Free toilet opens in TL

CBD funds W.C. at Rescue Mission — 3-month pilot

BY TOM CARTER

A new, free public toilet in the Tenderloin is expected to bring some blessed relief to the neighborhood after years of complaints in community meetings and to the police over people using sidewalks as bathrooms.

The Tenderloin Community Benefit District has contracted with the San Francisco Rescue Mission to open a unisex bathroom for the public five days a week starting Feb. 1. The Mission’s bathroom at 140 Turk St. is about 60 feet straight back from the entrance and visible behind a small stage. It will be open from 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, the neighborhood’s only free toilet open all day weekdays, except for the Main Library which is open seven days.

The program is a three-month pilot that ends May 1. From the CBD’s $1,900-a-month grant, the mission will hire a monitor to safeguard the toilet and collect data. If the data demonstrate a need is being met, said Dana Hilliard, acting CBD manager, the program will be refunded.

The budget didn’t include a line item for plumbing repairs, an omission some people in the know say may come back to haunt the project.

“We’ll just eat it,” he said. “Or, maybe we’ll get lucky.”

The project adds one toilet to a short list of free ones at Hospitality House’s Self Help Center, 290 Turk St.; Youth With a Mission, 357 Ellis St., Boeddeker Park and the Main Library.

The Rescue Mission’s Clint Ladine, also the CBD’s recently elected board president, said he had “thought of” the plumbing issue but hadn’t acted on it. He indicated the Mission would pay any plumbing costs.

“We’ll just eat it,” he said. “Or, maybe we’ll get lucky.”

The project adds one toilet to a short list of free ones at Hospitality House’s Self Help Center, 290 Turk St.; Youth With a Mission, 357 Ellis St., Boeddeker Park and the Main Library. But it doesn’t make up for the facility that was closed years ago.

The Tenderloin closer

Rev. Glenda Hope gives residents a caring sendoff

BY TOM CARTER

When someone dies among the Tenderloin’s poor, there’s a crying need for a dignified closure for the life that has passed, regardless of how it was lived.

One person, more than anyone, has answered the call to perform this final task. She’s 5-foot and rail-thin and at 74 has grandmotherly gray hair. Sometimes she’s mistaken for a nun because of her clerical collar. She has fearlessly traversed the seedy hood’s unforgiving streets for more than three decades on her way to honor the dead in ceremonies in low-rent hotels.

Rev. Glenda Hope, the closer, is a fixture among the residents who may one day unknowingly receive her services. In a low voice tinged with a Southern drawl — her ice-blue eyes soft and compassionate — she bestows on prostitutes, drug addicts and dealers, robbers, alcoholics and the mentally troubled the identical reverence she gives to the disabled, low-income workers, immigrants and pensioners who dominate the central city’s demographics.

Her last name — like a beacon to the city’s sketchiest neighborhood — is from her late husband, Scott Hope, a San Francisco State University education professor, who died in 1997.

The memorials are a final dignity to those who couldn’t have them,” Hope says. “They offer a place of comfort and the beginning of healing for mourners.”

Most memorials take place in SRO lobbies or community rooms, which vary from threadbare and musty to clean and cheery. Sometimes only a couple of people show up and a few who do may not have even known the deceased. Memorials with 40 to 50 mourners are exceptional. A bouquet or two is always on a table in front, sometimes photos, cards and mementos. Mourners are anxious for closure, yes, but a side attraction to the event is free food, often ethnic fare — from Filipino to soul food — and always with sugary baked goods. The largesse is donated by the hotel, or social workers, less often by family and friends.

After acknowledging the deceased and quoting the Bible, Hope asks for reflections from the mourners. Life is hard in the Tenderloin and the remarks are often revealing.

One widow, a little tipsy at the 11 a.m. rite, regretted she hadn’t seen more of her late husband. The reason, she said, was that he had spent so much time in jail. Asked later if he had done anything well, she said without blinking, “Sell heroin.”

Another time, a dolled-up woman said what a wonderful guy the deceased had been, but she had known him “years ago in New Orleans when he was a waitress.” One man confessed his friend was a real “son of a bitch.”

“Sometimes I get surprised,” Hope says. “I’ve had to handle some sticky wickets. Sometimes people don’t know when to stop.”

In June 2004, Hope contacted Central

> CONTINUED ON PAGE 3
Supervisor Kim: ‘I will always listen’

Kim and her newly elected fellow supervisors at the Jan. 8 swearing-in ceremony. Flashes from digital cameras sparkled throughout the room. Reporters squeezed themselves into the press box while media photographers, still and video, angled for ideal shots of the four new board members.

Once they were sworn in and the full board elected its new president — David Chiu, who was nominated by Kim — the freshmen supervisors got a chance to make brief remarks and thank yous.

“The district that I’m representing is a passionate district, a district that is dynamic, that is changing, that has an opportunity to be a model for the city of San Francisco, because it is both new and emerging and historic,” Kim said.

She knew it would be a challenging district to run in because of its diversity, she said. But talking to the residents, she found they wanted the same things: more jobs, cleaner and safer streets, better schools.

“And they want it to be a place that’s open to everybody, ... I support community-building,” she said, acknowledging her work as a community organizer that began in Chinatown 10 years ago.

“How we change together is by caring about one another, ... I will always listen and be an open door.”

— Marjorie Beggs

Beaming constituents and supporters, in the audience during Kim’s swearing-in, surround her afterward in the hall outside her new office. Her speech included thank yous in both Korean and English. “I wouldn’t be here if not for the community of support that brought me here,” she said.

In her first speech in chambers, during the swearing-in ceremony, Kim reflects on her District 6 campaign. “What really struck me was the openness and the honesty of the residents … and hopefulness. A lot of hopefulness.”

Left: Newbies take their seats: Kim sits next to the three other freshmen supervisors at their first full board meeting — Scott Wiener (District 8), Malia Cohen (District 10) and Mark Farrell (District 2). Supervisor David Campos (District 9) is at the end of the row. Center: During the full board meeting, Kim confers with Legislative Aide April Veneracion, formerly an aide to Chris Daly. Kim’s first actions were a call for a hearing on pedestrian safety in SoMa and a request for a bedbug update. Right: Kim and District 1 Supervisor Eric Mar share a light moment in her new office, room 282. “I’m so happy to be working with him again,” she told The Extra, citing the four years their tenures as members of the Board of Education overlapped. Kim, first elected to the school board in 2006, was named its president in January 2010. On her office walls are paintings of neighborhood residents by Tenderloin artist Hugh Leeman.
Public toilet opens in TL

Continued from Page 1


does the neighborhood need this bathroom?

asked along the 100 block of turk street

Matt T., San Francisco

Absolutely. Homeless people are drawn to this neighborhood, and they need a place to go to the bathroom. It's amazing how many people come here from other neighborhoods to hang out and drink, and there's just nowhere for them to go. We used to have 39 Fell (a homeless drop-in center), but when that closed, there's nowhere other than Glide and St. Anthony's. It's a quality-of-life thing.

Teresita Williams, San Francisco

Yes, if everyone can use it. If people can't find a bathroom, they use the street. It's definitely worth the money (it will cost to operate). It takes more money to hire an employee to clean up the street than it would to keep a public bathroom open.

Bill S., San Francisco

Yes. I see people urinating on the streets. They go into the local bar and don't even ask to go to the restroom – just go right in and use it. I think this bathroom is a good idea.

Christine T., Oakland

I don't think it's a good idea, because people will go in there and use drugs. That's what I used to do when I used drugs. If they have to go, they have shelters where they let you use the bathroom. There are bathrooms everywhere – seriously! I think the bathroom (at Mission Rescue) is going to be misused. They could be using that money on something else.

Christy G., San Francisco

The neighborhood definitely needs this bathroom, because there are a lot of people who live on the sidewalks. I've been in that situation before – you're sick, you just have to go to the bathroom, and so you go (on the street). It's a bad feeling when you need to go to the bathroom and there's nowhere to go. And it can't be good for other people to be around urine and feces, especially a lot of people around here with compromised immune systems.

Chris W., San Francisco

Even if you're a customer at a restaurant they say you can't use the restroom. They'll say it's out of order – especially in the poorer neighborhoods. This neighborhood definitely needs more bathrooms.

Tim, San Francisco

People go to the bathroom on the street because of the lack of sanitary public restrooms. The few there are you don't even want to go into. When every store owner you ask says "No," you just gotta go where you gotta go. This is the first town I've ever been in where this is a problem. In other places, when you ask, they just let you go. I've walked down the street and seen people wailing to me with their junk in their hands as they use the street for a restroom. I don't get angry; I understand – there's no where else to go.

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Hope Esperley with Rev. Harlin, left, and Jay residents Minyon Post:

CENTRAL CITY EXTRA / FEBRUARY 2011

“Hope believes that when homeless people, who often are in poor health, move off the streets, permanent housing may give in to what ails them and die not long after. ‘Nobody wants to die alone, so outside they fight to hang on,’ she says. ‘Then, when they move in, they find peace, safety and comfort, and they can let go.’ No studies back up her observation, but she’s seen it happen, time and again, enough to know it’s true.”

HOPE’S PLATE IS FULL

Hope, who lives in the Crocker Amazon neighborhood, is executive director of San Francisco Network Ministries, the nonprofit she helped start in 1972. It ministers to the poor, especially women, in the Tenderloin and is a team ministry, she emphasizes, where everyone earns the same salary — “the world loves a star, but that is not, and should never be, the standard of a real ministry.”

Network Ministries runs the Ambassador Hotel Ministry, SafeHouse, Tenderloin Community Church, the 366 Eddy St. Center and, with St. Anthony Foundation, a computer training center at 150 Golden Gate Ave. The Network Ministries headquarters building at 559 Ellis St., which it owns, also houses 38 low-cost, one- and two-bedroom apartments.

“It was a priest then, and the three of us got the word out and went to the Dalt Hotel lobby for a memorial. We didn’t know if anybody would show up. We didn’t know what we were going to do, either. So we just made it up as we went along.”

But the men turned up in suits and ties, the women in dresses. Sister Clare played the guitar and sang. The room was filled.

“Afraid, the cookies weren’t very good and something like Kool Aid was served,” Hope continued. “But everyone had a chance to remember Ruth.”

Word of the memorial spread.

“Hotel managers began calling us and city agencies who served the poor,” she says. “Oh, it wasn’t as many as we have now. But gradually the nonprofits, like TNDC, got involved.”

GROWING UP

Hope’s journey to the Tenderloin seems unlikely. She was an active little girl growing up in Atlanta, playing basketball at school and softball during the summer — “the only sports girls were allowed to play in those days,” she says. “No track, which I regretted; I was a good runner.”

She was visiting elderly people in the Dalt Hotel. In those days, the Dalt was for-profit, rundown and awful. “A woman named Ruth who was chronically depressed,” she says. “She was visiting elderly people in the Dalt Hotel. In those days, the Dalt was for-profit, rundown and awful.”

Sister Clare Ronzani regularly visited a diabetic woman named Ruth who was chronically depressed. One day, Ruth jumped out of a fifth-floor window. “We wanted to do something and we didn’t know what,” Hope says. “Sister Claire and I called Dan O’Connor (at St. Anthony’s), who wasn’t a priest then, and the three of us got the word out and went to the Dalt Hotel lobby for a memorial. We didn’t know if anybody would show up. We didn’t know what we were going to do, either. So we just made it up as we went along.”

But the men turned up in suits and ties, the women in dresses. Sister Clare played the guitar and sang. The room was filled.

When Hope left Old First in November 1972 she found a space at 3036 Bush St., between Jones and Leavenworth and opened a nighttime drop-in coffeehouse for poor folks under her newly formed San Francisco Network Ministries. It became popular with Tenderloin people who went up the hill to Bush. Once, a man who had overdosed, stumbled in, saying, “I just knew if I got to the coffeehouse I’d be safe.” He was taken to a hospital and survived. To Hope it was a sign to move down to the Tenderloin.

“We started with zero money and no connections, eight people and two dogs, making up as we went along,” Hope says. “There are a lot of stories in the Bible like that.”

IN THE BEGINNING

Her headquarters for several years was at 942 Market St. Then it was in a room next to St. Boniface Church on Golden Gate Avenue, before building the apartments at 555 Ellis St. in 1995 with Asian Neighborhood Design and moving into the downstairs. Seed money for the building, which cost $7.5 million, came from the National Organization of Presbyterian Women. In the 1990s, prostitutes were being mauled and murdered. Hope went into the streets to talk and listen to the working women. More than anything, they told her, they needed safe housing. She took that on as a project.

In 1997, the Catholic Sisters of the Presentation, hearing of the plan, joined her. SafeHouse, 14 units at a Mission neighborhood address that’s kept secret, opened in 2001 for prostitutes wanting a new life.

Hope has been as fervently anti-war as she has been a force for social justice. Back in 1961, she was jailed in North Carolina in a peace demonstration. In 69, as a seminary stu-
One day I watched as a disheveled man stopped her a block from Boeddeker Park, dropped to one knee and begged her to bless him. She did, with simple dignity — the tiny, gray-haired woman in black, her hand on a kneeling man's bowed head, on an overcast day in the middle of the towering concrete jungle as cars rolled by and passing street people made mental notes. “It happens all the time,” she says. “Usually they want me to say a prayer for them.”

Her staff says Hope’s “a kick” to work with — it’s her sense of humor, her disarmingly utterances of truth, her amusement at the weird, tweeting jargon of the Internet. “She encourages honesty,” says staffer Susie Wong, director or operations. Hope seems energized by reality — good or bad. And she loves to lapse, impishly, into a thick accent to tell anecdotes from her Southern experiences. At any time she can call on “the look,” the baleful eye she directs at someone like an idler blocking her Network Ministries doorway. “She’ll go ask them if they can be somewhere else,” Wong says, “then she gives them the look until they move.”

Her contribution to the Tenderloin is well-known among her Presbyterian peers. Rev. Calvin Chinn, the interim Presbytery executive director in Berkeley, says, “She is loyal, dedicated and prophetic to the end. Some may be a flash in the pan, but Glenda is real deal. She is mentor and teacher for so many of us.”

Jan, a memorial at the Ambassador for Michael Aylwin, attended by two staff social workers and resident Bill McLean, was a recent closure that gave comfort precisely at the right moment: “It incidentally added weight to Hope’s intimate understanding of death in the Tenderloin that often the homeless come in from the cold to get comfortable enough to let go and die peacefully.”

Mr. Aylwin, who used a cane, had been homeless for five years before he came to the Listening Post — a program she helped create during hard times in the 1980s that has been performing memorials in the Tenderloin neighborhood for 33 years.

ANNUAL RITE FOR HOMELESS DEAD
Hope’s largest memorial by far is her annual celebration of the Tenderloin’s homeless dead. “It’s a time to reflect,” says Hope, who organizes the service and gets the names from the Coalition on Homelessness. Often other names are offered for inclusion in the rite by the Tenderloin AIDS Network, which changed its name to TARIC around 1993, and Network Ministries’ program for its first five years.

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Ambassador. His social worker, Jackie Mollitor, said he was so happy to be there. He died less than four months later at age 63.

Part of his happiness was finding a drinking buddy.

“We hit it off from the top,” McLean said with a smile. “He liked wine, I liked beer.”

Sometimes Mr. Alywin stayed overnight in McLean’s room to sleep it off after a long night boozing and talking about his problems and hopes for the future. The chipper redhead had mental issues, hepatitis C and was on lifetime parole status, having been in “many” prisons, McLean said.

Then, in January, Mr. Alywin hadn’t been seen for several days. Jan. 4 he was found dead in his room, cause unknown.

“He had plans,” said McLean. “He wanted to clean up and get straight. He wanted to go to Joe Healy Detox (on Page Street) — he had been there before — and wanted me to go with him. But I didn’t want to. He needed to get clean so he could work on the hep C — he had to take meds every day and not be drinking.”

“This reminds us to get it done in whatever time we have,” said Hope.

To end this and other memorials, Hope reads from the 1970 version of the Presbyterian Worship Book about when “the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over and our work is done … grant us peace at last.”

She asks the mourners to stand and hold hands.

“Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. Peace I leave with you, and my peace I give to you.”

“Now,” she says in finality, “turn and give your neighbor the sign of peace.”

“That’s a hug.”

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