since

2011. Zendesk will not claim the gift to St. Anthony's in fulfillment of its CBA requirements.

"Growing up as a tech company in the mid-Market neighborhood of San Francisco has taught us the meaning and importance of being a good neighbor," said Zendesk founder and CEO Mikkel Svane. Zendesk has another office in the U.S. in Madison, Wis., and nine worldwide: Australia, England, Denmark, Ireland, Philippines, Brazil, Argentina, Japan and Germany.

Tiffany Apczynski, Zendesk's corporate social responsibility director and newly named foundation executive director, explained: "The plan is to spread the community aspect that began in San Francisco to the rest of the global

offices and instill a companywide culture of giving back."

For now, Zendesk will fund the foundation by contributing \$1 per month for every new employee other companies sign on to subscription plans for customer service platforms. As the company grows so will the foundation. Zendesk trades on the New York Stock Exchange for about \$23 a share, and the company has drawn nearly \$2 billion from the sale of stock.

"St. Anthony's is thrilled," said Karl Robillard, senior manager of St. Anthony Foundation. The \$100,000 will support operations of the Tenderloin Tech Lab, the 8-year-old progeny of St. Anthony's Employment Program/Learning Center and S.F. Network Ministries' Computer Training Center that pooled their expertise and equipment to help breach the digital divide in the TL, at a time when that gap was a deep, deep chasm.

In 2007, the Tech Lab quarters were cramped, and the computers were refurbished castoffs donated by Goodwill. Technology was ascending, but the boom of technology and its presence in the everyday life of the Tenderloin had not yet happened. As The Extra reported, St. Anthony's announced the lofty goal of serving 50 users a day in the new lab with a vow to "make technology less scary to neighborhood residents."

On a morning last month the Tenderloin Technology Lab on the third floor of St. Anthony's 150 Golden Gate Ave. building was in full use. In a series of well-lighted rooms 50 or so people sat quietly working at new, state-of-the-art, touchscreen computers.

Julia Cowan, the lab's coordinator of instruction, explained that some guests, as St. Anthony's calls those it serves, were there to catch up on the Internet news and entertainment, or to read their emails. Others, in a small room with six computers, were working with individual instructors to hone their computer skills, learning to navigate Excel programs or PowerPoint

platforms. The third floor had the calm, studied atmosphere of a library in use.

Classes of six are conducted in the Computer Learning Lab, where the new touchscreens flank the walls and a 6-foot monitor screen draws the eye.

St. Anthony's says about half of the lab users are homeless, living on the street or in temporary shelters. "We've conducted focus groups and most of our guests say they value the safety and calm of the lab. They can be productive and not have to hold in place the defenses they might have to use on the street," Omid Khazaie, assistant manager of the lab, said.

Anyone can use the lab. The basic instruction program meets four times a week in hourly sessions for three weeks. People who feel they've mastered the basics can enroll in the intermediate training. If not ready, they are free to re-enroll in a second go-round of elementary training. There's no pressure to move up and out. If guests are happy with their level of computer competence, they don't enroll in classes. They can use the computers as they please, reserving an hour of use, or longer, if no one else is waiting for a seat to open.

St. Anthony's doesn't view the lab as a standalone service to the community, but as part of the overall programs it offers. "The ability to use technology is vital to people seeking job training, resume building and, in many cases, re-entry to society. That's why the touchscreens are helpful. It's streamlined and it's the new way people will use technology," said Jessie Brierley, a communications associate in St. Anthony's public relations department.

Brierley estimates 100 people a day, 36,000, visited the lab in the last year.

"The number of smartphones in the neighborhood is growing and people are learning more and more about services. The latest technology — swiping a touchscreen — is the key. You can access multiple services in a new way," Brierley said. ■

## S.F. pioneers e-cig busts

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a misdemeanor ticket, which can be adjudicated in community court, Falzon said. But the retailer faces the suspension of its tobacco retail license, typically for 20 days.

That part of the process is handled by the city Environmental Health Agency, a division of Public Health. Retailers can contest their citations at an Environmental Health director's hearing, before Dr. Tomas Aragon, who is the director of the Population and Health Division of DPH and also health officer of San Francisco — something like being the city's surgeon general.

Should the retailers object to Aragon's findings, they can take their case to the Board of Appeals. But typically, Tobacco Free's Smith said, "It's a pretty clear case," and most retailers choose not to fight their citation.

"I have not heard of anyone else doing this enforcement," Smith told The Extra. "I'm not aware of another community that has worked with the local police or sheriff's department to do a decoy operation."

Although The Extra found that 42 states have regulations barring the sale of e-cigarettes to minors, the only other enforcement action we found was a single citation issued in Queensland, Australia, where one retailer was prosecuted for selling a vaporizer.

In late March, the San Mateo County sheriff and San Bruno, South San Francisco and Daly City police conducted a sting on 187 merchants, citing, but not prosecuting, 19 for selling tobacco to a minor. Two were e-cigarette cases, the first such cases in the county, where the potential penalty is a \$200 fine.

Of the 15 San Francisco retailers cited last year for e-cigarette violations, Rite-By appealed its license suspension on May 6 and was denied, as was a store on the 1800 block of Divisadero Street a week later. Five more are mulling their options following a director's hearing, and five more have yet to have their day before Aragon.

Aragon has the authority to set a 90-day suspension at most, but has yet to do so, instead opting for 20-day sentences, during which the retailer must take all tobacco products off its shelves. The DPH does its own compliance inspections, Smith said.

June Weintraub, an Environmental Health program manager, said that four cited retailers had volunteered at director's hearings to quit selling e-cigarettes, including New Princess, Woerner's and Salem in the TL.

Smith said DPH had conducted two surveys of retailers last year and found that the number of retailers selling vaping products grew from 357 in January to 458 by mid-August.

The rising popularity of e-cigarettes, which allow users to get a nicotine fix without actually burning tobacco — instead, a battery-operated device ignites a nicotine-laced liquid — has pumped new millions into the always resourceful tobacco industry, and presented new challenges for those seeking to reduce tobacco's toll on our health.

"The reason the citations are new," Smith said, "is because the law is new." Last April, San Francisco adopted its Health Code Article 19N, which stipulates that e-cigarettes be treated just like traditional cigarettes in the eyes of the law. ■

## A Fool steps in at CAC

### Displacement is high on TL resident's agenda

BY MARK HEDIN

**T**he Citizens Advisory Committee for the Twitter tax break has new blood. Faithful Fools' Sarah "Sam" Denison has joined the panel, and Rob Gitin will replace SEIU organizer Peter Masiak as committee chair. Masiak has held the seat for two years.

Despite the new energy Denison and Gitin bring to the panel, the committee seems likely to remain ineffective. In August, the terms of five members will expire, and supes' Rules Committee clerk Alisa Somera told The Extra no current CAC member has yet reapplied.

Eva Perring, after four years on the panel, seems eager to move on. Her seat comes up for renewal Aug. 2. She represents neighborhood low-income families.

The seat John Bogacki occupied represents seniors or the disabled; it expires at the same time, though he's been on the CAC only since October. The seats held by Steven Suzuki, an expert in workforce development, Brad Paul, affordable housing expert, and Antoinetta Stadlman, who represents community residents in general, expire then too.

CAC seat No. 9, for an expert in commercial real estate, has been vacant since 2013.

Given that at least six members must be present to constitute a quorum, without which the panel can neither meet nor hear public comment, the community's only direct voice in



CARMEN BARSODY

**Sam Denison** of the Faithful Fools was the only applicant for her CAC seat.

the process that has brought so much change to the hood seems likely to reach a new nadir of irrelevance.

In mid-May, the Rules Committee, acting on D6 Supe Jane Kim's recommendation, approved Denison's application for the seat Robert Marquez vacated in February. If approved by the supes June 2, Denison will join the committee at its next meeting, July 2.

Denison's seat is reserved for someone "representing a community-based organization or providing direct services to the ... area." She is chief financial officer of Faithful Fools Street Ministry on Hyde Street, where she lives.

"My hope and I think others on the CAC hope to shift the meetings away from routine reporting of volunteer hours and grants to hearings on topics stemming from displacement," Denison told The Extra. ■

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