

# 6th St. turnaround — change is in the air



PHOTO BY CARL ANGEL

**Teriyaki House** (above) is the new neighbor of long-time Vietnamese restaurant Tu Lan. Moe Hakim, (below) and his brother Hani Hakim moved their Chico's Pizza to Sixth Street and have a 15-year lease on their busy restaurant.

► CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

million in loans. "Public drinking is widespread, stolen goods are bought and sold, sanitation is nearly nonexistent and public indecency is commonplace." The area is so depressed, the document said, "that only undercapitalized and predatory businesses are willing to locate here."

When a man was murdered at Minna and 6th, Mayor Willie Brown came down and held a news conference. It was clear the city needed to do something about the street. It was too late to include funds in the 2001 city budget, but 2002 was feasible.

Roger Gordon, executive director of the nonprofit South of Market Foundation, now called Urban Solutions, and former candidate for District 6 supervisor, talked with the mayor at a cabinet meeting involving various agencies and departments about the need to stabilize and revitalize the neighborhood without displacing people. "The mayor was very understanding," Gordon says.

## CITY GETS INVOLVED

The city subsequently commissioned the Six on Sixth plan. The loan program it embodied was funded for \$750,000, not \$1 million. Red tape held up implementation until late 2002, according to Gordon, who now heads Urban Solutions, which guides the plan.

Some \$670,000 has been approved for loans and already 15 property and business owner applications have come in. These are needed because rents are too low to finance the expensive improvements required to lease long-vacant storefronts, such as those on the east side between Natoma and Howard. Gordon expects that more than \$1 million in private funds will go into the area within the year as the loans' leverage stimulates

investments.

"It has exceeded our expectations," he says. "Right now we have 12 applications for facade improvement from awnings and painting to tiles and windows. There will be a lot of activity in the next three months. But nobody who is freaked out by the neighborhood is going to put money in."

## 6TH AND MINNA SUCCESS STORY

One entrepreneur who came in on his own is Kaushik Dattani, a Lombard Street accountant. He bought a building at Sixth and Minna, a former pawnshop, and turned it into the clean, 14-room Haveli Hotel above. In January, he opened in the storefront a brightly tiled vegetarian restaurant with Indian shawls and pictures on the walls, with the hotel as its namesake.

During construction, Dattani, who lives in Marin County, took his oldest son, Tej, around to meet some of the shopkeepers. The 18-year-old who studies at UC San Diego and wants to be a heart surgeon reeled at what he saw around him.

"It was depressing," he says. "I was shocked."

He asked his father why he chose to start a business here.

"He said in the long run this will pay off," the son said. "And that you've got to think ahead. I trusted him. I still trust him. He has a dream that this area could become a Little India. He has talked to a lot of his friends about investing here. He was excited about seeing other businesses coming here, too."

Just after Haveli's opened, The Teriyaki House restaurant debuted across the street next

to the venerable Tu Lan, arguably the city's first and best-known Vietnamese restaurant. And last year, Donut World replaced the Wendy's that had anchored the Sixth and Market storefront for many years.

The son recently left school temporarily to mind the restaurant while his father recovers from brain surgery. Dattani wants to show Indian movies on Saturday nights when he comes back.

"Business," the son says, "is all right. Steady. We get a lot of people in their 20s new to the workforce who work nearby. My 13-year-old sister hates this place. But my 16-year-old brother loves it. He wants to go into the business."

Down the street at the Liberal Loans pawnshop, 77 Sixth St., pawnbroker Mike ("I don't give my last name to the press") reminisces about the changing neighborhood. He has been on the street 45 years, he says, and has owned the shop since 1970, as the second owner since 1938.

## HIGH-CLASS PAST

"It used to be a high-class neighborhood," he says, standing behind the counter in the back with two of his friends. "Women used to come down here in hats and gloves. There were nightclubs and bars and restaurants. The Greeks owned a lot. The Coffee Cup was my uncle's old nightclub. There was a dance hall across the street. And this was the only pawnshop."

"And you know all the streets were named after prostitutes," one friend pipes up.

Mike thinks the problems of the street are the drugs, an almost impossible task to handle in his view, and merchants not fixing up their storefronts. He is still bristling over "the elements" burning up his 2-month-old awning and swinging on it "like apes." When the store alarm goes off at night and pulls him back, he gets out of the car with his gun raised, he says, not loaded though, and the crowd parts. Don't come down here at night, he'll warn you, it's not safe.

"But the street is good," he says. "The cops are starting to put pressure on the elements. The D.A. can only do so much, I know. But the street will pick up. It's Redevelopment. They're going to redo the sidewalks next year."

The replacement and sidewalk widening project actually starts this year, and people look forward to it as much as the opening of Bayanihan House. In April, when the finishing touches were being applied to the handsome, five-story, 1912 brick structure, it caught everyone's eye and became a symbol of resurrection. The former haggard SRO Delta Hotel caught fire Aug. 11, 1997, and 180 SRO rooms were lost as firefighters tore out the roof and the water poured in. It was abandoned for four years.

Then TODCO, a South of Market tenants and business owners nonprofit, put \$22 million into it.

"It's a derelict building we can now all be proud of," said Lem Construction Co.'s project engineer Hunter Browne of the job that took more than a year. "The major part was seismic upgrade. There's a lot of steel in that building now. We made something good out of something old, and that's a main reason I wanted to be part of it."

The building is an eye-ful for passing Sixth Street traffic. The 152 rooms vary from 10-by-

► CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

PHOTO BY LENNY LIMJOCO



## Café do Brasil

1106 MARKET STREET  
CHURRASCARIA RESTAURANT (AT THE RENOIR HOTEL)

---

PH: (415) 626-6432  
FAX: (415) 626-6450  
www.cafedobrasil.com

SPECIAL LUNCH OFFER: 2 FOR 1  
THE MEAL THAT COSTS LESS IS FREE