

GOOD NEWS for...

60,000 MUNI RIDERS Last August, about 2,500 San Franciscans bought Muni Lifeline Fast Passes — a \$45 value for \$35. Muni has offered the special monthly pass for more than two years but is disappointed with sales, according to Razzu Engen, Tenderloin Housing Clinic's transit outreach coordinator. The Human Services Agency estimates 60,000 people are eligible, says Engen, who, under THC's Transit Justice Project, has been charged with pumping up the sales. The \$10 savings may seem small, he says, especially compared to \$10 senior and disabled passes; still, over a year, a Lifeline pass purchaser can save \$120, enough for some necessities and a few indulgences. To buy a pass, bring photo ID and proof you're in a government benefit program to 170 Otis or 3120 Mission. Once qualified, you also can buy a pass at 11 South Van Ness. Here's the catch: Passes are on sale for four days only, the two business days before and after the first of the month. Engen and others meeting with Supe Aaron Peskin and Muni officials recommend lowering the pass price and adding sales sites and days to buy them. Call Engen for details: 775-7110 ext. 110, or go to munilifeline.org.

RECOVERING VETS At the Ambassador Hotel, a group of residents meets weekly at the second-floor Listening Post and in January began writing letters to recovering vets at Walter Reed Hospital. It was the idea of 20-year resident Cecil Baker, a regular at the afternoon sharing program that Network Ministries started 24 years ago. "The first 10 people I talked to about this said they didn't want to do it because they are against the war (in Iraq)," Baker said at the first letter-writing session Jan. 16. "It doesn't make sense. It's sad they confuse the person with the war." Tom Laurent, one of two dozen residents who drifted in over an hour, had no such compunction. He gobbled down chocolate cake that Network hosts Francine Osenton and Francie Inesi provided along with homemade cupcakes and tea, then wrote his letter. "I'm a Listening Post regular," Laurent said. "It's a place where people listen to residents and feel for them." Still, guilt by association, akin to old anti-Vietnam War feelings, was hard for some to shake. "A pro football player quit and went over there and got killed — that was stupid," said one man who declined to write a letter. "I have people over there, and some have died," said another who refused. "But it's good to hear something good from someone," offered a man who was undecided. Leo, a self-confessed 30-year IV drug user, said his hands suffered from neuropathy and he didn't want to write. But he said he would put his name on a letter if someone wrote one for him. Inesi volunteered. At the end of the month, four letters had been written. Network Ministries put them in a big envelope and mailed them to the hospital.

MEDICAL CANNABIS USERS The California Supreme Court ruled Jan. 24 that employers can legally fire medical pot users — not for smoking on the job but in their own homes outside work hours. The ruling in the case of *Ross v. RagingWire* upheld the court's own previous ruling, in 2002, that defined physician-approved cannabis users as "no more criminal than" anyone who takes a prescription medication. The same day as the high court ruling, Assemblyman Mark Leno announced he will introduce a bill "in the coming weeks" to protect pot patients' right to employment. "The people of California did not intend that patients be unemployed to use medical marijuana," Leno said. The bill "secures a medical cannabis patient's right to use their doctor-recommended medication outside the workplace."

If you have some good news, send it to marjorie@studycenter.org or tom@studycenter.org.

Food-buying habits in Tenderloin

TNDC focus group expresses great fear for safety

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

TWELVE Tenderloin residents sat down in November and gave focus group moderators an earful about how lousy it is to try to buy groceries in their neighborhood.

"I call a [nearby] store 'the crack store' because of the clientele, because a lot of the drug dealers [who frequent the store] would take your money," one participant was quoted in a report from Planning for Public Health, which conducted the focus group for TNDC. "If you're going to go buy milk, you're going to lose your life buying milk."

The low-income, ethnically varied group members, all 30 to 60 years old, were served pizza and soda but weren't paid to participate. None own cars, an important factor in a neighborhood with no supermarket. Most reported spending five or six hours a week grocery shopping.

"I go to Costco. I go to three different Safeways," said one, then listed the locations and the buses needed to get

there and back.

"It's true you can get the fruits and vegetables you need in the Tenderloin. [But] they aren't always fresh. I wouldn't say rotten, just not as fresh," commented another.

High-priced, low-quality food drove the participants outside the neighborhood to shop, they said, as did fears for their safety.

"If there are more than two people in the store, I will turn around and walk out," said one. Others told of being mugged while shopping.

Ironically, because it's so hard to get the food they want to cook at home, many group members reported that they eat out at local restaurants a few times a week, usually a higher-priced alternative to home preparation. About half the participants have full kitchens, the others just microwaves and refrigerators.

Planning for Public Health, a program of the Oakland nonprofit Public Health Law & Policy, also created a written survey of food shopping habits that TNDC handed out to 250 residents in October. In the 98 returned surveys, 43% said

they spent \$5 to \$15 per visit at small Tenderloin markets, and 27% spent that outside the neighborhood. Also, 48% spent that amount on fast food every week, and 24% spent that at sit-down restaurants.

In its report on the focus group, Planning for Public Health concluded that residents would like to be able to walk to a nearby grocery store that's large enough to stock a good variety of food — especially fresh produce, meat and dairy — but that doesn't sell liquor, cooking utensils or other nonfood items.

Focus group members wanted a safe environment with regular specials, but also didn't want a huge retailer that would "dwarf all the other types of stores," said one. "I've lived in neighborhoods that have these gigantic shopping stores, and they've been a disaster for the community."

TNDC sponsored the surveys to test the feasibility of leasing ground-floor space to a grocery store at Eddy and Taylor, the site of a 140-unit family apartment building that TNDC is developing. It's a ways off: completion 2012 or later. ■

Thumbs-down on \$750,000 condos, Trader Joe's

No affordable housing, but city would get \$5.5 million

BY TOM CARTER

IF plans hold, the Galaxy Theater at Van Ness and Sutter will fall to a wrecked ball and 107 market-rate condos plus a Trader Joe's store on the ground floor will rise, a proposal two community organizations would not endorse.

After hearing presentations from Oakland builder Bay Rock Residential at two Tenderloin meetings — the Alliance for a Better District 6 and Lower Polk Street Neighbors — residents weren't swayed by Marilyn Ponte, a Bay Rock partner.

The project, one block outside of District 6, seemed otherworldly to several TL residents among the 35 people attending the Alliance's annual meeting Jan. 8 in TNDC's Alexander Residence.

The 46 one-bedroom and 61 two-bedroom condos would start at about \$750,000, and be ready to move in by mid-2010.

In response to a question, Ponte said the building would include no affordable housing at all, as required by law. Instead, the builder would pay a "substantial" in lieu fee into a city fund to build affordable housing elsewhere. She later said the fee was \$5.5 million but she would not divulge the total project cost.

"The downside is that market-rate brings in \$750,000 to \$1 million condos and it changes the demographic of the neighborhood," said Jim Meko, an activist who serves

on several SoMa advisory committees and the Entertainment Commission. He was present to receive the Alliance's first annual Jim Berk Award for "outstanding leadership and public service." The late Jim Berk was a retired engineer and senior activist.

"Another downside is it

takes the site out of the hands of affordable housing (possibilities)," Meko said.

In other action, the Alliance re-elected Michael Nulty president, a post he has held since 2000. Others re-elected were Dennis Isner, secretary, and Terrance Alan, parliamentarian. ■

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