

6th Street: 8 new businesses will start this year

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At one point, the nonprofit identified the 13 worst buildings and — as added incentive to freshen up — got Redevelopment to double the matching money available to them. Aid for façade improvements went from \$9,500 to \$20,000 and interiors from \$25,000 to \$50,000. Seven owners responded, four passed but two, according to Urban Solutions, “did work on their own because they didn’t want to get involved in city contracts.”

Urban Solutions provided The Extra with additional figures: 33 vacancies existed in the corridor’s 76 storefronts in 2003; now 11 vacancies remain. In the five-year period, 12 businesses closed — four of them failed — but all have been replaced with others or will be this year.

Redevelopment has put \$482,000 into the project and has committed \$647,000 to work that’s under way.

The area’s proximity to Yerba Buena, or Emerald City as it was humorously called, is tantalizing. But attracting new businesses to the “diamond in the rough” corridor is an uphill pull. Knots of scuzzy loiterers, homeless folks and brown bag drinkers still dot Sixth Streets sidewalks. Drug use and auto break-ins are common.

“Hanging out isn’t illegal,” said Urban Solutions Project Director Tracy Everwine. “But if a business has a sign in the window (discouraging loitering) police can ask them to move on. Without police, it’s sometimes impossible to get them to move.”

It remains to be seen what impact Hospitality House’s planned SoMa senior and self-help drop-in center will have. It’s supposed to open in the Alder Hotel’s 169-181 Sixth St. storefronts. The city-funded facility may attract as many as 200 street people a day who are seeking help or respite. That it will have bathrooms will be a boon for the area, Everwine said.

The center is one of eight new tenants slated to open in 2008; six are under construction.

The Alder itself is a testament to Sixth Street evolution. For years it vied, inside and out, for worst SRO fleabag in the corridor. But in December 2005, after a \$1 million renovation that included new electrical, plumbing, windows and flooring, some



PHOTOS BY LENNY LIMJOCO

The view from Market Street down Sixth, which is undergoing a renaissance.

Redevelopment matching funds along with a \$48,000 façade improvement, the five-story hotel emerged as a glistening gem. Its battered storefronts had been boarded up for 40 years. Its nostalgic Art Deco sign — flamingo pink neon against a lime green background — has been restored and Everwine says the drop-in center’s sign will match.

But the Alder is delinquent with its paperwork. If businessman Henry Karnilowicz, who handled the work for owner Vijay Patel, can deliver receipts and progress reports on the interior work, the Alder would receive \$100,000 from Redevelopment. But now, after two years, it is unlikely, Everwine says. Karnilowicz failed to collect from Redevelopment \$25,250 each for the Sharon and Shree Ganeshi hotels, she said.

The drop-in center will have employment help, case management, and group support, holistic health, medical services and recreation.

It was supposed to be ready in October, but bureaucratic approvals and structural ADA compliance problems delayed the build out. Hospitality House Executive Director Jackie Jenks expects the center to open in summer.

Other new tenants this year: SF Print, a full service shop next to the Bayanihan Community Center; Dr. Jack Sinow Optometry at 71 Sixth St., an eye doctor who was at 71 Fifth St. for 28 years and lost his lease; Rancho Parnassus, a café for musi-

cians; the Northeast Federal Credit Union at 900 Howard at Sixth; Passion Café at 28 Sixth St., a red-brick French bistro that will supplant a pawnshop; Miss Saigon at 100 Sixth St., a Vietnamese restaurant across from the venerable Tu Lan and replacing Ginger’s at 100 Sixth St.; and Mi Tierra Market at Howard and Sixth.

SF Print, now operating, follows the feds. Since 1995, its owner has run KK Printing at 500 Larkin, catty corner from the Phillip Burton Federal Building on Golden Gate Avenue. The new shop is a block from the new Federal Building at Seventh and Mission.

Mi Tierra, which has two stores in the Mission, will be a 5,000-square-foot meat and produce grocery. It will compete with the modern-looking, 11,000-square-foot Harvest Urban Market three blocks away at 181 Eighth St. and Howard. The pricey Harvest Urban opened in June 2004 and operates 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. Urban Solutions helped it get financing.

The corridor community isn’t yet complete, obviously, but just eliminating darkened storefronts with lighted businesses has made the neighborhood safer, Everwine says. Some businesses have hired locally. Split Pea Seduction, a restaurant new in 2007, hired three employees from the neighborhood, she said.

“And there are more goods and services available to the community,” she adds. “We’d love to have a hardware store. We’re still working on it.” ■

In the works: French bistro with rooftop dining, bakery

WHEN contractor Steve Barton bought the one-story building at Sixth and Stevenson last year he had no idea that behind its deceptive Pegboard walls he’d discover early 20th century secrets to launch him on the biggest “transformative” project yet on Sixth Street.

“I only knew I had bought a brick building,” Barton said. “You could see it in the basement.”

What Barton had in mind was making a café out of a pawnshop.

Peeling back the Pegboard walls of the former Can B Loans pawnshop Barton found original 1910 red brick. On the building’s south side facing Stevenson Street he exhumed double wooden doors — one with glass paneling intact — that he’s restoring. It’s all the more fetching for the Passion Café, a French bistro, that he’s creating with partner Jacques Andre.

Beyond the walls, though, a sealed-off back room — as if answering his dreams — was his greatest discovery: a bakery. He figures it was an add-on built in 1914.

“I’ve always wanted a bakery,” the muscular Barton says as he shines light into one of two awesome 15-foot-deep, almost a century old, brick ovens. “And I’ve got everything I ever wanted.”

The ovens are in a 9-foot-high, white-tiled housing that runs 20 feet along the wall. Spit and polish could shine it up like

the old days when people must have clamored to the Stevenson Street door for hot bread, cakes and cookies. But the ovens would never pass city codes now.

Even so, the space will become a bakery with new ovens, a business that has been on Urban Solutions’ wish list since it began its Sixth Street improvement project with Redevelopment in 2003.

“This is the single most transformative project we’ve had,” said Tracy Everwine, Urban Solutions project director. The economic development nonprofit has helped more than 60 projects on the street in five years.

For Barton’s “extreme green” changes he will receive façade and tenant improvement matching funds from Redevelopment in amounts yet undetermined, Everwine said.

Besides the bakery, Barton has another new Sixth Street look planned for his main attraction: the café will have solar panel-covered, rooftop dining with a garden around it. Below, he’ll knock out the building’s wall that separated the pawnshop from the Rite-By Grocery and Liquor store, and increase the café width to 30 feet.

The doors will open onto Stevenson in time. They are covered now on the outside by a wall precariously holding a mural running the height and length of the building. The futuristic cityscape with embryonic images was painted by four artists who have since left town, Everwine says. It is popular

in the neighborhood, Barton says. But it has pieces missing, cracks throughout and it’s separating badly from its anchoring.

The Maryland Café was there before the pawnshop, Barton says, hovering over the precious door to show the old-timey pebbled glass in it.

“This is so much fun,” he said. ■

— TOM CARTER



New owner Steve Barton stands next to century-old double doors that had been walled over for decades.