

GOOD NEWS for...

GROUPS LOOKING FOR ALFRESCO EVENT SPACE

Hoping that a rise in wholesome activities will drive less wholesome denizens from Boeddeker Park, Rec and Park is offering neighborhood organizations free space to schedule barbecues, outdoor lunches, even ice cream socials. The latter is in the works, being planned — date TBA — by Presentation Community Senior Housing, Glide and St. Anthony's. TL organizations and special interest groups that would like to use the park should call Senior Director Rob McDaniels to make arrangements, 292-2019.

LOW-INCOME WORKING FAMILIES

The Board of Supervisors on July 13 unanimously passed Mayor Gavin Newsom's proposed tax credit for the city's low-income working families, modeled after the federal Earned Income Credit. The two-year pilot program, scheduled to begin in July 2005, will give qualifying families credits amounting to several hundred dollars a year. The city hopes private corporations and local foundations will kick in about half the estimated \$3 million to run the program. Only two other such programs are operating in the country. Coleman Advocates for Children and SF Works spent the last year getting the program approved. For info, call Margaret Brodtkin, 239-0161, or Terri Feeley, 217-5183.

WOMEN ONLY

Free entertainment, haircuts, massages, manicures, mini makeovers, lunch, informational booths and goodie bags are just the beginning at the third annual Women's Day at The Rose hotel, 125 6th St., Aug. 24, 11 a.m.-3.30 p.m. Survival is the theme of this day-to-take-care-of-yourself event, says Denise Jackson, support services manager at the Rose. Besides all the look-good and feel-good treats, there are workshops on real-life issues: Is Your Man on the Down-Low; Best Way to Survive Breast Cancer; I Survived CRACK; Silence IS Deadly — Domestic Violence; and I Survived (husband put out a hit on keynote speaker). For more information about this day of celebrating sisterhood: 543-0485 x 503.

FIVE-DAY-A-WEEK DRAW

The bustling U.N. Plaza just got busier — the Thursday and Friday antique and artisan market has added Mondays. Begun four years ago, the 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. white-tented outdoor bazaar features 100 vendors of collectibles, crafts and imports from all over the world. Now, with the Wednesday and Sunday Heart of the City Farmers Market, the Plaza will be drawing San Franciscans and tourists five days a week, a colorful, open-air replacement to the drug-dealing and transient activity of past years. Information: Mary Millman, 255-1923

— MARJORIE BEGGS

This column needs regular infusions. If you have some good news (no events, please), send it to marjorie@studycen-ter.org.

Gentrification elephant snorts again

Benefits district in the works; Project Connect hits TL

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

THAT elephant in the room — gentrification — was back again in July, bigger than ever, stomping around in front of members of the Futures Collaborative.

Shawn Collins, Tenderloin Sidewalk Improvement Program director, is the point man for a plan to make the Tenderloin a community benefits district. A variation of what normally is called a business improvement district, or BID, a community benefits district uses a special tax on property owners to fund needed neighborhood improvements. The difference is that the CBD will fund social services as well as street cleaning. Union Square has a BID.

The idea isn't new: California's first CBD formed 35 years ago. Today, Berkeley has three such districts, Oakland four, San Diego 21 and Los Angeles 35. The Tenderloin CBD, Collins said, would run from Market to O'Farrell and Van Ness to Mason.

Collins introduced Marco Li Mandri, president of the San Diego-based New City America, who's also working with reps from the Castro, mid-Market and lower Polk on forming benefits districts.

A CBD has a steady source of income to take care of cleaning streets, picking up trash and getting rid of graffiti, Li Mandri said. If approved in a neighborhood ballot, every property owner in the district would pay an assessment; private, nonprofit, government all share the costs. The city collects the money as it does other taxes, as a separate line item on the owners' annual property tax bill.

With community input, a board of directors decides how much money should be collected from each property owner and how to spend it. Supervisor Aaron Peskin is working on legislation, Collins later told The Extra, requiring that commercial renters comprise 20% of the board of any benefits districts formed in the city.

"We're also going to ask that our board have 20% residential renters," Collins said. "The whole idea is to institutionalize street cleaning, improve the public spaces, create safety and other service programs, and start marketing strategies to fill the empty commercial spaces in the Tenderloin."

A few eyebrows lifted. Some said they worried that the district assessment would come out of their wallets eventually if their landlords had to pay into it.

"It's possible that displacement and

gentrification may be partially spurred by this," Collins said, "but having a coalition of 20% tenants on the board will help them protect their interests."

Collins said how much property owners might be taxed "will be determined by a series of community meetings. My dream is to collect \$4 million a year from 500 to 600 buildings."

The CBD campaign is off to a good start, Collins said, with 24 owners and renters, from developer Art Evans to lawyers Zamora & Wynn, little guys like Peerless General Supply and big guys like the Hilton, have signed up to support it.

MAYOR'S PROJECT CONNECTS WITH PAIN

Marlowe Paraiso, the mayor's liaison to District 6, reported on Project Connect, which launched July 28 in the Tenderloin. He didn't have time to describe it in detail, so The Extra followed up later.

The Mayor's Office of Community Development and community agency staff lead teams of volunteers into low-income neighborhoods, knock on doors, and ask people about which services they get and what they need. Their checklist covers health, mental health, child care, housing assistance, immigration, legal services and more, 15 categories in all.

On the 28th, The Extra went to a jammed room at Glide Church, where scores of workers got last-minute instructions on how to conduct interviews and a rousing pep talk from MOCD Director Dwayne Jones.

"This project has been fantastic so far," Jones told The Extra. "We started in June, and in our first neighborhood, Sunnydale, we had 50 volunteers. At our second, in Bayview, we had 120. At our third, in the Western Addition, we had 230." He estimated the TL number at 175. Neighborhoods still to be assessed are the Mission, Chinatown and Potrero Hill. He hopes to reach 8,000 households before the project ends.

"We have 288 (sic) community-based organizations in San Francisco. The downside is that we haven't connected people to all that's out there," Jones said.

Carrying clipboards and clad in white T-shirts that said "Project Connect" or "M.O.C.D.," the volunteers formed into teams of 10 or more and fanned out to 16 SROs and apartment buildings.

Team 2's destination was 820 O'Farrell, the Jordan Apartments, 55 units of supportive housing operated by Conard House, and 835 O'Farrell, the Hotel Iroquois, Community Housing Partnership's 73-unit SRO, also supportive housing.

Among the 12 team members were 6 adults and teenagers from Washington state, part of a contingent of 20 from the Lake Washington United Methodist Church in Kirkland, one woman explained, here in the city to work at Glide

for a week. Given a choice between volunteering in the kitchen this day and getting out on the streets, they chose Project Connect.

All the buildings participating in the project had a heads-up on the visit. The Iroquois manager decided to bring tenants to the lobby for the interview. Only three showed up, so three team members stayed to talk to them; the rest went to the Jordan.

Many people weren't home — it was lunchtime — or didn't answer. But one of the Washington women got lucky. On the fourth floor, a man was glad to answer her questions, and then some. He has trouble getting out of his room and over to St. Anthony's or Glide for lunch because his new meds make him too sleepy to get up in time.

At another apartment, she interviewed a man who said he was 59, but looked a decade older, and food was a big problem for him, too.

"I can't drink regular milk. It makes me sick," he said as he leaned against the door frame, in obvious pain. "And I can't afford that other stuff, that nonmilk stuff. It's way too expensive."

He said he thought he'd heard about some services offered in the building, but he'd never used them. The Washington woman promised she'd let someone know he needed help, said she knew it was tough and she knows how he feels.

"You don't know how I feel," he came back, a little snappish. "No way you can know."

He dropped his head and shook it back and forth. "I don't have much food left in the house — only some cereal and some milk, you know, the milk that makes me sick. And I haven't been out of my room for a week."

At the bottom of the one-page services questionnaire and checklist are only two blank lines for the interviewer's comments. Maybe the Jordan interviewer was able to write very small, small enough so the man's story could become part of Project Connect. ■

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