

U.N. Plaza dings don't daunt mayor

BY TOM CARTER

U.N. Plaza and Civic Center Park recently made a worldwide Top Ten Worst parks and plazas list. But the report card didn't faze Mayor Newsom because he believes the city's plans for the United Nations' 60th birthday party next year will turn things around. The changes, vague at this point, involve the guidance of architect Lawrence Halprin, who designed the plaza, and lots of art work.

The Project for Public Spaces, a New York-based, globe-trotting environmental design outfit, placed U.N. Plaza at No. 3 on its Worst Squares and Plazas list. Civic Center Park landed at No. 7 on its Worst Parks list. The bad news showed up in the project's September Special Parks issue on its Website.

"San Francisco is one of the worst civic centers we've seen," PPS President Fred Kent told The Extra by phone from New York. "It's just a bunch of buildings that are unrelated. Nothing unites them, and nothing is going on in the public space. But Boston is the worst."

PPS visits 70 cities worldwide each year and Kent said he had visited San Francisco just two weeks before the ratings went up. U.N. Plaza, the Halprin creation of 27 years ago, is beyond redemption, Kent said. His observations of the seedy hangout echoed criticism the Board of Supervisors heard last year when a task force proposed removing the plaza's granite fountain to stop the loitering.

Halprin objected to that plan and the sapes turned it down.

"The investment was too big for the return," Kent continued. "It needs things to do there. The farmer's market shows the potential for activity. But as it is, U.N. Plaza is a sinkhole. And I think it's dangerous."

Mayor Newsom was spared the East Coast quotes but not the world rankings Sept. 24 at an informal sit-down in his office with representatives of the Neighborhood Newspaper Association. Asked for his reaction, he relished the chance to promote the big doings being planned to celebrate the founding of the United Nations here in June 1945.

"It's almost like a setup question," Newsom said with a smile, as he launched into plans for enhancing the plaza and the park that he said will start in a couple of months. A key player in the plan is the 87-year-old Halprin, who also designed Justin Herman Plaza. The city will arrange for a number of art projects for the commemoration, Newsom said, including the creation of a mural on the side of a building yet to be designated. And he said he will invite 60 mayors.

Under a previous city plan, after several directionless years for U.N. Plaza, low-key renovations are already under way, all with Halprin's blessing. The Department of Public Works, using a \$936,000 federal grant and \$450,000 local funds, will put bollards and chain around the fountain that is now off-limits and surrounded by yellow plastic chains with No Trespassing signs. DPW will



PHOTO BY LENNY LIMJOCO

Off-limits now, the U.N. Plaza fountain will stay that way when it gets chained off later this year. Other plaza changes for next year's U.N. birthday celebration officially are not yet even in the planning stage.

relocate to another site the plaza's Simon Bolivar statue. It will replace and add more walkway lights for finer illumination at dusk, remove an extension of the wall leading into the plaza from Leavenworth and put bollards and chain around the grassy area near the BART entrance, making it a reservable space for art and music offerings, according to project manager Judi Mosqueda.

But an improvement that could foster the vitality that critics say U.N. Plaza so desperately needs is DPW's installation of water and electrical capabilities for kiosks to locate there.

"These could be sandwich and coffee and information kiosks," Mosqueda said.

"And it could bring more people into the plaza."

It won't happen soon for an area that is a convergence for so many interests.

"It's very tricky to get a consensus in this part of town," Mosqueda added. "We had to find what meets the needs of all. But there is no lack of support for this. And we've coordinated with Lawrence Halprin all along the way and he does support this. I just want to get it done before any other changes begin for the U.N. (commemoration)."

The mayor's office said Halprin serves on the planning committee.

"The problem is the planning is in its infancy stages," said Darlene Chiu of the mayor's office. "But the city is preparing in

style."

As for the positive side of the Project for Public Spaces' ratings, San Francisco's Washington Square ranked No. 10 among the world's finest squares, and Golden Gate Park rates No. 14 among parks. ■



TENDERLOIN AIDS RESOURCE CENTER

Outreach and Community Events October 2004

Health Education Forum

Topic: Hepatitis C and Drug Use

Speaker: Joey Tranchina, M.A., APAN & Hepatitis C Global Network

Date/Time: October 27th, 2004, 6-8 pm

HIV Education Forum

Topic: Stages of Change: Readiness to Go On HIV Medication

Speaker: Andrew Reynolds, Haight Ashbury Medical Free Clinic

Date/Time: October 20th, 2004, 6-7 pm

Location for Forums: 175 Golden Gate Ave. (St. Boniface Marion Group Room); light meal will be provided

Client Advisory Panel CAP

Come talk with Alexander Fields, Consumer Board Representative; Tracy Brown, TARC's Executive Director and program managers about plans for TARC. Also provide input on new services and how we can improve.

Date/Time: October 27th, 11:30-1:00

Volunteer for TARC

Orientation: October 20th, 21st, 22nd, and 25th, 183 Golden Gate Ave.

You must pre-register for volunteer trainings. Stop in and see Ned Howey at TARC or call Ned at (415) 934-1792

For the current groups' schedule or more information, call 415.432.7476 or go to www.tarc.org



CENTRAL CITY EXTRA is published monthly by San Francisco Study Center Inc., a private nonprofit serving the community since 1972. The Extra is published through grants from the S.F. Hotel Tax Fund and the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund. The contents are copyrighted by the San Francisco Study Center, 1095 Market Street, Suite 602, San Francisco, CA 94103.

PHONE: (415) 626-1650
 FAX: (415) 626-7276
 E-MAIL: centralcityextra@studycenter.org
 EDITOR AND PUBLISHER: Geoffrey Link
 SENIOR WRITER/EDITOR: Marjorie Beggs
 COPY EDITOR: Gerry Fregoso
 REPORTERS: Tom Carter, Ed Bowers
 DESIGN AND LAYOUT: Carl Angel
 DESIGN CONSULTANT: Don McCartney
 EDITORIAL ASSISTANT/CIRCULATION: Rumi Eto, Steve Surncey
 PHOTOGRAPHERS: Lenny Limjoco, Mark Ellinger
 CONTRIBUTORS: Adrian D. Varnedoe, Diamond Dave, William Crain, Mark Hedin, Phil Tracy, John Burks, Eric Robertson, Meg Dixit
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Central City Extra is a member of the SAN FRANCISCO NEIGHBORHOOD NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION

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