

# One for the ages – Manor House becomes history

## Mimi and team retire as TNDC scrambles to find a new eatery

BY TOM CARTER

A SPECIAL chapter in Tenderloin history ended sadly March 1 when the low-cost Manor House restaurant and its beloved manager, Mimi Yee, called it quits after 17 years of unparalleled service to the city's poorest neighborhood.

The closure left hundreds of poverty-level customers — some of them damp-eyed — wondering if anyone who follows could equal Mimi, yet feeling lucky to have had it so good for so long.

Mimi and her husband John Yee, chief cook, were retiring because of his health, she told surprised customers over recent weeks. Plus she herself was “very tired,” she said, having been on her feet, moving constantly more than 10 hours a day, six days a week since 1996. Then she did the restaurant's shopping on Saturdays when the Jones Street eatery was closed.

“I'm tired,” Mimi said the day before Manor House closed. She's in her early 50s, her husband in his early 60s. “I'm not burned out, but if I don't do it now, I will get burned out. And I want to do this before something happens.” She plans to go to school to improve her English.

Among her six employees, her “team,” were her sisters May and Shirley, also well-known to Manor's regulars.

The last day, Thursday, Feb. 28, found a stream of well-wishers saying how much they will miss her, and others who hadn't known of the closure and were shocked, dazed, even distressed.

“What am I going to do?” one man demanded at the counter, sounding angry. “And what's my brother going to do? Does he know?”

Tenderloin Capt. Joe Garrity barreled through the door at 12:20 p.m. with an armful of roses, giving one bouquet to May and another to Mimi. He chatted with a few customers and was gone in five minutes. Later, District 6 Supervisor Jane Kim's staff showed up.

Manor hours were 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., serving breakfasts and lunch all day. Mimi did not want to be open after 5 p.m. because she feared the neighborhood after dark, she has said.

The Board of Supervisors will acknowledge her contribution to the Tenderloin in March, during International Women's Month, an aide in Kim's office said.

Don Falk, executive director of TNDC, which owns the Antonia Manor hotel, the building where Manor House occupies

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PHOTO BY TOM CARTER

**Mimi Yee**, who elevated Manor House service to new heights, gets roses as just desserts from Tenderloin Capt. Joe Garrity on her last day, Feb. 28.

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## A CBD AWAITS CITY HALL

### Central Market plan needs OK

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## KOCI THE ARTIST

### Bold, evocative paintings for \$3.28

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## OBITS

### Noted advocate for legal grass; Camelot Hotel 'royalty'

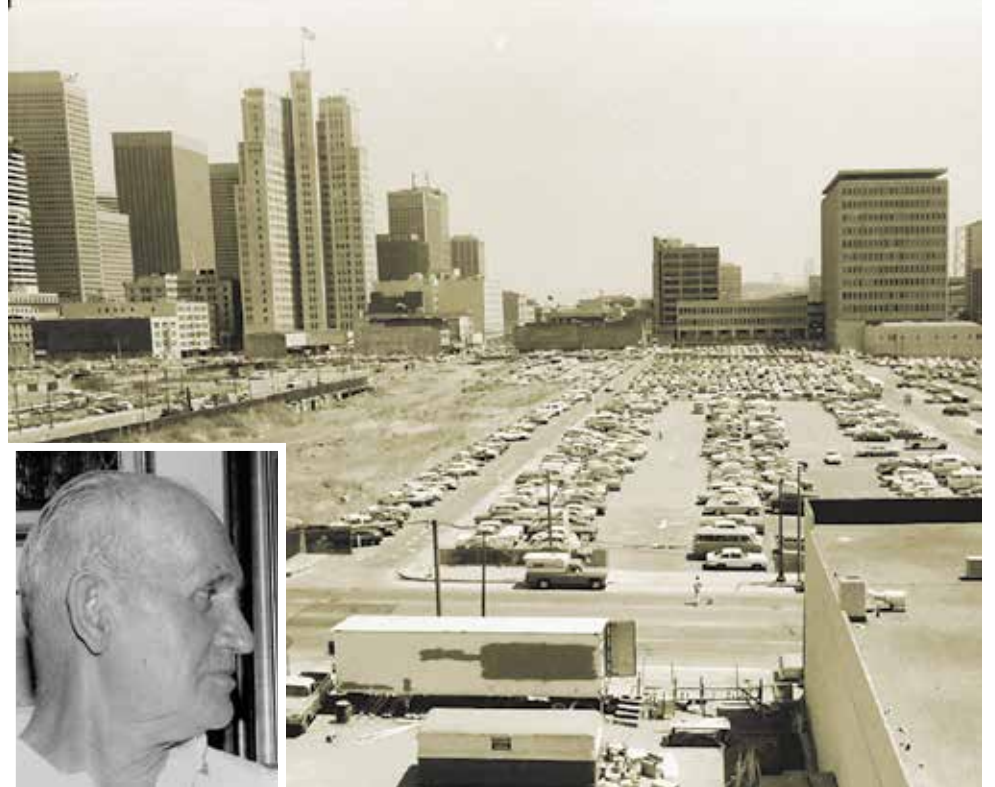
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# CENTRAL CITY



S A N F R A N C I S C O

## ORAL HISTORY



PHOTOS BY BILL CARLSON

The 1978 view from Frank Koci's apartment was a sea of cars and empty space where flats, small apartment buildings and businesses were razed for the Yerba Buena Center development that hastened the end of the old neighborhood and the beginning of the new. Inset: Frank Koci

# Before it was SoMa

## The transformation of South of Market — artist in 1978 minces no words

Neighborhood  
**ORAL**  
HISTORY PROJECT

THE WORK of San Francisco Beat-era artist Frank Koci, born in 1904 in Czechoslovakia, “represented a remarkable union of naivete and canny sophistication,” wrote Thomas Albright, reviewer and author of *Art in the San Francisco Bay Area 1945-80*. Before he turned to painting, the young Koci, new to America, worked as a merchant seaman, cowboy, farmhand, silent film and theater extra. He was still actively painting when Oral History Project staffer Isabel Maldonado interviewed him in August 1978 at his Clementina Street apartment. A South of Market resident, he had watched as Yerba Buena Center construction got under way, displacing thousands of residents and hundreds of businesses, most permanently. Early on, the neighborhood was called South of the Slot because of the Market Street cable cars. When they were long gone, then it became South of Market. And, in the Eighties, in a nod to New York City's SoHo district, people in San Francisco started calling the area SoMa. Frank Koci died in 1983.

**What's it like living South of Market these days?**

Seven years ago, I was living at the Westchester on Third Street between Market and Mis-

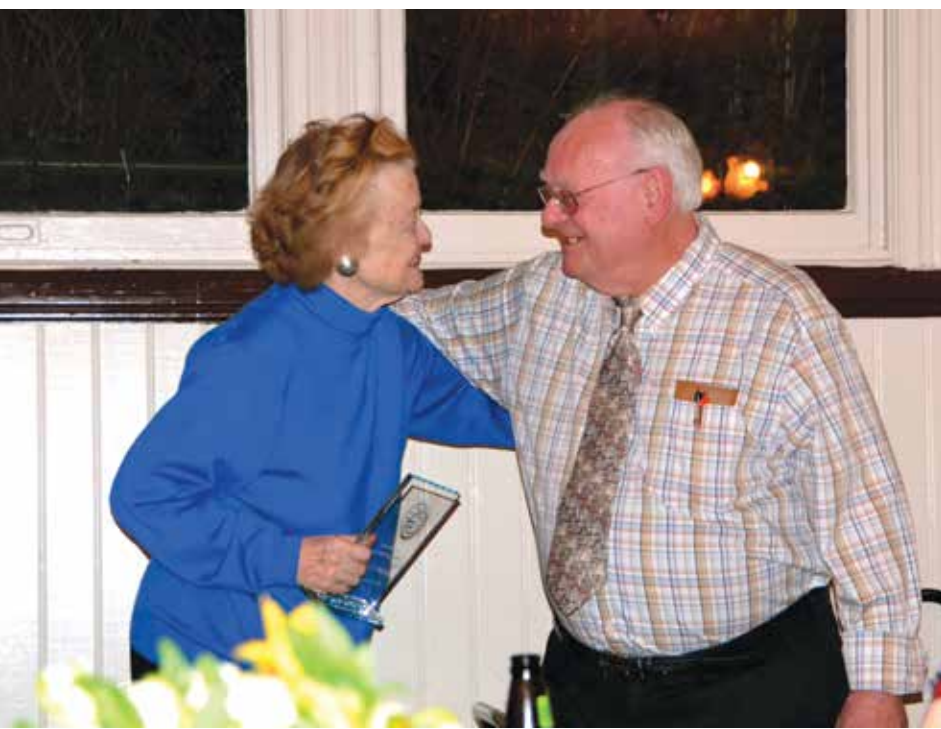
sion. There's nothing there now — the city tore everything out, but it took them three years after I moved before they started knocking things down. And it took me a long time investigating to find this place in Clementina Towers. You have to buy your own furniture here, but I had the money to buy it, not like some of those bums who go from check to check, drinking it up, and then there are the misers and drunkards with a couple of religious fanatics thrown in, and also several pretty nice people. You'd be surprised how many practically geniuses you find on the skids in San Francisco.

**Tell us about coming to San Francisco.**

I came to this country when I was 17 and spent my first two years in Shiner, Texas, where I learned how to milk cows for \$30 a month. Then I moved to Los Angeles and that's where I got a few of these X-rated movie jobs and worked for Charlie Chaplin, a great guy to work for, and all that — I get a little tired of rehashing that in interviews. When I came up to San Francisco in 1923, I really didn't live anywhere, just bummed around. But I do remember South of Market then, all small, ramshackle, broken-down rooming

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PHOTOS BY MARK DONEZA

## Study Center celebrates its 40-year milestone of service to community

**S**AN FRANCISCO STUDY CENTER, publisher of Central City Extra, celebrated its 40th anniversary Feb. 27 at the Stern Grove Clubhouse.

The festive sounds of Latin jazz band, Bluezona, greeted the arriving partygoers, who eventually filled the Victorian.

A staff-made feast included lumpia, prawns, two kinds of pancit, chips with three dips, green salad, artichoke frittata, ribs, wings and lots, lots more with tres leche cake and tiny cream puffs for dessert.

But it was a night to honor Study Center's "Dozen for the Decades," board and staff members, all still active, who have made significant contributions to the agency since its beginning in March 1972 as a resource for neighborhood organizations. Honorees were:

**Stas Margaronis**, founder and board member, businessman

**Elizabeth Denebeim**, secretary-treasurer, former S.F. school board president

**Marjorie Beggs**, senior writer/editor

**John Burks**, president, chairman emeritus S.F. State Journalism Department

**Richard Livingston**, vice president, EXITTheater managing director

**Reiko Homma-True**, board member, former S.F. Community Mental Health Services director

**M. Roy Crew**, director, Office of Self Help

**Fancher Larson**, senior advocate, S.F. Mental Health Clients' Rights Advocates

**Ben Fong-Torres**, board member, author and broadcaster

**James McWilliams**, board member, advocate at S.F. Mental Health Clients' Rights Advocates

**Edgar Mercado**, board member, Warm Line supervisor, Office of Self Help

**Tina Tong Yee**, board member, former director of Cultural Competency and Client Relations, S.F. Community Behavioral Health Services

Also honored were Tom Carter, Central City Extra community reporter, who retired at the end of January, and Geoff Link, executive director, who has been at the Study Center for 39 years.

Two days after the party, San Francisco Study Center turned 41. ■

— Geoff Link



**Top: Libby Denebeim**, secretary-treasurer of the Study Center board, is presented her award by Executive Director Geoff Link. Libby was president of Study Center's 35-member Community Advisory Board in 1973. **Above**, President John Burks sits in with the band for a few hot licks during the party.

# Central Market CBD plan awaits city OK

BY JONATHAN NEWMAN

**H**EEDING THE NEGATIVE results from an areawide survey, Central Market CBD has abandoned its 2012 plan to increase its turf six-fold and triple its budget to \$1.6 million — and recast its hoped-for future more modestly.

Now, the district wants to expand southward to Minna Street and west all the way to South Van Ness Avenue, down Sixth Street to Folsom, include sections of Tehama and Clementina west of Fifth Street, taking in many family-size apartment buildings and medium-scale condos.

The result is a decidedly more residential benefits district than the all-commercial east to the current CBD.

Last April, the CBD's Steering Committee decided to explore expanding the district in a do-or-die bid to grow beyond its Market Street corridor that now runs only from Fifth to Ninth Street. Simply renewing the current boundaries would have given the district another seven years of life. But once it decided to expand, it needs two positive votes by prospective property owners in the expanded area or the CBD will go out of business May 31.

The first vote will be on a petition favored by owners holding properties with a combined 30% of assessments (plus \$1) in the newly drawn district. If the petition passes, District 6 Supervisor Jane Kim will request the supes' Government Oversight Committee to sanction an official ballot to create the new district. The ballot — the second vote in the process — must pass by a majority of those voting and that majority must represent at least 50% of the assessments. The ballot voting opens and closes in a 45-day period.

If the votes come in, the new CBD will encompass nearly 750 properties — largely the result of including multicondo buildings like Mission Street's Soma Grand. The overall area served by the district will triple in size and generate \$1.4 million in assessments.

The draft expansion plan is being reviewed by the Office of Economic and Workforce Development, city attorney and Supervisor Kim. All have had the plan since mid-February.

The CBD can't send the plan to property owners to approve or reject until the draft becomes final after City Hall signs off on it. Neither the mayor, city attorney nor District 6 supervisor has told The Extra when the review of the draft will be completed, though CBD officials expect to mail the petition by March 6.

A previous expansion plan was more grandiose.

In August, Central Market mailed 1,452 surveys to property owners, the majority with holdings south of Stevenson Street to the southern side of Howard Street, and 220 responded — "an extraordinary high response" rate

of 15%, said CBD Executive Director Daniel Hurtado. Only 23 — 10% — of the responses came from existing district members, with 20 solidly in favor of expansion, he said.

But resistance in the proposed expansion area, notably on the western end of Natoma Street and along the 10th and 11th Street corridors running south from Market, where two owners of a combined 23 properties opted out, doomed the bigger benefit district.

Bob Harms owns and manages nine properties in that area through his privately held company, Ares Commercial Properties. He answered the survey, letting the CBD know he was not in favor of expansion.

"I'm a small landlord and I try to keep my rents low and my tenants happy. I don't want to have to pass these extra assessments off on my tenants," he told The Extra. "Keeping the streets clean and dealing with graffiti — that's what the city should be doing. I mean that's why we pay the property taxes, isn't it?"

Stanley Saitowitz, who owns four properties on Natoma Street, was all in favor of expansion. "I would love to participate. I think it's a great idea people taking care of their own community. I'm sorry that we won't be included," he said.

The survey results, particularly the negative responses from owners with multiple properties, resulted in rethinking the expansion, so the map boundaries were redrawn more modestly, said Jim Chappell of MJM Management, the CBD's consultant on the expansion.

"The survey showed that owners along Howard Street didn't always feel connected to Market Street. They see their area as more South of Market," he said. "So, we want the existing CBD to expand with planned continuity and a sense of neighborhood."

"Owners on Tehama and Clementina and along Sixth Street are firmly behind the expansion. They want to see a return of community services, which disappeared when redevelopment ended. It's important. Whatever happens on Sixth affects Market," he said.

Central Market CBD provides community guides, street and sidewalk cleaning, including graffiti removal, and programs designed to aid economic development. The services provided and how often depend on the type of property and its location within the district. Market Street and Sixth Street will get more community guides and street cleaning than the less-heavily traveled Tehama and Clementina streets.

Not all CBDs provide the same services. Across Market Street, for example, the North of Market/Tenderloin CBD provides more tree-planting, needle and syringe pickup and graffiti removal, but no community guides, a service nixed by then-District 6 Supervisor Chris Daly when the CBD was formed. ■

# Manor House — TL landmark eatery — closes

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a large storefront, making him Mimi's landlord, sent his sentiments to The Extra via email from the East Coast where he was on business.

"Mimi is an exceptional person, and that is obvious to anyone who steps inside Manor House," Falk wrote. "It is truly a community gathering place, not only because the food is affordable to Tenderloin residents, but also because she serves it with love. Her warm charm has created a unique Tenderloin institution, and I'm proud that TNDC played a key role in supporting it."

Last year, Mimi won TNDC's Kelly Cullen Community Service award for her long tenure of providing low-cost meals that average \$3 for a big breakfast and \$5 for a balanced lunch that's often more than one person can eat. But she didn't appear at the nighttime awards ceremony at the Hilton Hotel a few blocks away, reluctant to go out at night. The award was later delivered to her at the restaurant.

TNDC's commercial management agent, Ventura Partners, said it is looking for another restaurant operation to take over: "Our goal is to find a food-related community use within the same spirit of Mimi's Manor House Restaurant." A spokesman said a nonprofit with a job-training program was a possibility, too.

TNDC had given the China-born Mimi a rent break for her promise to furnish low-cost meals. She often went a step beyond and allowed tabs for certain customers.

## 'NAME YOUR PRICE'

"Don (Falk) wanted me to stay," Mimi said. "He said, 'Name your price.'" She smiles. "He offered no rent. I didn't know if he was kidding. He said he was serious. He has been very good to me. But I said no."

"I started from nothing 17 years ago," she reflected, staring blankly, caught in a flood of thoughts and emotions she kept close. "I just don't have the words. I really appreciate everyone ... I want to keep the relationships."

"People say I helped lots of people, but they helped me — we had to help each other. You respect them for them to respect me for that long time."

How will she keep the relationships?

She looks blank again. "I don't know," she says. "No way to do it."

Mimi went out of her way over the years to get along with a rough and unpredictable crowd. Her patience was as famous as her firmness in adhering to her principles and to basic business practices, such as chasing down the sidewalk after people who had skipped out without paying. She was determined not to fail, to do the right thing and go the extra mile. Here's what one person said in a Yelp review of Manor House three years ago:

"I am a money manager for formerly homeless adults with mental health histories. I frequently write checks to Mimi on behalf of my lower-functioning clients so they can eat at her establishment. Not only does she keep a tab AND give my clients meals on credit, she also contacts case managers in the community when she is concerned over someone's choice of diet."

"And if I want a client's tab to be spread out over the months, she will assist me in budgeting the tab, designing a personal menu for the client's budget, and monitoring the diet. Yes, she will arrange meetings between myself, the client, the case manager and herself to set an agreement. This is WAY beyond what restaurant owners do!"

Mimi had more than two dozen such customers.

Unofficially "Mimi's," or the "people's restaurant," as some have called



PHOTOS BY LENNY LIMJOCO 2008

**Mimi's sister, May Ling**, takes an order in 2008, when Manor House was featured in *The Extra*.

it, has evolved over many years. It was Manor House when Bill and Althea Yee, Mimi's aunt, operated it before 1996.

Marvis Phillips, community activist, has eaten at Manor more than 30 years and remembers the old version vividly as a dingy, hole-in-the-wall Skid Row restaurant with blacked-over windows, "solemn," he says. Bill cooked, Althea waited tables and someone else washed dishes.

"But it was lunch and dinner," Phillips says. "They opened at 11 a.m. and closed at 5:30. Dinners were about \$4. They had noodle and vegetable soup five days a week, chowder on Fridays and were closed on Saturdays. No breakfast."

"Bill had a television propped up in the kitchen and when you came in he'd tell you to go sit in a corner and leave him alone because he was watching a game and betting on it. Someone else watching with him, he thought was bad luck."

"It was a good place to eat. I ate dinner there every day about 4."

The Formica counter was in the middle then, the kitchen in front in a corner against what are now windows. Druggies didn't deal inside but hung around outside, sometimes causing problems on the sidewalk.

Althea Yee was talkative and her English was good. She knew all the gossip and neighborhood developments. "Everyone loved Althea," Phillips says. "She liked being complimented, too. And you never left hungry."

## GOOD FOR A LIGHT TOUCH

She didn't keep tabs, but was good for a light touch. "Toward the end of the month if I was short I could always get a \$5 loan," Phillips says. "She was that way with a lot of people."

When Althea died in December 1995, Bill, in his 60s, didn't want to continue without her. After 25 years of the Manor, he handed the baton to Mimi and went back to China to live.

In a feature on Manor House in the July 2008 *Extra*, Mimi said the place was so filthy when she took it over that it took three people one week to get it clean. She had other, more serious problems, though.

She had been a waitress for 10 years at the Bashful Bull restaurant on Noriega near 19th Avenue — where the customers were nice — while her husband worked at various Chinese restaurants. Then the opportunity to have her



**Mimi takes a break** from front of house work to pose with her husband, John, for a 2008 *Extra* "Jones Street gem" profile.

own restaurant came up from a relative and she took it, figuring the Tenderloin wasn't all that different from the avenues.

She wanted to quit after the first month.

"It's hard to explain how hard it was in the beginning," she said in 2008. "I didn't know how to handle these people. They don't know me, and they give me hard time. I didn't know about the things they did — why they do these things? I was very scared. I wanted to quit. But I couldn't."

Her school of hard knocks included rude, threatening customers, some demanding credit and leaving her with a mound of unpaid bills that nearly ruined her, addicts using the bathroom to shoot up, dealers working at the door (one day she had to call the cops four times), and then the smaller stuff, like losing five pairs of salt and pepper shakers a day to theft.

"I learned later why people were in the bathroom so long," she said. "Before, I never knew. I never thought about it. I don't know how I did it and paid all the bills. It's not easy to survive in San Francisco."

Fortune smiled in December 2000 when TNDC acquired the Antonia Manor with the help of the Redevelopment

Agency to preserve the hotel's 134 units as affordable housing, a 100% Section 8 building housing seniors and persons with disabilities. TNDC shut it down to upgrade and reopened in 2004. In that time, Manor was closed almost a year for a face-lift.

"When we renovated, we moved the kitchen in order to create windows along the Jones Street wall, bringing 'eyes to the street,'" Falk wrote. "It was to enhance safety and allow ample light into an otherwise dank and dark space. We also offered her below-market rent in return for Mimi's agreement to continue serving low-cost food."

The years since have been good as the Manor reputation spread, even into the East Bay where Tenderloin residents sometimes move, or have relatives there who visit. It has scored fairly high on its Department of Health inspections, usually in the high 80s, but never nailing three 90s in a row to get DPH's excellence certificate to display.

Her attitude remained consistent: If customers were nice, she was nice, she says. When they weren't, she was direct, laying down the ground rules, seldom raising her voice but keeping it strong, showing command, running her restaurant. And Mimi raised the bar. ■

## CENTRAL CITY



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# Beat artist Koci recalls early days before it was SoMa

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houses with at least three or four bootleggers on every block. Every pool hall, every skid row had its characters. They were recognized for their eccentricity or fighting ability or how much wine they could drink or how many times they'd been in jail.

I came here with a shirt and a pair of pants, and it was so goddamn cold here, you know, a typical San Francisco summer. I looked for work, but I only picked up a day's work here and there, mostly as a day laborer where you wait for the truck driver to come over when he needs extra help. Or I'd get a day or two on banana boats, the boats that came in at what we call Shit Creek [Islais Creek] — yeah, that's where they pulled the switch. And the life of the working man was the shits. Excuse the language. Then I left San Francisco again. You always leave. I started out to become a hobo and I finally succeeded. I bummed across the country working, but I was a hobo — a guy that travels and picks up work here and there. Hobos even had an organization and the hobo paper.

**Were there a lot of people South of Market when you came in '23?**

Yeah, lots of people. San Francisco is where you either come to finish off — the end of the route — or to begin. I remember over on Howard Street, where there's nothing standing now, there were 39 restaurants on one block.

**Did they cater to low-income people?**

Boy, this language. If anyone back then had asked, "Do you cater to low-income people?" they'd have said, "What the hell does that mean?" Look, this was a place of cheap restaurants where you could get four eggs and a fried potato, two pieces of toast and some coffee for 10¢ or 15¢. During the Depression, it got even cheaper. On the corner over there was the Niagara Hotel, run by Germans. It had a saloon, probably a bootlegger and maybe a bookie there, too. And there was an employment office on the corner.

There were about 10 employment offices around here, but mostly they'd ship you out to jobs away from San Francisco. When you'd come out here, you'd find there weren't any jobs anyhow, so they'd ship you wherever they'd like, to lumber camps and ranches. Guys would use it as free transportation. Then, in wintertime, this place would fill up with lumberjacks and whistle punks [water boys], mule skiners and ranch hands and people who work in camps or Hetch Hetchy in Southern California. Around November, they'd all flock here and take all these cheap rooms. They had silver dollars in their pockets and they'd rattle them. They'd see a guy real hungry and they'd get their jollies shaking their pockets in front of him — well, it's the nature of the beast.

**How did Los Angeles compare to San Francisco at that time?**

When you were broke in Los Angeles, you could hit every restaurant and they wouldn't give you anything. I came here and the first restaurant I went to, Gough Bay City Grill, they said, "Sit down, son." The guy who called me son was two years younger than me, but he



PHOTO BY BILL CARLSON 1978

Frank Koci in front of Clementina Towers in South of Market, where he lived on the seventh floor in a \$225-a-month apartment — complete with a balcony.

**"When I came up to San Francisco in 1923, I really didn't live anywhere, just bummed around. But I do remember South of Market then, all small, ramshackle, broken-down rooming houses with at least three or four bootleggers on every block."**

Frank Koci, South of Market Beat artist (1904–1983)

gave me a big bowl of minestrone soup and all the French bread I could eat and wouldn't let me pay. I said, "This is my town."

**And now? Anything wrong with San Francisco?**

There's nothin' wrong with San Francisco. You move 4,000 miles east to New Hampshire and you get the same things, the same hot dogs, the same pizza parlors, the same punks on the street. Some people think we got magic here — the little cable cars will shoot you up to the stars — but the morning fog will kill you it's so cold. Hollywood has its movie stars and back East they have the prize fighters and here we got the grimpen on the cable cars. But wrong? Living here, South of Market, the most agonizing part is the noise — it's just part of the scenery and they keep pushing and pushing, doing it since I moved in.

**What is the noise? Does it have to do with clearing the land for Yerba Buena Center?**

They've been down there, right there on that corner since January 18, but this corner has nothing to do with Yerba Buena. The workmen just enjoy the tearing down. They're the most sadistic bunch of city employees. They work two shifts. At 6 p.m., they change shifts when the ninnies go home — all the guys with their insurance papers and their portfolio baskets, running around to catch the train. After they clear out, the boys come back and work from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. I had a half pound of cotton in my ears and my radio and television going it was so loud. And now we have another thing: the rock-n-roll music. They have a place across the street where they teach that stuff. I'm surprised they teach it — it comes natural to monkeys. The minute these boys over there find out that the short hairs like me are goin' to bed, they open up, and go on to midnight. Once, when there wasn't too much complaining, they went until 7 a.m. People stay here for a while and they say, "How can you

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These paintings are from the collection of John Burks who supplied the photos, titles and interpretive captions. All are signed "Koci," none is dated. They almost certainly were painted in South of Market during the late Fifties and early Sixties.

PHOTOS BY JOHN BURKS

Clockwise from upper left:

**PICNIC**  
Sunlight streams across picnic table in forest. Who sits? (a) Doctor, plutocrat, nurse? (b) Son, corpse, assassin? (c) Assassin, dad, mom? What next?  
24 x 24 inches, oil on plywood

**REVOLT**  
Two top-hat guys enter a mottled, motley street throng. Will Big Baldy and the Long Faces let them pass? Who owns this street?  
26 x 7 inches, oil on crate

**SELF**  
Self-portrait of the artist as an old man? His naked lover flees. The shadowy citizen over his right shoulder — ready, waiting, next?  
15 x 18 inches, oil on siding

**REPLAY**  
She stares death in the eye. On her mind, her lover. At her side, her mate. Referee studies replay before making the call.  
16 x 16 inches, oil on plywood

## Koci — a Beat marching to his own bold beat — sold his paintings cheap to pay the rent

BY JOHN BURKS

THE GUY AT THE CASH REGISTER looks like Popeye's pissed-off older brother. He speaks in a Count Dracula accent so gruff, so thick, I assume it's a joke until I discover it isn't. Popeye presides at a North Beach gallery a few doors down from City Lights Bookstore, serving up salty insights concerning Beatnik art and Beat philosophy to gawking tourists.

Popeye's rant is multidirectional — he speaks against God, against the feds, WWI and WWII, always returning to the deplorable quality of the art he is selling and the fools who buy it. "But anyway," he cackles, "it's cheap; we don't commit extortion, just theft." The pricetags run \$3.28, \$12.99, \$4.44, \$5, priced according to the size of each painting, cheap even by early Sixties' standards.

"Vot are you doing looking at dat monstrosity?" Popeye shouts from across the room. "Utter shit." Next painting: "Keep moving, don't look! Idiot, idiot! Dat painting iss insult to art!"

Only when my gaze falls upon a work signed "Koci" does he shut up. These Kocis are, to my eye, remarkable and totally unlike anything else in sight: hints of Rousseau, Matisse, Roualt, screwy angularities in the dense, cartoonish tracings, vivid splotches of sunshine, lots of people. All kinds of people — peasants, pimps, killers, bishops, big money guys, dried-up crones, juicy nurses — all headed for cosmic collision.

After a few visits, I make the connection: "Popeye" is in fact Koci ... Czech-

born Frantisek (Frank) Koci, an ex-merchant seaman, ex-actor, ex-cowboy who washed upon The City's shores determined to become an artist. This South of Market denizen, whose early paintings did sell for as little as \$3.28 and \$5, would live to see his work featured in several galleries and museums, selling for thousands.

To this day, there are said to be competing collectors who have stashed away hundreds of Kocis hoping to reap zillions, should a Koci Revival ever occur. No sign of such a revival has yet appeared.

At his peak, Koci painted as fast as he could. His small South of Market apartment was jammed with dozens of partially completed paintings. He raided dumpsters all over town, seeking anything he could paint on: plywood, tiles, crating, siding. He had no choice but to work cheap. Nobody was going to pay \$250 for an individual painting by an unknown Beat artist. But they'd happily lay out \$7.29 for a piece of Beatnik art commemorating their trip to the coast.

All Koci had to do was sell 30 such paintings to cover that month's rent.

In broad terms, you can describe Koci's paintings as a series of "peoplescapes," wherein people are shown having relationships (some fleeting, some enduring) with fellow humans. A better term is probably "preludes" — where in each painting sets the stage for something momentous that will occur in the very next frame. In the best Kocis, the tension is palpable. ■



## OBITUARIES

### RANDI GIVENS Advocate for legal pot

Randi Givens lived at the Ritz Hotel for two decades and had many visitors over the years, but, according to social worker Heather Venisse, he “didn’t socialize much” with fellow residents. That’s why his memorial was so lightly attended by neighbors — only Thanapa Simphanth and Otto Duffy showed up for his Feb. 21 sendoff.

“I really liked him,” said Simphanth, who had lived near Mr. Givens on the first floor. “He was nice to me and he had a nice heart. I remember that he used to go food shopping and bring things back to his room — then he got so skinny and sick. I miss him a lot.”

Despite the small turnout, Mr. Givens’ life emerged as extraordinarily full, productive and active, filled with loving family, political colleagues, and intellectual and artistic accomplishments. He died Feb. 6 in his room at the Ritz. He was 71 years old.

“I’ve lived here at the Ritz 17 years, almost as long as Randi,” said Duffy. “He was quiet, kept to himself and never smiled much. But here’s what I liked about him: He was a left-winger and a real activist.”

Mr. Givens was passionate about legalizing marijuana for adults, wrote blogs and letters to editors, spoke publicly about his beliefs and was eulogized in *West Coast Leaf*, a quarterly newsletter that calls itself “The Cannabis Newspaper of Record.”

“Randi’s and my political paths never crossed,” said Duffy, whose activism is strictly local while Mr. Givens’ was national. “I’m a moderate progressive and he was farther left, and we even had a huge argument about that decades ago, but we made up and I admired him.”

Duffy noted a “pattern” he sees developing in SROs and its aging population.

“People here are getting on in life and you think they’ll never die, that they’ll go on and on,” Duffy said. “Randi hadn’t looked healthy for a long time, though he went on and on.”

Duffy looked around the small third-floor kitchen where the memorial was held, waving an arm at the clean but clearly unused room with no food, no pots and pans, no eating utensils in sight. On a Formica table were only temporary signs of life — and death — a bouquet of spring flowers, a few candles and Mr. Givens’ picture.

“This place isn’t great,” Duffy said, “but the Ritz gave Randi a home and a place to live and work from.”

Immediately after Duffy excused himself to get over to City Hall for a hearing, two women joined the mourners.

Janice Antrillo introduced herself as Mr. Givens’ partner “off and on for 40 years,” and their adult daughter, Cara Givens. Both saw Mr. Givens regularly, their relationships with him affectionate to the end, though not always easy.

“He was such a good guy and a magnetic personality, a great dad and friend,” Antrillo said. “If he got into tiffs a lot of the time, it was because he had a moral compass.”

“He was a strong advocate of Prop. 215 [medical marijuana initiative], and marijuana helped him with his pain.” She grinned, remembering fun times together in the past, long car rides and “so much to do and not enough time.”

He had a pacemaker and had had a hernia operation, Cara Givens said of her father’s many “near-death experiences” and increasing frailty, especially in the last two years, when she was his caretaker. “He’d been in bad health since I was a teenager, and we didn’t know how long he would live. But as far as we know, he passed peacefully in his sleep.”

Antrillo had visited Mr. Givens in



COURTESY CARA GIVENS

### Randi Givens

his room the day before he died. Leaving the hotel, she told Venisse that he had said he wanted to die “at home” — at the Ritz — not in the hospital. When Antrillo came to see him the next day, he was lying in bed and was gone.

Antrillo read a poem a co-worker had given her, “Miss Me — But Let Me Go,” and passed around a photo of Mr. Givens playing billiards with Willie Mosconi, the famed billiards professional from the 1940s through the 1960s.

That was the other great love of Mr. Givens’ life. A crackerjack bar pool player, he won trophies and awards, and in



COURTESY OF GIVENS FAMILY

**Givens’ 1979 marquetry image of rock-n-roll great Jimi Hendrix is made of walnut and avocado wood veneers.**

2004 published a seminal study of the form, *The Eight Ball Bible: A Guide to Bar Table Play*. The 283-page volume is filled with such details as, “Instead of stopping on a draw shot (full ball hit) and then drawing back, an overweight cue ball slides thru a bit before coming back because the object ball cannot absorb all of the cue ball’s momentum (Diagram A).” The book has 460 illustrations and is still in print.

“He also shot videos about billiards and wrote for *Pool & Billiards Magazine*,” Cara Givens told *The Extra* in an email, “and he learned how to edit his videos — he was very interested in computers and the tech world.”

Mr. Givens, born in Missouri, was an airline mechanic in the U.S. Air Force, came to San Francisco in the ‘60s, attended the College of San Mateo, drove a cab, hung out in divy bars with pool tables in the central city.

He and Antrillo met at the Boarding House, the ‘70s nightclub hot spot on Bush Street off Taylor that featured a parade of comers — Patti Smith, Tom Waits, Neil Young, The Tubes, Bette Midler and many more.

“Then we were licensed street artists in San Francisco,” Antrillo told *The Extra* later. “I sold my beadwork and he sold his marquetry” — the ancient art of producing images by inlaying various wood veneers.

Cara Givens filled in other details of her family’s life. Her parents, she said, lived apart but were life partners and friends as defined by Jehovah’s Witnesses. “My dad was a believer in their message of faith, although he wasn’t a member of the organized religion. He and I went to the movies regularly. Some

of his favorite music was ZZ Top and the Grateful Dead. He was a dedicated newspaper reader, and his favorite TV show was *The Simpsons*.

“His mother, who is still alive and lives out of state, was ‘his best phone friend.’ They talked on the phone while watching *Wheel of Fortune* together.”

Mr. Givens also is survived by two brothers and two sisters. Cara Givens has made an extensive family tree, charting back 28 sets of grandparents and fact-checking a possible relationship to Catherine Parr, the last of the six wives of King Henry VIII of England. Antrillo says that one of Mr. Givens’ grandmothers was a full-blooded American Indian, probably Cherokee.

“My father has just been accepted for interment, as a veteran, in the National Cemetery in Sacramento,” Cara Givens wrote in an email, “and some of his ashes will be scattered at sea, per his request.”

At the memorial, she told how grateful she was for the time she had to spend with her father during his last years. “His death was a long, drawn-out process, but now I feel a huge sense of relief — I feel positive about my grieving.” ■

— MARJORIE BEGGS

### ARNOLD W. STRINGFELLOW ‘Royalty’ at the Camelot

When Arnold Wayne Stringfellow walked through the lobby sporting his handsome suede jacket of brown and tan squares, lavishing a toothless grin, probably on his way to hang out at Aunt Charlie’s Lounge across the street, he lit up the space around him like a roman candle. You couldn’t help but smile.

That’s what his fellow residents among the 15 mourners — including his regular doctor from S.F. General — said about the slight little man with the big bright aura. He had enhanced the quality of life with his sunny personality and ability to fix mechanical things for them during the 10 years he lived at the Camelot Hotel.

So the hotel’s community room swelled with love for Mr. Stringfellow at his Jan. 24 memorial. He was so easy to be around, truly “connected” with everyone and gave so much of himself, they said.

“I can’t speak because I’ll start crying,” said one disheveled man who headed for a seat in back, turning away from the table on which there was a bouquet and Mr. Stringfellow’s picture. Another table had vegan donuts, cupcakes and bagels for later and a stack of informational sheets on “Recovering from trauma and loss.”

Even the SRO staff choked up. “A beautiful man, full of love,” said Tony Baldwin, general manager, fighting back tears, “a smile on his face I’ll always remember, a positive cat, and the way he interacted in touching everyone.” Baldwin called him Camelot “royalty.”

Mr. Stringfellow’s case worker, Linda Duncan, said she was in the hall by his fifth-floor room on Jan. 8. Usually, disco music emanated from it, but that day all was quiet except for his labored breathing that she could hear.

“He was struggling to breathe,” she said. “I asked to come in, then sent him to (St. Francis) hospital. He never said a word after that — I visited him — and he died a week later.”

She believed he died of natural causes. The medical examiner said the cause of death wouldn’t be known for three months after his Jan. 21 autopsy. Mr. Stringfellow was 64.

Ironically, Mr. Stringfellow was nicknamed “the Unabomber,” one man said, because he was “always working on something electronic” in his immaculately clean and ordered room. At Aunt Charlie’s, though, they called him “Peaches,” Duncan said.

Another mourner was “jealous,” he said, of Mr. Stringfellow’s ability to understand other people so well, “the only



COURTESY CAMELOT HOTEL

### Arnold Stringfellow

one” to comprehend the mourner’s “genius.” He was crushed by the loss.

The desk clerk said one night she told Mr. Stringfellow she couldn’t go to the bathroom and leave the desk unattended because the front door lock was broken, a security problem. He told her to go anyway, he’d stand by. When she returned he was putting the finishing touches on the lock he had just fixed.

Another time he wanted to make deviled eggs for the hotel’s Halloween party because he said everyone would be crazy about them. He was going to buy the eggs himself, but management wouldn’t hear of it and sprung for them. Sure enough, they were gobbled up in no time.

“I never saw him mad,” said one tenant. “A wonderful man, a beautiful man. He changed my life.”

“He gave the best hugs,” another said.

Little was said about Mr. Stringfellow’s background. He was one of the Camelot’s first residents after it was renovated in 2002 and later became a Direct Access to Housing hotel of the Department of Public Health.

It was believed he had once worked in electronics. He told someone he had met his partner — whoever it was — in the exact spot the Camelot occupied when it was a bar years ago. And he loved to talk about the 1960s, people said.

Jeff Schoenfeld, director of Camelot support services, said he had been in touch with Mr. Stringfellow’s sister in Alabama. She was surprised by the call. She thought her brother had died 10 years ago, he said. Schoenfeld had collected tenants’ comments to send her. They said he was kind and loving and “lit up the room” and made all things electronic better.

“He was not just beautiful but fascinating the way he moved and enjoyed life,” Schoenfeld said.

Mr. Stringfellow often rambled before making a point, but Schoenfeld said it taught him to have the patience to listen, a virtue that Mr. Stringfellow showed unflinchingly with others.

“He was a character of the Tenderloin. And there’s a hole in our hearts. I don’t know how we can be the same without his love. I never thought of this place as a sanctuary until I worked here. Arnold was not the strongest, but I adored the man.”

“I hope he knew his life mattered.” Mr. Stringfellow often bought Grandma’s Cookies in the vending machine. Allison Ulrich, the assistant general manager, kidded that he was getting grandmother love.

Oh yes, she said he would reply, “I can’t live without it.”

Rev. Glenda Hope, who conducted the memorial, concluded by saying: “Let’s all live so people will say about us what was said about Arnold.” ■

— TOM CARTER



PHOTO BY BILL CARLSON

**Koci perfects his shot on the pool table at Clementina Towers. “Every pool ball, every Skid Row had its characters,” Koci remembers of South of Market in 1923. “They were recognized for their eccentricity or fighting ability or how much wine they could drink or how many times they’d been in jail.”**

## Beat artist Frank Koci minces no words

► CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

stand it?” I say, “Well, what are you gonna do?” This kind of place somewhere else costs \$250. I pay \$225, and I get this balcony, too.

They keep tearing stuff down. There was the last Chinese laundry here. The owner held out and got \$6,000. I have a friend, an artist, who was the last person on the block at Howard and Third. He refused to move but he finally gave in and signed a contract. They gave him \$6,000. He put the money down on a house in the Mission. That night they wrecked his place. I got \$2,500.

**What did you do with it?**

Put it in the bank. What else to do with it? A poor man puts money in the bank and then waits until he dies and then the state takes it away. I’m spending my money for essential things, like my own art.

**When did you start to paint?**

I started painting when I worked at CBC Studios in Los Angeles. I was a janitor there, but I had the opportunity to get into the place where they painted all kinds of sets for shows like “Queen for a Day” and Art Linkletter. I started using the paints in my spare time and had my first show in Hollywood — I made \$4. I told a critic I’d show him my best work, but he said, “I’ve seen your best ones and they’re the worst ones I ever saw in my life. With you, it’s the opposite of throwing pearls before swine.” I says to him, “That’s good. I like real good criticism.” Then, I took all my paintings and burned the hell out of them. Worst in the world? Best in the world? Who’s the critic? Picasso said that if you want to learn painting, learn from children because they’re uninhibited, haven’t been brainwashed. Look at people like Miró — they draw something like what a kid draws. It’s identical except dozens of critics get together and say it’s great. ■

**This is the seventh in a series of photos and excerpts, edited by Marjorie Beggs, from the Neighborhood Oral History Project interviews that the Study Center conducted in 1977-78 under a CETA contract.**

**Boeddeker Park, a fortress that was once the launching pad for a children’s track team, fell into virtual disuse in recent years, open only 15 hours a week because of Rec and Park budget cuts. Now, it is swept away. A \$6 million renovation will create a new park and fancy glass clubhouse by mid-2014. The question looms as to how will it be staffed for greater use. The top view from the fifth floor of the Windsor Hotel on Eddy Street, was taken in February. The “then” view was shot from the same location in December 2010.**

# Boeddeker Park — now and then

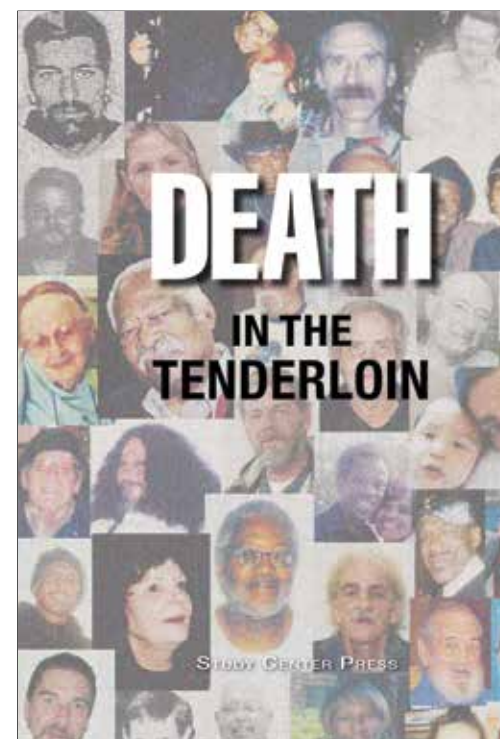


PHOTO BY TOM CARTER



PHOTO BY LENNY LIMPOCO

**Boeddeker Park, a fortress that was once the launching pad for a children’s track team, fell into virtual disuse in recent years, open only 15 hours a week because of Rec and Park budget cuts. Now, it is swept away. A \$6 million renovation will create a new park and fancy glass clubhouse by mid-2014. The question looms as to how will it be staffed for greater use. The top view from the fifth floor of the Windsor Hotel on Eddy Street, was taken in February. The “then” view was shot from the same location in December 2010.**



## THE TENDERLOIN AT ITS MOST TENDER

**“It’s never over while one person remembers you.”**

**“Today is a gift, that’s why it’s called the present.”**

**“All of us have a lot of grief in the Tenderloin.”**

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# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

## SPECIAL EVENTS

**Recology rate hike meeting**, Thu., March 21, 4 p.m. City Hall, Rm. 421 1. First of DPW's informational workshops with public comment on Recology's request to increase rates for collecting and disposing of trash, recyclables and compostables by more than 23%. Info: [sfdpw.org/refuserates](http://sfdpw.org/refuserates)

**Launch party to unveil Epicenter-SF.org**, new calendar and directory Website to promote mid-Market arts, culture, community events, dining and nightlife. March 28, 5-7 p.m., Kunst-Stoff Arts, One Grove St. The project, a collaboration between the Central Market, Civic Center and North of Market/Tenderloin CBDs, is supported by the Office of Economic and Workforce Development and the S.F. Arts Commission. RSVP at [info@Epicenter-SF.org](mailto:info@Epicenter-SF.org)

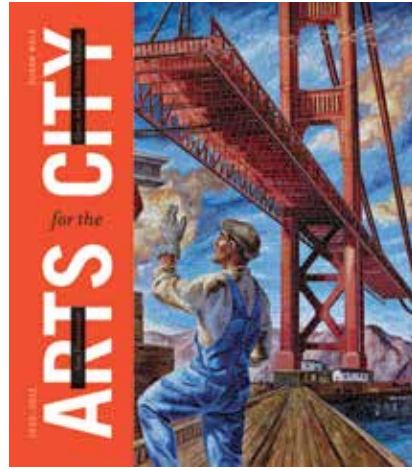
## ART EVENTS

**WritersCorps Live at the Contemporary Jewish Museum**, March 7, 6:30-7:30 p.m., 736 Mission St. Free. An evening of intergenerational readings featuring WritersCorp students, teaching artists, and writer Tamim Ansary (West of Kabul, East of New York and Games Without Rules). Info: [startscommission.org/WC/writerscorps-live-at-the-cjm-march-7/](http://startscommission.org/WC/writerscorps-live-at-the-cjm-march-7/)

**Eugene Ionesco's The Chairs**, Cutting Ball's productions, through March 31, at EXIT on Taylor, 277 Taylor St. The play follows an elderly couple who pass their time in an abandoned seaside building playing private games and telling each other half-remembered stories. Info: [theexit.org/web/the-chairs/#more-122](http://theexit.org/web/the-chairs/#more-122)

**Concerts at the Cadillac**, 380 Eddy St., free concert series. Sat., March 16, 12:30-1:30 p.m.: CAVALISA, with Cava Menzies, piano and vocals, and Lisa Forkish, lead vocals. Fri., March 22, 12:30-1:30 p.m., Glimpse Trio Lite, Mike Sopko, guitar, and Hamir Atwal, drums. Info: [cadillacahotel.org](http://cadillacahotel.org)

**Behind the Curtain**, March 28, 29, 30, 8 p.m., EXIT Theatre, 156 Eddy St. No Nude Men Productions, in association with EXIT Theatre, presents a one-week-



**Lecture at the Main Library celebrates the history of the S.F. Arts Commission.**

end-only mini-festival of three dramatic readings of three backstage comedies by three San Francisco playwrights. \$10. No reservations required. Info: [theexit.org/web/behind/#more-228](http://theexit.org/web/behind/#more-228)

**Free lecture by Susan Wels**, author of San Francisco: Arts for the City — Civic Art and Urban Change, 1932-2012 (Heyday books), Thu., April 4, 6:30 p.m., Main Library, Latino Room. The book celebrates moments in the S.F. Arts Commission's 80-year history of shaping the city's cultural and physical landscape. Info: [sfpl.org](http://sfpl.org)

## COMMUNITY: REGULAR SCHEDULE HOUSING

**Tenant Associations Coalition of San Francisco**, 1st Wednesday of each month, noon, 201 Turk St., Community Room. Contact Michael Nulty, 339-8327. Resident unity, leadership training.

## HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

**CBHS Consumer Council**, 3rd Monday of month, 5-7 p.m., 1380 Howard St., room 537, 255-3695. Consumer advisers from self-help groups and mental health consumer advocates. Public welcome.

**Healthcare Action Team**, 2nd Wednesday of month, 1010 Mission St., Bayanihan Community Center, 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Focus on increasing supportive home services, expanded eligibility for home care, improved discharge planning. Light lunch. Call James Chionsini, 703-0188 x304.

**Mental Health Board**, 2nd Wednesday of the month, 6:30-8:30 p.m., City Hall, room 278. CBHS advisory committee, open to the public. Call: 255-3474.

## SAFETY

**SoMa Police Community Relations Forum**, 4th Monday of each month, 6-7:30 p.m. Location varies. To receive monthly email info: 538-8100 x202.

**Tenderloin Police Station Community Meeting**, neighborhood safety. March meeting will be held Monday, March 18, 6 p.m., police station Community Room, 301 Eddy St, with Supervisor Jane Kim and staff speaking to the community. April resumes regular schedule: last Tuesday of month. Call Susa Black, 345-7300. Neighborhood safety.

## NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT

**Alliance for a Better District 6**, 2nd Tuesday of each month, 6 p.m., 230 Eddy St. Contact Michael Nulty, 820-1560 or [sf\\_district6@yahoo.com](mailto:sf_district6@yahoo.com), a districtwide improvement association.

**Central Market Community Benefit District**, board meets 2nd Tuesday of month, Hotel Whitcomb, 1231 Market St., 3 p.m. Info: 882-3088, <http://central-market.org>

**Friends of Boeddeker Park**, 2nd Wednesday this month, 3 p.m., Police Station Community Room, 301 Eddy St. Plan park events, activities and improvements. Contact Betty Traynor, 931-1126.

**Gene Friend Recreation Center Advisory Board**, 3rd Thursday of month, 5 p.m. Works to protect SoMa resources for all residents. Gene Friend Rec Center, 270 Sixth St. Info: Tim Figueras, 554-9532.

**North of Market/Tenderloin Community Benefit District**. Full board meets 3rd Monday at 4 p.m.. Call 292-4812 for location or check [nom-tlcbd.org](http://nom-tlcbd.org).

**SoMa Community Stabilization Fund Advisory Committee**, 3rd Thursday of month, 5:30 p.m., 1 South Van Ness, 2nd floor. Info: Claudine del Rosario, 701-5580.

**Tenderloin Futures Collaborative**, 3rd Wednesday of the month, 11 a.m.-noon, Tenderloin Police Community Room, 301 Eddy. Presentations on issues of interest to neighborhood residents, nonprofits and businesses. Info: 928-6209.

**Tenderloin Neighborhood Association**, 2nd Friday of month, 842 Geary St., 5 p.m. Nonprofit focuses on health and wellness activities to promote neighborly interactions. Info: [tenderloinneighborhood@yahoo.com](mailto:tenderloinneighborhood@yahoo.com).

## SENIORS AND DISABLED

**Mayor's Disability Council**, 3rd Friday of month, 1-3 p.m., City Hall, room 400. Call: 554-6789. Open to the public.


**Senior Action Network**, general meeting, 2nd Thursday of month, 9 a.m.-noon, Universal Unitarian Church, 1187 Franklin St. Monthly programs, 965 Mission St. #700: Senior Housing Action Committee, 3rd Wednesday, 1:30 p.m. Call for health program and Senior University: 546-1333 and [www.sfsan.org](http://www.sfsan.org).

## DISTRICT 6 SUPERVISOR


**Jane Kim**, chair of Rules Committee, member of Budget & Finance Committee and chair of Transbay Joint Forces Authority.

**Legislative aides**: April Veneracion, Sunny Angulo and Matthias Mormino.

Jane Kim@sfgov.org 554-7970




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<b>Bayanihan House</b> (Non-Assisted Units) Located at 88 – 6th Street & Mission OPEN WAITING LIST	SRO – 1 Person, Couple Shared Bath Single 10 1/2 x 12 – Double 12x12 In the unit there is a sink, microwave, refrigerator, 2-burner stove, closet, single bed, community kitchen, 24-hour staff & surveillance, laundry facility	1 person \$30,275/a year  Couple \$34,580/a year Minimum income of \$866.40/month	Starting 1-2013 Move in Deposit \$545.00 Rent \$545.00 Utilities included


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