

'Doing away with private cars seems silly. After all, it's a street'

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they want no part in.

"No one from the city came in here and told us what they were going to do," said Andrew Vasquez, a long-time employee at Kick's clothing store, at 1071 Market St. "They just went about doing it. Business is bad, and with the street closures it's ridiculous. Instead of giving us customers, they're pushing them away."

"Bicyclists really love this," Papandreu said, "so do taxi drivers. People say that now they can hear the birds and the sound of stilettoes."

"We have the data for autos, pedestrians and bicyclists. What is happening at the storefront level is what we need you people to tell us."

So Central City Extra interviewed a number of mid-Market merchants to hear how the city's improvement efforts have affected their businesses. What we learned is that not one merchant wants cars off Market Street, and none could discern an effect on their business. ■

TAQUERIA CANCUN, 1003 Market St.

MANAGER Roberto Barcas said the traffic calming has had "no effect" on the burrito and taco business at Sixth and Market streets. The only change is that he sees more people on the street now. "But business — it's the same." ■

ELECTROMANIA, 1083 Market St.

KYONG Son Pak emigrated from Korea in 1983. He's owned and operated Electromania, a TV, DVD, music system, cell phone and camera outlet on Market near Seventh Street for more than 20 years. He doesn't think traffic rerouting is a meaningful response to the mid-Market Street blight.

"The city doesn't do enough to help the small businesses along this part of Market Street. The city gets more sales taxes from the big corporations than from the small store owners." He cited the irony of the city's anti-auto policy and the requests of CityPlace to build underground parking two blocks away. "The big corporations, the Wal-Marts, need the people to drive automobiles, so they need parking," he said.

Pak has observed the traffic-calming at work since it started in late September.

"The city has parking officers at Eighth Street and at Sixth Street all day. It would be better to have foot patrol officers on Market, one at Seventh and one at Sixth Street, then people could walk and shop."

"Look up the block. Every day they are selling stolen merchandise on the corner. At least once a month there's a robbery, or a stabbing on the corner. The city buys hotel rooms for people in the Tenderloin and a lot of those people come here during the day."

"Some drink too much, some do drugs,



James Patrick's family has been in business on Market Street since 1873. "Traffic isn't causing businesses to fail," he says.



Al Choi's godfather opened the jewelry store more than 40 years ago. He says more parking, not fewer cars, is what Market Street needs.

some treat the street like a restroom. Every day I clean in front of the store. Market Street won't be better until people get better. On Sundays it's dead. No cars, no people walking and shopping. Doing away with private cars seems silly. After all, it's a street." ■

CIGARETTES FOR LESS, 1053 Market St.

PETER Azar, who's managed his brother's smoke shop for seven years, said November was definitely slower than usual.

But he isn't ready yet to attribute it to the city's pilot project: "Most of our traffic is foot traffic. Still, I don't understand their point — I wish someone from the city would come down here and tell us." ■

PATRICK & CO., 1390 Market St.

PATRICK & Co. has been a fixture in San Francisco since 1873. James Patrick, grandson of the founder, and his son Jamie oversee their two office supply stores on Market Street — one in the Financial District, the other at Fox Plaza.

The venerable mid-Market strip seems to be at an all-time low, James Patrick says, estimating that ground-floor vacancy could be as high as 80%-90%. "About 7 or 8 p.m., just count the rolling doors that are down — it's not rocket science," he says. "But we do think that Market is a good street historically. It will be much worse if there's no traffic."

He's not in favor of the recent closure to private auto traffic. "It will reduce the vitality of Market Street all along the street," Patrick says.

"You need the vitality to sustain the businesses. What will happen is it will become sparsely traveled other than taxis, streetcars and bikes. People will cross the street at random and you'll have a whole other set of problems."

"Traffic isn't causing businesses to fail. Would you rather have girly shows and no traffic, or businesses and traffic? ... When Mary Jane from Walnut Creek wants to come to San Francisco, she wants the confidence that she can get across Market Street easily." Without that, Patrick figures, "she'll go to Walnut Creek shopping instead."

He mentions that he supported the recently defeated Measure D that would have illuminated the strip with flashy signage. What the area needs, he says, is "the willingness of the building department and city fathers to consider good development strategies for the area, and they've chosen not to do that," he said, citing a defeated redevelopment area proposal. "Make it less expensive to build — we need businesses there." ■

HIDDEN TREASURES, 1015 Market St.

HIDDEN Treasures, a store filled with hand-crafted clothing and jewelry from India, Tibet and Africa, nests on Market near Sixth Street. Eddie, the owner and proprietor, does-

n't think that Market Street traffic flow should be the city's first concern. "Business is hurting," he said.

"Without traffic, fewer people see the store, fewer people stop to shop. The big hotels hand out maps, but they tell people, Don't go past Fifth Street. They tell them not to go here, this part of Market. We have no residential neighborhood, no people to shop here."

"Better the city should help more business on the street," he lamented. Then they can stop the traffic."

On the prospects of CityPlace, a multistory retail mall planned to be built less than a block away on Market near Fifth, Eddie was less than enthused. "That's what? Target — the big stores? We need people who live and work here, then they shop here," he concluded. ■

HIMALAYAN CORNER, 1019 Market St.

AFTER years of working flea markets, Tsering, a Tibetan who's been in the country a decade, opted to try the bricks-and-mortar mode of retailing. A year ago, he opened his Himalayan Corner shop where he offers products made by refugees from Nepal and Tibet.

"I appreciate that people have the intentions to improve the street, but to be honest, I don't see any difference," he said when asked his impression of the traffic changes.

What is needed, he theorized, is to "make

it more lively. There are all kinds of characters who lead [prospective] customers to run away. Once a month, we should have some kind of street fair that can attract people." The weekly Civic Center farmers' market doesn't do enough to bring shoppers to the area, he said.

The street "has a wonderful national heritage," he said. "But right now it's a mess."

Citing New York's revitalization of Times Square in the '90s, he said that if "someone like Rudy Giuliani had the political will," the situation here might be different. Instead, he said, "it looks like a deserted town, with a lot of stores closed for years." ■

PIPER'S JEWELERS, 1066 Market St.

"THE biggest challenge besides the homeless is parking," says Al Choi, manager of Piper's Jewelers. "We have very large side-walks here, but there isn't much foot traffic. People would rather go somewhere more convenient."

More parking, not fewer cars, is the key to revitalizing Market Street, he said. He suggested reducing sidewalk size and installing diagonal parking spaces to give the area a much-needed lift.

Ralph Piper, Choi's godfather, opened the store in the 1960s, and Choi has managed it for about 10 years.

"You see people less and less every day," he said. "This is not a spot most people want to come to." The pilot program, he believes, is partly responsible for the recent decrease. ■

DOLCE & SALATO, 1145 Market St.

DOLCE & Salato used to be Caffe Trinity at 1145 Market St. since the 1980s. Erin Sherwood has worked at Dolce & Salato since Trinity was reincarnated in January 2009. Business is good — "We ARE making it," Sherwood said cheerfully, "though it started to fall off a couple of months ago and just now seems to be coming back."

Sherwood said she assumed the drop in business had something to do with BART and Bay Bridge changes. Until The Extra told her, she didn't even know about the traffic changes on Market Street right in front of the cafe.

"I don't think car drivers can even see us anyway, so the lack of cars probably doesn't affect us," she said.

But pedestrians and bicyclists — that's another story. If doing away with private vehicles on this stretch is proven to increase the number of people walking and pedaling, Sherwood believes cafe patronage would increase substantially. ■

RENOIR HOTEL, 45 McAllister St.

BYRON Yee, manager of the 18-year-old Renoir Hotel at Market and Seventh St.,

hasn't noticed any shift in his businesses fortunes lately, but he still has sharp opinions about the project.

"It's ridiculous," Yee said. "If you're going to keep it as a bike and bus thoroughfare, you're going to have to put some controls in there. You can't just close off Market Street."

Yee said the idea of installing green pods for outdoor seating areas with greenery was a "nice thought, but you have to work around the real problems first. Green pods are not a solution."

It is grubby, misbehaving street people that are the damper, he says. Yee spent years studying the street. He was chair of the Mid-Market Project Area Committee that worked 10 years on a Redevelopment Agency plan from Fifth to Tenth street. But the plan was buried by the Board of Supervisors.

"The street needs to get rid of vagrants," Yee said. "Not all of them are homeless."

"The police started more foot patrols a year ago and that was great," Yee said, standing in the lobby of the 100-year-old building as workers hung holiday wreaths while a cold rain fell outside.

"People talk about a pedestrian mall but that can't happen until we take care of certain issues. Another one is lighting. (Market Street) is not conducive for safe walking. Embarcadero to Fourth Street is still pretty dark and it's dark around here, too. Brightening it up will help get people going into shops and businesses."

Yee believes that before there can be a successful revitalization, the city needs to start offering better incentives to Market Street property owners. ■

MARKET STREET DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION, 870 Market St.

"RIGHT now, we haven't gotten a lot of feedback about the traffic restrictions," said Carolyn Diamond, executive director of the association that represents many businesses along the Market Street corridor. "Some retailers are saying they don't see a difference, but it's also a time of year when they're really busy, so it's hard to tell what the numbers mean."

She's sure that all her members would like more information about extending the car restrictions. "There is some fear and trepidation about it," she said.

Diamond also believes the city isn't doing enough to acknowledge the "elephant in the room — public safety," citing the stabbing of mural artist Jason Hailey in November. "You've got to address that issue if you want the street to be commercially viable." ■

— Merchant interviews were conducted by Daniel Powell, Mark Hedin, Jonathan Newman, Tom Carter and Marjorie Beggs.

Electromania
owner Kyong Son Pak, below, would rather have beat cops on the corners than to ban cars on Market Street.

Below: Erin Sherwood, right, and Jessica Deckert work the counter at Dolce do Salato. Sherwood didn't know cars were banned in front of her restaurant.
Center: Himalayan Treasures' owner doesn't think the city should be worrying about cars on Market Street with so many other problems on the street.

