Homeless 'Encampment' coming to City Hall

BY TOM CARTER

The clutch of mini-cardboard huts that Dianne Platner fashioned from the hand-scrawled signs of the homeless moves into City Hall on Feb. 12.

The conceptual art installation called "Encampment," consists of 75 structures, each brandishing a plaintive plea and message to get attention. They will occupy a 20-by 30-foot space in the basement (accessible by elevator from the Van Ness entrance). The exhibition will run Feb. 12-March 23.

Originally, the artist had been intrigued by the makeshift signs she saw as a passing motorist at such spots as the Duboce/Mission intersection. The neighborhood activist and former book designer decided to collect them after learning of a 1906 relief project in the city. An encampment of 5,600 small wood cottages was created back then to temporarily house the homeless after the fire and earthquake.

Platner bought the signs for $1 and $2 on the street, interviewed the people behind them for their stories, then reassembled the signs into 8-inch-by-14-inch huts.

"This juxtaposition of past and present elements challenges viewers to reflect on how we as a society respond to people in crisis," she says. "This is not meant to suggest any sort of solution. It's just to get people to think."

The artist's reception is Wed. Feb. 12, 5:30-7:30 p.m. It is the only time that three television monitors on nearby tables will accompany the exhibit. The middle monitor will run tapes of Platner's street interviews while the others show a continuous flow of traffic.

Ironically, the huts will be treated like royalty, set up on the marble floor and enclosed behind a velvet rope attached to four pillars that will be wrapped in blow-ups of the 1906 encampment. Platner is delighted that the Art Commission's Gallery allowed "Encampment" into the seat of power.

"The installation and video are almost two stand-alone pieces," Platner says. "The installation puts the signs of the homeless in another context, so you can think about them a little differently. The video actually introduces you to the people who contributed to the piece — what they're doing, why they're there."

In the course of her project, Platner became friends with many of the destitute who she hopes will also attend the exhibit.

"Before, I had no idea what was going on behind the signs," she says. "Now, I see that there are so many reasons why those people are there. In developing relationships with the homeless for this work, I learned of their hopes and dreams, their sorrows, depressions and illnesses."

Viewing hours are 8 a.m.-8 p.m. Mon.-Fri., and noon-4 p.m. on weekends. ■

PHOTOS BY TOM CARTER

Dianne Platner's *homeless exhibit features sentiments of people in crisis.*

Makeshift structures *will be on display at City Hall.*

GEDC buys first 4 parcels

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community room, a learning center with computers for children, an esplanade of trees — as well as to help with predevelopment costs such as paying architects or zoning consultants to ensure that the project is well-planned with a minimum of glitches.

Concurrent with the financing efforts, GEDC has started the environmental review process to determine how the height, mass, noise, traffic, transportation and other aspects of the project will affect the surrounding neighborhood. A preliminary draft environmental impact report, prepared by EIP Associates, the group that just finished the Mid-Market Redevelopment Survey Area EIR, should be ready this spring, with the public comment period starting in summer, Loustau said.

NO TICKING TIME-BOMBS

Loustau said that to avoid hitting the community with a "surprise," as Hastings did last year with its proposed eight-story parking lot, GEDC will present its plan at community meetings long before the public comment period formally starts.

"So far, we've made presentations to the Tenderloin Futures Collaborative, NOMPC, the TNDC board, to a representative of the Residential Housing Association, to Randy Shaw of Tenderloin Housing Clinic and to [land-use lawyer] Sue Hestor," he said.

Shaw opposed the Pavilion project back in 1999 — "Few if any of its 'potential benefits' will accrue to existing Tenderloin residents or small businesses" he wrote in a letter to then-Pavilion Committee Chairman Mel Carriere. But, in a recent e-mail to *The Extra*, he said, "We neither oppose nor endorse the project."

Loustau imagines the Pavilion construction schedule thus: groundbreaking in 2004, underground parking finished by late 2005, the two-story pavilion done by 2006, the housing completed by 2007.

In these lean times, Loustau said, GEDC's public/private partnership will create a feel-good project for all — parking and commercial convention facilities and some market-rate housing for the suits, low-income housing with support services for folks who need a hand, and space for non-profits that serve the community.

Though he said he's uncertain how he can help make the Pavilion project reality, District 6 Supervisor Chris Daly said he "absolutely" supports it. "I especially like the idea of the community owning a mixed-development project. It's a model for the future" — one, he said, that will become a positive "marker" for where the Tenderloin begins. ■

GLIDE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORP.

Corporate and organizational structure

GEDC PARTNERS

Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corp.
Mayor's Office of Housing
S.F. Parking Authority
S.F. Convention Facilities Management Dept.
Hilton Hotel
Related Companies of California, which manages Hayes Valley Public Housing, Fillmore Marketplace Apts. at Eddy and Webster and Paramount Apts. at Third and Mission

GEDC *staff*

Jeff Loustau, development manager
Mel Carriere, president
Elena Gary, finance manager
Rev. Cecil Williams, CEO

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Glide: **Rev. Cecil Williams**; **Janice Mirikitani**; **Amy Errett**, chair of Glide Foundation

TNDC: **Kelly Cullen**, executive director

Hilton: **John Mazzoni**, general manager, and **Holger Gantz**, former Hilton general manager and longtime resource in the S.F. hotel community

Community

Leroy Looper, Cadillac Hotel
Helena Brooke, director, S.F. Mental Health Board
Christine Johnson, Glide housing resident
Joan Thomas, Natoma Street Apts. resident
Ron Parks, CPA
Rubin Glickman, land-use attorney
Nicholas Rosenberg, former director, Adopt-A-Block.
Ruthy Talansky, senior project manager, Ecumenical Association for Housing

Committees

Finance and Development Committees ["Participation so far has been ad hoc, representing some involvement on the part of each of the board members," according to project Development Manager Jeff Loustau. "Committee assignments are expected to become more formalized over the next couple of months."]