

Laundromat opens in long-vacant laundry

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

For six years, the storefront at 372 Ellis was a hell hole, vacant except for the rats running freely and electrical wires hanging from the ceiling. Today, it's Blue Water Wash — a pristine, 30-washer, 30-dryer laundromat.

Why did owner Jeff Cleary take a 10-year lease in the heart of the Tenderloin?

"There are a lot of people here but not many clean, nice laundromats," he says. Cleary previously owned a laundromat in the Sunset District, on Taraval and 32nd Avenue. He sold that business and took on this new venture, sensing an unfilled need, he says.

Blue Water Wash, on the ground floor of a five-story, 32-unit apartment building, formerly was Ellis Street Laundry. Cleary says the space was vacant for so long because the building owner had a tough time finding a tenant. Besides rats and wires, there was a car parked in the middle of the floor.

"When I took over the lease in October 2004, the front of the building basically wasn't there," he says. "I think one of the tenants just drove her car in and left it there."

Blue Water's a sea change from that. Painted in crisp, nautical white with blue trim inside, the 1,800-square-foot space is well-lit and has gleaming new front-load washers in four sizes, a bank of dryers, big metal tables for folding laundry, colorful pictures above the dryers done by kids from the Tenderloin playground, and a mezzanine around three sides of the room where Cleary plans to add an Internet café. He redid the storefront in classy Deco-style glass brick that lets natural light into the space.

Neighbors seem happy with the new

business, which opened March 1, especially because they've had to wait so long for it, Cleary says. He was just about ready to open when a series of plumbing leaks from the floors above destroyed much of his work, even causing several sections of his ceiling to collapse.

When Urban Solutions surveyed ground floor uses for its *Tenderloin Neighborhood Profile* in 2004, it tallied 12 coin-op laundromats between Market, Van Ness, Post and Powell streets. Cleary says only new buildings and some renovated SROs in the TL have their own laundry facilities, leaving lots of people with dirty clothes and few places to get them clean.

"One nearby laundromat has 10 machines, but only five of them work. Some places are really expensive, too," Cleary says. "I think I'm a little lower-priced than my competitors."

Blue Water charges \$1.75, \$3.50, \$4.25 and \$5.50 a load for washers, depending on their size: The 19 smallest ones hold up to 20 pounds of laundry, the largest one 75 pounds — "fits two king-size quilts with room to spare," Cleary says. Dryers cost 25 cents for 10 minutes.

Blue Water Wash opens every day at 7 a.m., closes at 11 p.m. and there's always an

attendant on duty. Of the four attendants, who work in shifts, three live in the neighborhood, Cleary says.

Cleary likes to think that more and more neighbors will come to share one of his abiding pleasures: "I really like washing clothes. If the machines work well, the store is clean, and people have a nice, hassle-free place to do their wash, hopefully our customers will feel the same way." ■



PHOTO BY LENNY LIMJOCO

Jeff Cleary has a 10-year lease for his Blue Water Wash, just down Ellis Street from Glide.

SOUTHSIDE

SoMa Health Center plans to move, nearly double in size

The \$6-a-day parking lot on Seventh Street between Howard and Folsom will make way for a \$27 million South of Market Health Center and 49 units of affordable family housing. Groundbreaking begins next February.

The federally funded center for people who can't afford health care will move 1½ blocks from the converted warehouse that it has occupied for 31 years at 551 Minna. The center and Mercy Housing California are the project sponsors.

The health center treats 5,000 patients a year now, 40% of them dually diagnosed men, many from the Sixth Street corridor. About 15% of all clients come from the Tenderloin, according to Marilyn Griffin who heads the center's capital campaign.

With the addition of the new center, the number of patients served is

expected to jump to 8,000 a year, or 30,000 visits.

The new clinic will occupy the first two levels (20,000 square feet) of the five-story building. It will have 16 exam rooms (up from eight), five dental rooms (now there are two), an X-ray lab and pharmacy.

The three stories above the clinic, plus a separate four-story building that will be built at the back of the lot and face Moss Street, will contain 49 units of affordable housing for families below 60% of area median income.

Mercy Services Corp. will manage the units, 15% of which will be three-bedroom apartments and the rest one- and two-bedrooms.

Mercy Project Manager Rosalba Navarro says the project, called Westbrook Plaza, will be complete 16 months after construction starts. ■

— TOM CARTER

California

California is a garden of Eden, a Paradise to live in or to see.

But believe it or not, you won't find it so hot if you ain't got no do-re-mi.

— WOODY GUTHRIE



TENDERLOIN AIDS RESOURCE CENTER Outreach and Community Events April 2006

HIV Services Forum

Topic: All About Medicinal Marijuana

Speaker: Sean Lackey, Hope_net

Date/Time: Wednesday, April 19, 5:30 pm - 6:30 pm

Health Promotion Forum

Topic: Acupuncture and Nutrition

Speaker: Quan Yin, Healing Arts Center

Date/Time: Wednesday, April 26, 2006, 5:30 pm - 6:30 pm

Location for Forums: TARC, 191 Golden Gate Ave.
light meal will be provided

Client Advisory Panel

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: Wednesday, April 12 11:30 am - 1 pm;

Wednesday, April 26, 11:30 am - 1 pm

Volunteer for TARC

Orientations: Sunday, April 9, 10 am - 5 pm (lunch provided)

Sunday, April 23, 10 am - 5 pm (lunch provided)

183 Golden Gate Ave.

You must register for volunteer trainings. Stop in/call David (415) 934-1792.

For current groups' schedule or for more information call: 415.431.7476 or go to www.tarc.org

TARC TENDERLOIN AIDS RESOURCE CENTER

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