

Bankruptcy won't affect AF Evans' affordable units

CEO predicts 'huge rent increases' throughout U.S.

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

THE early March announcement that housing developer AF Evans had filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy seemed to be more bad news for people in the central city already jittery about the economy. The Oakland company has been a big player in affordable housing in San Francisco, partnering in property acquisition and management with nonprofits, among them Asian Inc., Chinatown Community Development Center, Citizens Housing Corp. and Mercy Housing.

But the bankruptcy filing shouldn't alarm, said President and CEO Art Evans, who founded the company in 1977: "We plan to become even more active in affordable housing, even though the market-rate part of our business has really collapsed."

AF Evans operates three separate companies — development, property management and senior communities. Only the development subsidiary is in Chapter 11.

"The property management company is looking for more contracts and trying to expand here in San Francisco and in three other states," Evans said. "We're managing 6,000 units now and want it to grow."

Evans ran down the list of its property involvement in the central city.

In the coming weeks, he was expecting to close the sale of 245-59 Hyde St. to an unnamed buyer, he said. Tenderloin Housing Clinic's Central City SRO Collaborative has its offices at 259 Hyde.

"We acquired the three buildings there several years ago, and wanted to build market-rate condos, but the condo market has dried up," Evans said.

AF Evans also pulled out of the Central YMCA renovation project last summer. It had signed a purchase agreement to buy the Y in August 2005, and TNDC joined shortly after as a partner in renovating the site for affordable housing. Part of the deal included the Y's two parking lots, where AF Evans planned to build market-rate condos. That plan still was in effect two years later, but, by that time, the use of the main Y building had shifted to housing

for the homeless.

"The city wanted the Y to be its premier example of its homeless ventures," Evans said, "and soon we realized that TNDC could do all that we could do regarding the sharing of responsibilities for the project. We didn't want there to be duplication."

So AF Evans withdrew from the entire project, seemingly without acrimony. "[The withdrawal] was fortunate for us. We're happier running it alone," TNDC Director Don Falk told The Extra.

AF Evans still is actively managing the 81-unit Lassen Apartments at 441 Ellis, which it built with Asian Inc. as affordable senior housing in the late 1970s and renovated in 2002.

"[But] we have little to do anymore with our two joint ventures with Mercy Housing — Marlton Manor at 240 Jones and 201 Jones," Evans said. "And at 201 Turk, we're only tangentially involved now." AF Evans built the 175-unit 201 Turk in 1993 with Chinatown Community Development, which still

manages the building.

"It's my favorite project in the Tenderloin," Evans said. "I still go in periodically, just to see how things are."

Evans worries that the slipping economy bodes ill for affordable housing, even as he says his company will try to partner with others in that market.

"[This country] is planting the seeds for huge rent increases because so little is being built," he said. "When the economy does turn around, and especially on the two coasts, there will be an enormous shortage of rental housing."

One idea he's promoting is an old one: Get HUD back into the housing business for apartment stock. He's encouraged, he said, that Carole Galante, president and CEO of BRIDGE Housing — a large-scale San Francisco developer of affordable housing — was tapped by President Obama in March to be deputy assistant secretary for multifamily housing programs at HUD. ■

Art without ego: Sand paintings of Bhutan

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power and charisma that we will remain safe.

Ask any Tenderloin junkie why he likes heroin. He couldn't take struggling with the big picture inside his little mind anymore. He had to slow down. So he chose suicide, instead of meditation or sand painting.

Slow is best, my friends. But heroin is not the way. I remember the black woman with a beautiful face and big eyes, crouching on the trash in front of a rotted hotel. She couldn't have been more than 19, a junkie but a live work of art deader in the water than some museum artifacts.

She was as real as the sand painters and reminded me of one of the Dancing Dakinis, sacred female embodiments of wisdom presented in the Bhutan show and painted by anonymous meditation masters. The Dakinis rock. None of the lap dancers in the Tenderloin can hold a candle to them. Plus,

Western religions don't have any holy representative to compare to these sexy girls.

But of course the Dakinis are not real. They do not suffer. They are empty of ego. They are invisible and exist only in the mind. Only the man who painted them is more invisible. The heroin junkie was full of self. She was suffering.

My mind is a wild horse. I am not interested in anything elite. I cannot be depended on to believe anything that you do, they do, or even I do. But I do pay attention to my mind. It is full of lively and entertaining hatred and love. The "Sacred Arts of Bhutan" presents these two dualities as a unity.

Go to the show and let it affect you in your own way. I'm not a preacher. I don't care about converting you to anything. I have enough problems of my own. But the art is beautiful and its motivation is to benefit all, even you.

The Asian Art Museum is open free to the public the first Sunday of every month. ■

YOUR VOICE VOTE

STATEWIDE SPECIAL ELECTION TUESDAY, MAY 19, 2009

The Last Day to Register to Vote is May 4, 2009.

You must re-register if you move, change your name, or want to change your political party.

Your Polling Place May Have Changed!

The Department of Elections is combining polling places for the May 19, 2009 Statewide Special Election. Make sure to confirm the location of your polling place before going to vote.

Become A Permanent Vote-By-Mail Voter.

When you become a permanent vote-by-mail voter, a ballot will automatically be sent to you before every election. Voting by mail is convenient, easy, and secure.

Visit sfelections.org to download a voter registration form, a vote-by-mail application or to confirm the location of your polling place, or call the Department of Elections at (415) 554-4375.

Department of Elections
City and County of San Francisco