

St. Anthony's serves 33 millionth meal

Itinerant musician, 62, hits milestone with meatloaf and mashed potatoes

BY TOM CARTER

AFTER Father John Hardin's blessing before 200 sit-down guests and volunteers, St. Anthony Dining Room served its 33rd millionth free meal shortly after 11 a.m. on Oct. 12 to Bobby Perry, a 62-year old musician.

The congenial 6-footer was sitting at a table with three others in the far corner of the spacious 2,500-square-foot hall. It was his second tray of meat loaf, mashed potatoes and green beans and a pastry that established the historic mark, and a phalanx of cameramen and reporters, several of them young women with radio microphones, rushed to his side.

To the inevitable question, "How's the food?" Perry smiled and issued his self-styled Michelin grade: "It's better than in some restaurants." Then, he had the disarming honesty to admit to the young ladies, "I'm enjoying the attention, too."

St. Anthony's has been serving free meals to the homeless, low-income and anybody else who wants to wait in the long line that snakes outside up Jones Street, around the corner and down Golden Gate Avenue every day since Oct. 4, 1950. That's the date Franciscan friar Alfred Boeddeker opened the doors at 45 Jones St. and served 400 meals.

Now, 2,500 meals are served daily, 25% more than in 2002.

The million-meal milestones used to come every three, five or 10 years. But they arrive more frequently now.

"Just over a year ago, we served our 32nd millionth," Father Hardin, St. Anthony Foundation's executive director, said. "The need for solutions to hunger in our community is urgent."

Destitute and low-income folks, from travelers with backpacks to scraggly street people to people in wheelchairs, sit and mix easily at the 180 blue Formica tables. Lines of volunteers — 40 a day — swoop down the aisles bringing hot food trays from the kitchen. The light gray linoleum floors are so clean they glisten. Pleasing murals of seascapes and countryside landscapes adorn the beige walls.

The meal is served between 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m., except after the 15th of the month when the crowd increases because money gets scarce. Then the doors open 15 minutes earlier.

The briefly famous Perry, a life-long traveling musician originally from Chicago, lives around town in cheap hotels ("in the Hindu Hilton," he'll say). He has been coming to St. Anthony's for nine years, "just when I need to," he said. Accompanying himself on guitar for the guests, he has sung jazz and blues during the meal. He also volunteers on Thursdays to fill and distribute brown bag lunches.

Now he is struggling with a new project. He is trying to distribute his two CDs, "Love Camouflage" and "In The City." He wrote, arranged and performed all the tunes on both CDs.

"I'm a musician trying to become a businessman



PHOTO BY LENNY LIMJOCO

Father John Hardin celebrates the milestone meal served to musician Bobby Perry, his second tray of the day.

and start a business and a record label," he said. "I've got very little money and I'm running into brick walls," he said.

But he and thousands of others always know where a hot meal in the Tenderloin will be. ■

Turk St. methadone clinic has ties to CMPC

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

ONE of the properties California Pacific Medical Center bought last year to make way for its proposed medical office building was at 1040 Geary. The three-story structure, a clinic operated by Bay Area Addiction Research and Treatment, closed its Geary facility on one day in September and opened the next day at 433 Turk.

"We started renting the Geary building in the early 1980s and later bought it," said Evan Kletter, CEO of BAART, a nonprofit founded by his father in 1977, that provides substance abuse services, including 12 methadone clinics in California.

At the end of the October Tenderloin Futures Collaborative meeting, Kletter got up and invited everyone to the Oct. 25 open house at the new Turk Street clinic.

Neighbors rarely roll out a welcome mat for sub-

stance abuse providers that want to locate in their community, so despite a David and Goliath-sounding situation, Collaborative members showed little sympathy and pinned Kletter to a different mat.

"How many clients do you have, and what's BAART doing to keep them from hanging around outside the clinic during and after hours?" one person asked after citing the Tenderloin's glut of providers and clients.

"We have 600 clients and a security guard when we're open, seven days a week, 7 a.m. to 3 p.m.," Kletter said. "We're sensitive to the community, but I haven't thought much about our responsibility when we're not open."

"But that is exactly what being a good neighbor is," shot back Michael Nulty, resident and president of Alliance for a Better District 6.

Kletter promised to consider ways to keep BAART's clients from adding to sidewalk problems.

Two weeks after the meeting, The Extra talked with Kletter about BAART's move from Geary to Turk and its negotiations with CMPC.

When CMPC began "going down the block, snapping up sites," Kletter and his brother, Jason, BAART's president, decided that they'd sell only if they could open a better clinic in a different location.

"We found the Turk Street site fit our needs better," he said. "More of our clients come from the [94102] ZIP code, and we could install an elevator and do other things to improve the building. We've always put a lot of resources into our facilities, making them look good so anyone would feel comfortable coming to them."

CMPC's purchase of 1040 Geary was "a really fast transaction," Kletter said. BAART rented it back from CMPC for about six months while it prepared 433 Turk.

Clinics like BAART, most of whose clients rely on daily doses, can't have service gaps, Kletter said. "We closed Geary one day and opened Turk the next."

At the open house, he gave The Extra a personal tour of the new digs. The 10,000-square-foot two-story space, formerly a law office, is efficiently laid out and attractive — lots of exposed brick, olive and dark lemon painted walls, sharp black doors, nice carpet, checkerboard linoleum tiles.

After methadone clients check in, they go to the dispensing area to receive their dose

— a specific amount that's computerized, based on information collected by professional staff and entered in the client's record. Licensed vocational nurses and psychiatric techs, sitting at counters behind plastic barriers with large holes cut in them, measure the liquid doses into cups, which they pass through the holes.

For about two-thirds of the 600 clients on methadone maintenance, the drug must be consumed on the spot, and there's no loitering inside once the drug is ingested. The other 20% to 30% of clients considered stable enough to do "take homes" pick up their methadone in vials.

"In either case, we have a strict dose-and-leave policy," Kletter said. "I'm certainly aware now that the community wants us to watch the people we serve, and we will." ■

Central City Democrats gets official approval

THE San Francisco Democratic County Central Committee met Oct. 25 and chartered the city's 28th Democratic club — the Central City Democrats. The committee heard comments from six members of the new group, which was voted in unanimously.

Democratic clubs work to get out the vote, distribute slate cards, endorse candidates and promote the Democratic Party's endorsements. Each club president becomes a nonvoting member of the Central Committee.

"That's really important for us," said Michael Nulty, the new club's secretary, who also is president of Alliance for a Better District 6. "It means that in all committee discussions, there's representation for our district neighborhoods and their needs."

Other officers — all District 6 residents — are Rick Hauptman, president, also president of North Mission Neighborhood Alliance and a 30-year Democratic fundraiser and supporter; Marvis Phillips, vice president, Tenderloin block captain and former NOMPC president; and Susan Bryan, treasurer, also treasurer of Alliance for a Better District 6 and a NOMPC board member.

The Central City Democrats meet quarterly, with monthly executive committee meetings. Since forming early last year, it has sponsored four community and voter education events. More information: 339-VOTE. ■

—MARJORIE BEGGS

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