

City pushing new priorities for benefits from tax cuts

Rift opens between CAO, panel serving as voice of public

By MARK HEDIN

EVER SINCE the first community benefit agreements (CBAs) between the city and the Twitter tax break tech companies were signed in 2012, there's been a hue and cry to begin the negotiation process earlier in the year, to produce deals that better help the community mitigate the effects of the tech influx.

With the clock fast winding down on time to negotiate the 2015 agreements with the six firms, a rift has opened up between the community's representatives in the process and the city officials who actually control it.

The community's only voice here, the Central Market and Tenderloin Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), in 2012 suggested a mitigation framework for the agreements. It produced mixed results in terms of the specifics the city administrator ultimately agreed to and the fulfillment of those deals' promises, even though 80% completion of the benefits listed is considered acceptable.

But the city administrator's office (CAO) recently took over the process of setting priorities by inviting 70 representatives from "the resident, non-profit, business and government communities" to a Sept. 24 meeting at City Hall to discuss "opportunities to increase safety and cleanliness in nine 'Action Zones' in the CT/TL," according to a new Website that premiered that month.

In a memo from City Administrator Naomi Kelly distributed at the CAC's Oct. 2 meeting, committee members were informed that the new Website, centralmarketcba.com, had been launched "to increase the transparency of the CBA process and provide real-time information to the public."

Transparency has certainly been a long-standing point of contention in the CBA process, on issues ranging from the value of the tax breaks to the companies,

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"You're not only cutting out the CAC, you're cutting out the community."

Peter Masiak
CAC CHAIRMAN

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THE EXTRA ATTAINS A MILESTONE

Issue No. 150 since 2000 debut

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Crowded memorial for Stephani Santana

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CENTRAL CITY



SAN FRANCISCO

WILSON BUILDING



PHOTO RAIN TREE PARTNERS

A "junior one-bedroom" at the Wilson Building — at 531 square feet and \$1,022 monthly, it's 102 square feet larger and \$123 more per month than the five affordable studios.

Cheapest rent: \$899

5 Market Street units area's lowest private housing

By JONATHAN NEWMAN

IMAGINE, amid San Francisco's housing crisis, you could rent a studio apartment in a refurbished historic building in the tech-booming center of the city for \$899 a month. Your brand-new home has a modern bathroom, a kitchen sporting quartz countertops and stainless steel appliances. And you get access to a rooftop lounge with an outdoor barbecue and dog run, free WiFi, a yoga studio and a well-equipped fitness center that never closes.

You would have the cheapest privately developed housing in the central city at the newest address, one of the seven affordable units — five studios and two one-bedroom — among 67 apartments at 973 Market St., the Wilson Building. If you qualified for the city's below market rate (BMR) housing program, the lottery gods smiled upon you and your rental application passed Wilson vetting, that is.

To stand a chance for one of the affordable studios at the Wilson — rented at below market rate under the aegis of the city's inclusionary housing programs administered by the mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development — you have to make at least \$26,970 a year. The median annual income in the Tenderloin is \$30,000, according to a 2012 Department of Public Health report. At market rates, the Wilson studios rent from \$2,500 to \$3,700 a month, the one-bedrooms from \$3,400 to \$5,500, the new norms in the city with the highest median rent in the country. The Wilson's below-market rent one-bed-

rooms go for \$1,022.

Nonprofits have long provided inexpensive housing in the city center, in some instances for little and even no rent. Plus, the nonprofits provide supportive services to targeted groups — the recently homeless, youths transitioning out of foster care, the disabled and the infirm — though no dog run or fitness center.

Community Housing Partnership houses tenants referred from service providers and city agencies. Depending on the scope of supportive services, tenants' rent is a percent of their monthly income — typically 30% to 50%, and that can mean paying as little as \$300 a month.

Unlike at the Wilson, however, CHP's rentals aren't designed to be permanent homes for the tenants. The 44 housing units CHP opened last year at Fifth and Harrison streets for 18- to 25-year-olds who are homeless or a paycheck away, is a prime example of housing with a purpose, says Bridget Holian, director of fund development and communications.

"Tenants share bathrooms and a community kitchen. There are rules on visitors and guests. We provide employment training and we try to address the challenges tenants face," Holian said. "It's designed to help the youth become self-sufficient and to move into the competitive marketplace of the world at large."

At less than \$900 a month, a new apartment in the central city would be an endless dream, particularly when the median monthly rent for a one-bedroom in the Civic Center is \$3,400 — higher than Nob Hill or Pacific Heights. HUD sets the maximum annual income for applicants of below-market rental housing. This year the one-person household max is \$37,350, for two, it's \$42,750.

Affordable housing legislation was state-mandated in 1985 when the Legislature recognized a shortage of housing for low- and moderate-income families and ordered each

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Image from the city's new Website pitching cleanliness and safety as neighborhood priorities.

The Extra hits a milestone: 150 issues



PHOTO BY LEONOR VERA

Central City Extra staff gather in front of the newspaper trophy exhibit to celebrate a milestone, issue No. 150: From left: Sophia Heller, editorial assistant; Mark Hedin, reporter and distributor; Lise Stampfli, designer; Geoff Link, editor and publisher; Marjorie Beggs, senior writer and editor; Jonathan Newman, reporter; Tom Carter, community reporter. Issue No. 1 hit the streets in 2000. We began entering journalism competitions five years ago and since, have won seven 1st-place, 10 2nd-place and eight 3rd-place awards from the S.F.-Peninsula Press Club. The Society of Professional Journalists honored us three times: Link got the *Unsung Hero* award in 2009, Carter first prize for his 2013 “Birds of the Tenderloin” story and — most precious kudo — the 2011 best Community Journalism award among all Northern California non-daily publications. Not pictured are Paul Dunn, photojournalist; Mark Doneza, photographer; and Ed Bowers, Art Beat writer.

GOOD NEWS

HASTINGS' HALLOWEEN Kids got a special pre-Halloween treat Oct. 24 courtesy of Hastings law students living at the 27-story Tower, 100 McAllister St. For a few hours, it was all sugary, shivery fun as the big “kids” tricked out their environs, competing in the annual “most spookified floor” contest, an event that goes back at least 20 years, says Hastings CFO David Seward: “This is a favorite holiday tradition at the school, an uber sweet event.” The 140 kids from five TL after-school programs started with pizza and candy in the wildly decorated lobby, then made their way up the tower for more treats from students



PHOTO JACKLYN FANG

A little goblin roams the halls of Hastings Tower on Halloween.

in some of the 251 apartments. Along the way, law student Lucas Pastuszka, a ghoulish 6-foot-4 creature with a black fright wig, (fake) bloody ax, bare legs and motorcycle boots with chains, popped out of the elevator

and around corners, scaring even the toughest-looking 10-year-olds. Lidia Lopez, second-year law student, Associated Students officer and the day’s event coordinator, was everywhere, her face painted like a Day of the Dead sugar skull. She chose the 34 contest winners — all 28 students on the ninth floor for best decorations plus six in a 10th-floor apartment for putting on the best spooky experience for trick-or-treaters. Each got a \$5 Philz Coffee gift card and earned pro bono hours. ■

— Marjorie Beggs

MORE HEALTHY STORES Last year, California Produce at 986 Polk St. was the only small grocery in the TL to get four stars in the Tenderloin Healthy Corner Store Coalition’s shopping guide, based on a survey of 56 stores in the hood. The stars rate measures types and quality of food sold, cleanliness, amount and type of advertising, and a score of other criteria. At the coalition’s second annual gathering Sept. 24, members

announced the great news: This year, a second store, City Supermarket at 669 Geary, got the coveted four stars; three-star stores almost doubled — from 12 to 23; and stores getting the dismal one star — no fresh produce, whole-grain products or other healthy comestibles — dropped from 12 to three. “These changes demonstrate a real ripple effect,” said Jessica Estrada, Public Health Department consultant and coalition co-coordinator. “Many corner markets are realizing there’s a demand for healthy foods in our neighborhood.” Other good news: Three TL stores — Dalda’s, Amigo’s Market and Mid City Market — will join the Healthy Retail SF program in 2015 (see The Extra issue No. 136). In exchange for stocking and promoting affordable, healthy food instead of tobacco, alcohol and salty, fatty, sugary snacks, each store gets \$16,000 worth of technical assistance and tangible products like display cases and coolers. ■

— Marjorie Beggs

SAN FRANCISCO NONPROFIT DISPLACEMENT MITIGATION PROGRAM

The Northern California Community Loan Fund, Community Arts Stabilization Trust and Urban Solutions announce the availability of technical and financial assistance to address displacement impacting San Francisco nonprofits providing arts, cultural, and social services.

Applications must be received by Friday, November 14, 2014. For information and the online application, please visit: www.ncclf.org/npdmitigation

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City's new agenda for mid-Market: clean and safe

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

to the value of the benefits they provide, the extent to which they follow through on their promises and on how the firms determine who in the community they will work with and how.

An analysis in the December 2013 Extra, aided by CPA Jim McHale using information that Twitter made public for its initial public offering of stock, estimated the tax break's value to Twitter alone at way more than \$100 million. As for the value of each CBA relative to the tech firms, in a memo to The Extra in 2013, Barnes confirmed that the initial expectation was that companies would return almost a third of the value of their tax break. He mentioned a 2012 Forbes article and said, "They got it right." And there it is in the article: "As part of the tax break, companies must pledge to give a portion of the tax break — 30% has been suggested, but is not required by law — to support the local area through the CBA."

Although the city — officially — continues to play lip service to the CAC's role in the mitigation process, the priorities for the CBAs as described on the new Website bear little resemblance to the discussions at monthly CAC meetings, the public's only opportunity to comment.

That new Website, however, links to a site dubbed "Neighborland," at which users are invited to sign up to express "ideas and insights on how to improve our neighborhood."

"Let's make Central Market a cleaner, safer, more vibrant neighborhood," the headline at the top of the home page says. CAC members were outraged.

"This is not a good foot to get off on," Chairman Peter Masiak told Barnes at the October meeting. "When the sole public body that hears this is cut out, you're not only cutting out the CAC, you're cutting out the community."

"There needs to be some way for us to be included in the conversation," committee member Julian Dash concurred.

"What is the CAO's commitment to this body?" member Steve Suzuki, asked. "You're not including us. I had no idea."

COMMITTEE OVERULED

City Administrator Kelly's disdain for the role of the CAC is hardly news, however. In January, after the committee overwhelmingly voted against all but one of the six CBAs she'd negotiated, she signed them all anyway. In 2013, the largest of the six CBAs — Twitter's first — was rubber-stamped before the hoodwinked CAC could vote on it.

"With respect," Barnes replied to Su-

"Cleanliness, safety, we can talk about that, but there's nothing about nonprofit displacement or housing ... we have stabilization issues."

Robert Marquez
CAC VICE CHAIR

zuki, "the purpose of the CAC is to advise the mayor and city administrator." Then he told a whopper: "Naomi's door has been open to anyone who wants to have a conversation." The Extra, for one, persistently asked to discuss the CBA process with Kelly earlier in the year and was rebuffed each time.

Barnes has consistently pressured the CAC to accelerate its approval of the CBAs, saying on Oct. 2 that 2015's need to be finalized by year's end. Late in the process of reviewing this year's deals, that deadline was moved up to Jan. 10 for CBA renewals — that is, all but Spotify, once Advсор dropped out — though the CAC had been acting under the impression that Kelly had until Jan. 31 to sign them as in previous years.

Although the CAC was created in legislation District 6 Supervisor Jane Kim introduced following the enactment of the Twitter tax break in 2011, and although its unpaid members are vetted by the Board of Supervisors, the panel has no statutory authority in the CBA process. So it's a weak voice that Kim gave her poorest constituents in the negotiations for community benefits.

When Zendesk, in June 2012, was the only company executing a CBA — later joined by Twitter, Yammer, One Kings Lane, Zoosk and 21Tech in 2013, and this year by Spotify after 21Tech dropped out — the CAC hammered out some priorities for the companies and city administrator to consider when negotiating their CBAs.

Among them are: affordable housing; supporting locally owned small businesses, nonprofits and arts organizations; creating jobs and hiring from within the community; providing educational and job opportunities to local youth; improving access to healthy, affordable food; reducing the "digital divide"; and developing strategies to address community safety concerns, the latter of which, CAC Vice Chair Robert Marquez told The Extra, was at best a low priority for the CAC.

"Cleanliness, safety, sure, we can talk about that," Marquez said at the meeting, "but there's nothing about

nonprofit displacement or housing ... we have stabilization issues."

The emphasis on cleanliness and safety, he said, implies that the city's priority has shifted to "making the companies that moved in more comfortable in this neighborhood where they've recently arrived."

"I'm concerned," Masiak said, "that 70 key leaders have identified these things, creating a faux sense of universal anguish over cleanliness and safety. There's no mention of nonprofit displacement, education, bridging the digital divide ..."

In response to Barnes' defense of the data Neighborland had provided, Masiak also pointed out that Web access is far from universal among those who live in the neighborhood.

STABILIZATION EFFORTS

Nonprofit stabilization has been a recurring topic of concern at CAC meetings, especially in 2014. Market Street for the Masses, a coalition of almost 30 neighborhood organizations, urged, in meetings held at Twitter and in presentations to the CAC, creation of a \$25 million Community Stabilization and Acquisition Fund.

At the October meeting, Hospitality House Executive Director Jackie Jenks detailed the plan: "We're really requesting two things in the CBA process," she said. The first is that the tax-break companies "be partners with us in the stabilization fund" and among them contribute a total of \$60,000 to it. Secondly, she asked for "four hours a month of senior-level management time to help us to open these doors" of potential corporate donors who could provide additional funding in the effort to help neighborhood nonprofits threatened by the overheated real estate market.

But there's no mention of any such effort on the city administrator's new Website. Its home page features a photo of the intersection of Seventh and Market streets, including the still-boarded-up Grant Building.

"Welcome to Central Market Street," reads the wording superimposed on that image. The next picture that appears is of a helmeted bicyclist wearing shades, with the words "Building a safer Market Street." Finally, there's a brightly colored cartoon image of City Hall, a streetcar, a few trees, a couple of bicy-

cles and waste bins and assorted blocky buildings.

"Since 2011," reads the text below, "Central Market Street and Tenderloin Area Community Benefit Agreements have helped connect new, innovative businesses in the neighborhood with the vibrant community that long considered the Tenderloin and Central Market home."

Those new, innovative businesses, of course, would be the tech companies that have signed CBAs.

"In negotiating these agreements," the Website continues, "the City Administrator has made community engagement a top priority, and this website continues that effort."

But the CAC is scarcely mentioned and neither are any of the framework items for CBAs suggested by the CAC.

Suzuki arrived at the meeting with a list of "five points I want to make sure are embedded in the CBAs," including the stabilization fund.

"The Companies engaged in the CBA's have immense creative talent and skill," he wrote. "We need to engage this talent." Each company should focus on one specific issue per quarter, for instance, "crime, housing, hunger, arts, displacement, etc.," Suzuki wrote.

"Can you folks help us solve some of these problems, a solution that actually works for us, the community? When you do community work, you do it on the terms of the community. I want to get to a solution, not just a dialogue."

Barnes also informed the panel that the Board of Supervisors' Rules Committee earlier that day had endorsed John Bogacki and Rob Gitin to fill two of the three currently vacant CAC seats, pending full board approval — which came on Oct. 21.

Bogacki's application cites his 25 years of living and working in the city, experiencing homelessness and disability along the way. Gitin is the co-founder and executive director of At The Crossroads for homeless youth and young adults in the TL and Mission

No acceptable candidate has emerged for the seat reserved for a person with commercial real estate expertise.

Also, Barnes announced that the CAO had recently hired University of Michigan Law School graduate Andrew Dayton as a policy aide. Barnes told The Extra that Dayton would be helping to draft the CBAs in consultation with the city attorney.

Dayton was not in the room at the time of the introduction, and neither he nor Barnes were there for the public comment portion of the meeting when Jenks took a moment at the outset of her allotted three minutes to thank the CAC "for its volunteer efforts" and the companies' community liaisons and then said, "I'm sorry that Bill and Andrew have left, because I was going to thank them for being in the dialogue." ■

CENTRAL CITY

EXTRA!

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Cheapest private studio in the neighborhood — it's below market rate



PHOTO BY JONATHAN NEWMAN, COLLAGE LISE STAMPEL

Wilson Building on Market Street offers best deals by a private developer.

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

county to address the crisis. The city has modified and tweaked its housing ordinances almost annually in an effort to balance housing stock against a wall of obstacles, including organized neighborhood opposition.

When affordable housing was built, bureaucratic blunders often rendered the units useless. A 2012 budget analyst report to the Board of Supervisors revealed that 17 units of affordable housing at 55 Page St. remained unoccupied for five years, because the Mayor's Office of Housing (MOH) failed to market them.

BMR rental applicants do not submit the application to the mayor's office but to the rental agent directly when the affordable units come on line. MOH posts notices on the city's Website when affordable units are ready to market and it monitors the scheduled lottery draw, but the meat of the transaction is between renter and landlord. There must be a 28-day application window and developers are required to run notices in local papers.

The city's affordable housing program is geared to those with low and moderate incomes.

Prosperous tech workers who have flooded the city in the wake of the Twitter tax break are willing to pay high rents and have created a fevered demand in a short supply market.

Despite a recent widespread media report that commercial and residential rates in mid-Market have not increased, the displacement of nonprofits and those close to the scene who follow the facts speak otherwise.

"Rents in the city rose 41% from 2011 to 2013 and 25% in the Tenderloin," according to Dan Kelly, the Human Services Agency director of planning. Federal budget cuts, redevelopment's 2012 demise and the recent expiration of a state housing bond program haven't helped either. Not enough BMR units are available for the thousands of eligible renters who live or work here.

A report the nonprofit California Housing Partnership released three months ago set the shortfall of affordable housing in the city at more than 40,000 units, noting that social workers, schoolteachers, sales clerks, waiters, auto mechanics and others not graced with a six-figure income may have a chance to rent where a one-bedroom median rental citywide is \$3,100, but only through affordable housing — and it's a long shot.

The Wilson Building, built in 1901, destroyed in the '06 quake, then reborn as a commercial base for furniture stores, clothing makers and medical offices, had stood vacant for 10 years. Hidden behind scaffolding, open in part to wind and rain and nesting birds, the building endured a succession of owners and a series of failed renovation attempts.

This year Raintree Partners from Southern California completed the restoration. The seven BMR units, ranging from 386 to 531 square feet, are a steal at less than half the going rate.

Nonprofit TODCO also offers cheap units

Cheap is a relative term. There are scores of SROs in the Tenderloin where one could rent a studio apartment for less than \$899 a month. The amenities wouldn't match the new, shiny gadgetry at the privately developed Wilson Building, and there might be eligibility requirements more individualized than the city's below market rate rental program.

The size may be less than the Wilson studios, and there's no private bathroom. You would have access to a community kitchen and your home could have a two-burner stove, microwave and refrigerator, as at three of nonprofit TODCO's SROs south of Market Street that maintain waiting lists.

The Knox at Sixth and Tehama streets has an open waiting list for a one-room, 189-square-foot apartment with a semiprivate, 49-square-foot bathroom. Tenants have access to a community lounge, rooftop garden and laundry facility. The building has 24-hour staffing and surveillance, and it's yours for \$865 a month plus util-

ities. You must make at least \$20,760 a year but no more than \$34,600. Supportive services are available in-house.

At Hotel Isabel on Mission near Seventh, TODCO provides a single room with kitchen amenities. You can't make more than \$34,600 a year, but there is no minimum income. The rent is 30% of your income and to make the waitlist you must have a Certificate of Homelessness issued by Public Health. Some of the Isabel's units rent with Section 8 subsidies.

For Bayanihan House at 88 Sixth St. add your name to TODCO's waiting list and you might lease a 126-square-foot single room with a shared bathroom for \$572 a month plus utilities. You must earn at least \$10,529 a year, but no more than \$30,275. Again, you may qualify through a DPH Direct Access to Housing program, but some of the Bayanihan's units are non-assisted. There are regular social, cultural and culinary events put on by resident volunteers. ■

— Jonathan Newman



PHOTO ALGIE ABRAMS, WWW.ALGIEABRAMS.COM

Street Beggar Woman, above, is one of Algie Abrams' images in the *Faithful Fools* show to run through 2015. Right, Father Louis Vitale and Meg Whitaker-Greene discuss Abrams' photo **Bent but Not Broken** during the reception for the exhibition opening. Below, **Even the Dying Must Work** leverages the power of compositional negative space to isolate the figure of the boy.

Applications for the units opened Aug. 11 and closed Sept. 8 — 371 applications were received.

According to Aissia Ashoori, director of BMR programs at the MOH, that's a generally small number. "I think the demand for one- and two-bedroom units is higher than for studios. Earlier this year the 69 BMR units at Mosso at Fifth and Folsom drew 2,000 applications. The 90 units at NEMA (10th and Market) drew more than 1,700," she said.

On Sept. 19 at the Main Library, MOH and Wilson reps conducted a lottery draw for the apartments and 100 applications were drawn.

These BMR applicants must establish the bona fides of the household. At least one household member must live or work in San Francisco, and all sources of income or benefits, including asset income, must be certified. Certain retirement accounts won't exclude you, however, regardless of their value. If you own a business, or hold title to residential property or land, expect to document its value and any income it brings in. Proving what you state in the application is necessary in lottery land where you can earn a preferred status if you're a recent Ellis Act evictee or you've hung on despite a redevelopment eviction extending back to the 1960s.

Lucky lottery winners then faced review of their application by Wilson reps. MOH gave them a heads-up: Be prepared to submit federal tax returns, pay stubs, income statements and three consecutive bank and asset statements. After clearing the document hurdle, rules of the Wilson rental background check take hold. Your credit report is drawn and a rating assigned. Past credit problems can derail you. Debts to previous landlords or outstanding nonsufficient funds checks are verboten.

If you pass the credit review, be prepared for a criminal background check. Felony convictions must be seven or more years behind you, though sex or terrorism crimes rub you out immediately. No one can co-sign your rental agreement, but someone might guarantee your rent payment, if their rent-to-

income ratio triples your monthly rent.

However, pets and service animals are OK, if the animal doesn't weigh more than 25 pounds. No pit bulls, malamutes, Doberman pinschers, or Rottweilers are allowed. Tarantulas, piranhas, reptiles, raccoons, ferrets or macaws are not welcome either.

If you are still in the game, keep that application polished and current. Emerald Fund has opened applications for 48 affordable studio, one-bedroom and two-bedroom apartments, renting from \$899-\$1,139 a month in its 400-unit complex at 100 Van Ness. Applications will close Nov. 25. The lottery is Dec. 10. Good luck. ■



A perfect vessel for old wine

Abrams' Photoshopped images show elderly, poor at their best

By Ed Bowers

ON DISPLAY at the Faithful Fools is an exhibition of photographs by the Algie Abrams that is especially relevant for digital media artists and the citizens of the Tenderloin. Photographers can take inspiration from Abrams' skillful use of Photoshop to transform images of the destitute into artistic statements in which we see the homeless and the poor depicted with grace and dignity.

This is an important exhibition.

Abrams was an electrical engineer at Johnson Space Center in Houston until 1976 when he purchased his first camera. He showed it to me and it looks about as big as a sawed-off shotgun. He chose homeless and other indigent people as subjects, he said, because they sit or stand in one place long enough for him to get good shots of them. Great work is all in the details and Abrams' candor is refreshingly insightful.

At Abrams' late-September gallery reception at the Faithful Fools, among the large turnout was the local legend of social justice, Father Louis Vitale. He loved the exhibit, he said. Another viewer, Lotus Miller, a young 66 who has been homeless three times, commented: "Everyone (in the photos) has such dignity. It's amazing!"

These photographs peer deep down into the silent presence of poverty on the street. Many of the subjects appear posed against a blurred or black or gray background as though caged behind the wall of an anonymous prison. "Street Beggar Woman" is an elderly lady, palm outstretched, begging against a black background, the void. Her open blank stare exhibits neither the luxury of love nor the indulgence of hate.

"The thing I did there was to take the background and turn it black," Abrams said, explaining his use of Photoshop. The black background brings out the woman's stoicism. She ap-

pears resigned to aloneness. "I try to minimize distraction from the image," Abrams said. And so he does.

As someone growing older hourly, I appreciate Abrams' vision of the elderly poor. None appears pathetic or silly. They exude dignity. Take the photograph of an old man on a walker counting his change so he can buy cigarettes, the cigarettes lying at his feet as he counts the coins. With all other distractions removed this illuminates the expense of a bad habit that, significantly, may hold off a little despair.

A personal favorite, "Even the Dying Must Work," shows a young man sitting on a tar-black road, his back slouched against a molten red wall. His eyes are closed as though he were in prayer, or he may be dying. The scene evokes images of fire and life and death, the dying boy and the wall both suffused with an inanimate life.

When I look at these photographs, I think only of the photograph, not the photographer. Abrams keeps his ego out of the picture. "I don't want to be part of the conversation. I feel like I'm the vessel and not the wine," he told me.

There are many great photographs in this exhibit. Anyone interested in the art of photography and the dignity of the homeless and poor should check it out. It's about time that the poor and homeless get presented with as much respect as is given to the rich and famous. The people in these photographs could be your mother or father, son or daughter.

Abrams captures the human dimension of poverty. Look at them close enough and the homeless here become as familiar as your face in the mirror. Go to this exhibit to find out if I'm right. It will be at the Faithful Fools at 234 Hyde St. for one solid year. You might recognize yourself in some of the photographs, or, if you look close enough, even peer into the future of someone you know. ■



PHOTO SAM DENNISON



PHOTO ALGIE ABRAMS, WWW.ALGIEABRAMS.COM

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STEPHANI SANTANA

The Hamlin's mom to many

Everybody in the Tenderloin should have a sendoff like Stephani Santana got at the Hamlin Hotel Sept. 11 — a big crowd of friends loving her and sharing memories through their laughter and tears, beautiful music being sung, a minister offering prayers, red paper hearts on the walls proclaiming love, and a cornucopia of food.

Ms. Santana earned it with her personality. Her giving nature touched so many residents and outside friends alike. Some felt she was their second mother.

"Gone but never forgotten," read an inscription under a photo on a flyer. The photo was taken in the community room where the memorial was held and it showed the hearts on the walls around Ms. Santana who was holding on to her walker while hooked up with a tube to the oxygen she needed day and night.

Her health had declined over two years. Even so, she helped prepare the hotel's monthly wellness breakfast. "She was a great asset," said Azizi Gupton, social worker. "I talked to her every day."

Ms. Santana, a 13-year Hamlin resident, was asthmatic and had heart trouble. She died Aug. 30 in her room with her oxygen tank near, a week before her birthday. She was 59.

New York-born, she had a Brooklyn accent one friend said was hard to understand at first. Ms. Santana had recently returned to the hotel from S.F. General against her doctor's wishes. Her brother had already moved some things out of her room, expecting she'd go into hospice care elsewhere. But the Hamlin was home.

Only a dozen mourners showed up at the appointed time for the memorial, but then the room slowly filled until all the seats were taken and people stood along the walls decorated with leftover red hearts from Valentine's Day, and spilled out the door into the lobby — 47 people in all — as emotions kicked in.

"There's a lot of diversity in this room," said Rev. Paul Trudeau, who led the memorial. And as he read the 23rd Psalm, some mourners echoed familiar phrases like the "shadow of death," "fearing no evil" and "my cup runneth over."

The statuesque soprano, Molly Mahoney, who teaches children's classes for the San Francisco Opera, sang "I'll



PHOTO COURTESY OF HAMLIN HOTEL

Stephani Santana at an earlier event at the Hamlin.

Fly Away" in the suddenly quiet room.

Angela Harris, who knew Ms. Santana seven years, had just come out of the hospital. She stood and gripped a chair. "My kids loved her," she said with difficulty in a raspy voice. "She was such a helpful person. I used to pick her up for lunch. I met her brothers. She's not gone, just gone to a better place. I want everyone to know that she'll be loved. And so will everyone here."

"Amen," the mourners murmured. Donell Henderson, a maintenance man, knew her 10 years. He had once lived at the Hamlin for 14 months and often went to the grocery for her. She gave him good advice, "wisdom," he called it, to help him stay out of trouble. He had been in prison when his own mother, a Hamlin resident, had died and he later came to live at the SRO. "She was like a mom to me," Henderson said. "I just saw her two or three weeks ago.

Two days ago, I heard she passed."

A man named Mike stood and said: "She was one of the nicest people I've ever known, and if more people were like her we'd all be a lot better off."

She was "a lovable woman," another said.

Andrew Mark had extensive notes he had written about Ms. Santana. He is the new president of the Hamlin Tenants Association, having been elected after Ms. Santana put his name in the hat. The tall, thin man was formally dressed in dark pin-striped suit and tie, and spoke with feeling and humor, beginning with the funny sound Ms. Santana made when she had too much to drink: "Eeyee-eeeyee eeyee!"

"Huh?" Mark said he'd respond, then she'd blurt out, "I love you!"

The mourners laughed. Ms. Santana had "the grand gift" of being able to relate to everyone, he said, no matter what it took. She could cajole or sweet-talk anyone into doing things for her, from being an "errand boy" to being her "therapist."

The mourners nodded and smiled. She loved company, and if she could help anyone she would. "But if you asked her for help, she'd cuss you out. "But Stephani," Mark continued, "could not bring herself to hurt anyone. And you could see it in her eyes that she'd been hurt.

"It's so hard to say goodbye to yesterday," he said.

Sasha said when she was in the hospital recovering from a serious operation her mother never called her, but Ms. Santana, despite her own failing health, called her every day. Sasha couldn't hold back the tears. "She

called me four times," she managed to say. "She watched me grow up. She was like a mother to me."

"Now you're making me cry," said a woman next to her.

"I miss her and I love her," yelled a man in back.

Mahoney sang "Over the Rainbow." When the notes weren't soaring you could hear a pin drop in the now close, muggy room, where the hearts had handwritten interpretations of love like "Love is limitless," "Love is hard, scary," "Love is peace within yourself first," "Love is the earth, sea, moon and stars," and "Love is cannabis meditation."

When it was over, the mourners surrounded a table laden with cold cuts, vegetables, cheeses, crackers, rice, fried chicken, teriyaki chicken, potato salad, gravy, sodas, even candy, contributed by Community Housing Partnership, City Impact, residents and outside friends.

Mark helped serve until he sat for a breather.

"Her brother called her every day," he said, "and when she was talking you could see the love she had for him in her eyes." Her brother lives in the Bay Area but didn't attend. Ms. Santana also had another brother, two daughters, a son and six grandchildren, all living out of state.

"We celebrated her birthday Sept. 10, too," Mark added. "Right here in this room. About 10 of us, and we had a cake."

Then he helped three residents clean up and put away the folding chairs for another time when they'd use the room with the old valentines. ■

— Tom Carter

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