

Nice surprise in 6th Street renaissance

Renovation for bistro reveals 1914 bakery

BY TOM CARTER

SURPRISES big and small keep tumbling out of the Sixth Street makeover. An uptown bar name that seemed coy and alluring turns out to be a bust. Poking behind a defunct pawnshop's Peg-board walls opens up an intriguing — and eminently useful — past.

Those pawnshop discoveries in fact have led to the most transformative venture of more than 60 projects that Urban Solutions has helped nurture on the street. Not only will the one-story building at Sixth and Stevenson sport the corridor's first rooftop restaurant, it will have a bakery behind it resurrected from its 1914 roots, its original ovens still intact. (See sidebar.)

But subtler changes affect the changing image of the street, and they harken desires not for mis-

placed gentrification but for respectability and credibility.

The Playbar at Sixth Street and Mission figured out that its chic name had baggage. Women who hadn't been inside hesitated to enter. It wasn't just the

neighborhood's skid row reputation spooking them. Across the street and next door are X-rated adult video and sex toys stores. Is it a hoochie-coochie bar, or what?

"There wasn't any striptease," Jenny McNulty, executive director of Urban Solutions, told 50 people at the Yerba Buena Alliance January meeting in The Westin hotel on Third Street. "We suggested they'd probably do better with a different name, like The Club, and maybe getting a glass door so people could see inside."

The bar — which didn't have an image problem with its customers when it was The Poppy — is a client of the economic development nonprofit that has been working with the Redevelopment Agency since 2003 on a Sixth Street corridor makeover.

Urban Solutions lines up new businesses to fill vacant storefronts and it arranges matching Redevelopment loans for improvements to existing businesses. With the city contributing palm trees, better street lighting and wider sidewalks — the upward evolution of skid row has been dramatic.

Playbar heeded the advice and recently stenciled its new name — The Room — on the top window near the new glass front door and made its basement into a lounge that has become a favorite for private parties. The Chronicle often has sendoffs there for its stream of departing employees.

McNulty said Urban Solutions' efforts have added 33 businesses to Sixth from Market to Harrison streets and has completed 62 projects from façade improvement to redesigns.

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Mr. Dick leans on a parking meter to talk with friends on the street.

CENTRAL CITY

EXTRA

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OBITUARIES



PHOTOS BY BRANT WARD, COURTESY OF S.F. CHRONICLE 2006

Michael Dick (right), who was featured in a Chronicle series, is hugged on the street by two friends.

Memorials for 7

MICHAEL DICK Dies watching TV with friends

HOMELESS off and on — mostly on — for the last 24 years, Michael Dick gained some notice when Chronicle reporter Kevin Fagan followed his scavenging activities in a three-part "Shame of the City" series in October 2006. Mr. Dick's story appeared shortly after he found permanent housing at the Coast Hotel.

That summer, Fagan and photographer Brant Ward had followed Mr. Dick on his two-mile shopping cart trek from Kearny and Sutter streets up Market Street to the Duboce Avenue recycling center. He'd been doing that daily for three years, ever since he lost his delivery job at a downtown florist, Fagan reported.

Life on the street was hard for him, Fagan wrote: "What he wanted more than anything was a home."

Mr. Dick, who had emphysema, died Dec. 29 at age 53 in the lobby of the hotel where he had lived for 15 months. He'd been sitting quietly, so quietly that his passing went unnoticed for two hours.

"I was sitting right next to him, us just watching the TV, him just looking like he was asleep, until someone noticed he looked really pale," said fellow resident Steven White, still shaken by the experience. "If we'd have called [the paramedics] earlier, he might be here today."

Everyone at the Jan. 7 memorial for Mr. Dick remembered him as polite, self-reliant, quiet, intelligent, someone who was beginning to successfully make the transition from the streets to the hotel community.

"I could see the adjustments he was making in his life," said Rodney Mitchell, the Coast's assistant support services manager. "That's challenging, going from homeless to housing, but I saw him spending more time with the other residents. I'm glad we could provide for him."

While working on the Chronicle series, Fagan and Ward both developed a strong attachment to Mr. Dick and visited him regularly at the Coast.

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