



Valerie Persky's rooftop PE classes are a bit with pupils. PHOTO BY TOM CARTER

Faced with agonizing choice, school drops PE to save reading

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half-time this year, 2 1/2 days a week, engaging each class in the school for 30 minutes, with grades 3, 4, 5 getting to use the vast expanse on the roof out in the fresh air. Principal Jane Huey says that parents and teachers have raved about Persky's work. And the kids, she says, couldn't wait to get to her classes. But the 13-year teacher with the SFUSD will see her position evaporate in next year's budget along with other reductions the school is making because of state cuts.

The site council, which determines how school money is spent, agonized over its hatchet job after polling the teachers and parents. As an indication of how well the factions work together, their priorities were "95% consistent," according to one parent. The year before, the school had scored 20% lower than the statewide Academic Performance Index (API) goal average of 800. And the council then had no hesitation in strongly supporting a new literacy specialist and an assistant.

"I have seen rapid differences in the (kids') skills."

Valerie Persky
PE TEACHER

LITERACY NO. 1 PRIORITY

"We are not yet a high academic school," says Huey. "And our administrative duty is to raise achievement. When we go to the council we discuss what the priorities are. And first is literacy and second is class reduction size in grades 4 and 5."

But for 2003-04, two of the three para-professional teachers have been canceled. The three days the teachers use substitutes while they evaluate each child's reading proficiency, and other days used to attend conferences, were wiped out. The \$40,000 for supplies such as crayons, glue, paper and pencils was pared to \$14,000. And the full-time teacher who keeps grades 4-5 class size small was knocked down to a .625 position.

Luckily, the school has supply reserves and will be able to handle day-to-day needs in the fall. But there will be no new library books, puzzles and manipulation games that help in learning English, and the flip books that work wonders with phrasing and putting sentences together. All these, plus the blow to class reduction are steps backward in closing the API deficit.

"Upper grades can go to 33 (students in a classroom)," says Huey from her office, where year-end anxieties are palpable in the air. "The reduction is to 25. You can imagine how that is if you have eight more children and you are trying to teach them math and fractions. And some don't have a math aptitude."

"Eight is a major difference with reading, too. Teachers are attempting to teach higher order thinking skills—to challenge what they read, to make inferences, to relate what they read to their own lives, to connect personally. You are trying to reach individual students. With writing it is the same burden. Teaching proofreading of one's writing is a small group or one-on-one process. It takes a long time."

However, she points out that the Legislature has not yet passed a budget and there could be additional changes. Gov. Davis did knock down his school cuts from \$2.2 billion to \$1.5 billion after some hefty education lobbying; even a group of Tenderloin teachers went to Sacramento to protest.

PE MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Up on the roof, Valerie Persky is leading a class through a basketball dribbling exercise. The boys and girls, grinning broadly and trying to stay in a straight line, bounce the balls to the far end of the playground and back. Persky is quick to compliment them, quick to notice good responses and manners. She is also quick to sit someone down for inattention but just as quick to start another exercise and reclaim the sitters. Her lesson is also one in fairness and completion.

"I have seen rapid differences in the skills these kids can perform now," Persky says at the break. "In the beginning, most didn't

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The rebuilt Delta Hotel is transforming the Sixth and Mission streets area. PHOTOS BY LENNY LIMJOCO

Delta's ravaged site reborn as low-income housing

Bayanihan House will also be home to Filipino groups

BY MEG DIXIT

STANDING tall and commanding the land and airspace around it, the building at 88 Sixth St. is turning heads even while it's covered with steel, wood and plastic. The old brick building, long considered an eyesore by many, is getting more than a face-lift and is helping to change the aesthetics of skid row.

The old Delta Hotel, new inside and out, anchors the corner of Sixth and Mission, dominating it now as it did when it was built in 1912.

The five-story, unreinforced masonry building, of classical revival style architecture, will soon house residential apartments on the top four floors, and will be home to the Filipino American Development Foundation, among other nonprofits, on the ground floor. In the basement will be a common laundry and den for the residents.

"The previous owner of the building, Mr. Mario Borja, a Filipino American himself, envisioned a community space for Filipino Americans and he saw that TODCO Development Co. could serve as the vehicle to realize his dream of building such a haven," said Diego Sanchez, project manager of TODCO.

The Delta was engulfed by fire on Aug. 11, 1997, then abandoned for four years. TODCO, a nonprofit housing and business development company, purchased the site and put about \$1.1 million into the building. Lem Construction is managing the project, and the architect is Barcelon & Jang of San Francisco.

"There are 144 single-room occupancy units and eight studios with kitchenettes," said Sanchez. "The rooms measure between 10-by-12 to 25-by-15 feet and have shared bathrooms located down the hall. One of the studios is reserved for a resident manager still being sought."

The property, known as Bayanihan House, is managed by the John Stewart Co. The residential units are considered low-income housing, so tenants cannot earn more than \$27,700, which is 35% of \$79,200, the median San Francisco income. Rents will be

between \$430 and \$485.

The main tenant on the ground floor is the Filipino American Development Foundation, which is renting the space for \$1 a year for the next 20 years from TODCO.

"The Filipino community is big in the area but it's also ignored. This very visible space used by a prominent organization will help strengthen the community here," said Bernadette Cee, executive director of the foundation.



The FADF is raising money to make some tenant improvements on the floor to house other nonprofits such as Veterans' Equity Center, South of Market Employment Center and South of Market Health Services, among others, said Cee.

"We have raised \$100,000 so far but we need approximately \$1.5 million. Some of the financing is coming from the S.F. Redevelopment Agency, the Mayor's Office of Community Development, and some private donations too," said Cee.

Sanchez said residents will begin moving in this summer and ground floor occupancy is scheduled for next spring. ■



Brand-new units will soon be available for low rents.

Origin of the school and what it means to be a parent

There was a time when there were 1,200 elementary schoolchildren in the Tenderloin attending 47 different schools scattered across the city. It was a striking figure that the Bay Area Women's and Children's Center gleaned in a 1989 survey of families and residents.

Parents told the survey takers that they had never gone to their child's school, although they wanted to participate. Language was a problem. Too much time devoted to dropping off and picking up children was another.

These all helped stoke the nonprofit's Tenderloin Grades school Campaign. Hundreds of volunteers and BAWCC leader Midge Wilson were behind the push for an elementary school to which parents could walk their children and that would also have available community services, such as medical and dental clinics and a counseling center in the same building.

Scores of meetings with parents and school district officials ensued. And after eight years the school with its distinctive hand-painted tiles by Tenderloin children became a reality, no small thanks going to the passage of Proposition A in 1994. It is the Tenderloin Community School and Tenderloin Family Center.

"This school did not happen easily," the school pamphlet says. "It is the result of years of work by people who would not give up their dream, and took steps every single day to make sure the vision became real."

Jennifer Arens, a parent at the school for three years and a member of its site council, continues to be impressed at how – and how well – the school serves the community.

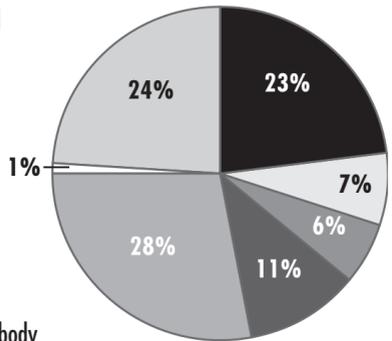
As a Tenderloin resident, she is a bit unusual. She busted her family out of an all-white Chicago suburb where she had been for years because she wanted a truer, diverse reality, one she saw in the world outside. Then, given multiple job opportunities by her employer, the Salvation Army, she chose San Francisco and then to live in the Tenderloin. She runs the Army's after-school program.

"I have been on tons of committees before I came here and it amazes me how the school prioritizes and how much it can speak with one voice," she says. "We all see what is needed and reach this agreement. My son is graduating but I am coming back next year again to volunteer."

– by Tom Carter

STUDENT (K-5) BREAKDOWN

Hispanic
Chinese
Filipino
Other white
African American
Other nonwhite
(Arab, Mongolian, etc.)
Decline to state



Demographics of Tenderloin Community School's student body

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know how to dribble a ball or jump rope or do a forward roll – real basic body moves. Even older children hadn't known these things – dribbling a soccer ball with their foot. Even kickball they didn't know."

Because of the fifth-graders' lack of experience, she had to start them at a second-grade level. And because of their size and inexperience they didn't learn as fast as younger kids. Some couldn't skip.

Classroom teachers are required to teach exercise, but it is far short of the organized activities and game rules that Persky pursues. From hula hoop to volleyball demonstrations, she hopes such "modeling" catches on. She tries to teach a physical lifestyle that ensures health, she says.

ANTIDOTE TO OBESITY

"The third-, fourth- and fifth-graders are overweight, as a whole," she states. "It's harder for them to move and they are much slower than the first-graders. Yes, obesity is a real chronic problem. The key to turning it around is integrating exercise in your life. I have tried to plant the seeds. I just hope they remember their skills and these exercises and games, especially if their parents don't give them a high priority. There are plenty of playgrounds around, but not a lot of open space."

The Tenderloin Community School can actually consider itself lucky to have had PE for the one year it did. Persky says that 90% of the city's schools don't have PE teachers. A few principals write grants for it, she says, but the paperwork is imposing.

"There are no gyms left either," she says. "They've been turned into cafeterias. Now it takes them three hours to eat in shifts."

Despite the cuts, certain kids next year will continue to benefit from sports in the array of after-school clubs funded by the Bay Area Women's and Children's Center that is located in a nearby Leavenworth Street storefront. In April, the group raised money to pay the teachers next year who will run such clubs as soccer, volleyball and swimming. Persky has the volleyball program, and with 25 kids this year, it was the largest of the three.

Moreover, Persky will return as a full-time third-grade teacher, thus becoming something of a silver lining in the cutback cloud. She'll be the resident PE information source for teachers.

"I have photo copies of all the games I can give them, too," she says. "And I know every kid in school." ■