

Tenderloin a potential gusher for biodiesel

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monthly Water Department sewer bill, a reduction that's expected, in one to five years, to offset the cost to buy and install, depending on the size of the device.

A Central City Extra walking survey found 216 food service establishments in the 49 blocks of the Tenderloin, ranging from the minuscule Kien Thanh Donut Shop on Eddy Street to the bustling urban tavern in the Hilton Hotel on O'Farrell Street.

Kashi Serhaan has owned Little Delhi at 83 Eddy St. for five years. About a year ago, he signed on with SFGreasecycle. Before pickup began, the city inspected his grease trap to ensure it was in working order — it was — and now the city comes by once a month to haul away the 25 to 30 gallons of cooking oil generated by Little Delhi's 12 hour-a-day seven-days-a-week operation.

A SKEPTICAL RESTAURATEUR

To meet the city's pending ordinance, Sehaan has looked into the purchase of sophisticated grease-removal devices — some costing up to \$7,000 — but he wonders what it's all about.

"I understand the sewers are old and we need to keep everything clean," he said. "I know what I'm doing, but so many rules and requirements here for small business. Sometimes the city makes regulations just to make money."

SFGreasecycle's grease-into-biodiesel efforts are beginning to pay off but can increase only if it can grab business away from private collection agencies. Food service establishments that aren't using the city's cooking oil pickup service are either pouring it down the drain or, in many cases, paying private firms 91¢ a gallon to haul it away. On top of that, they're also paying to get their grease traps cleaned out.

The Extra polled nine private companies that pick up in San Francisco. Two, GotGrease in San Francisco and Bay Pumping in Salinas, don't charge. Those that charge wouldn't say how much; one, Liquid Environmental Solutions, a huge, San Diego-based waste management company that collects in 2,000 cities, refused, citing "the competitive nature of our business."

In the private sector, GotGrease, a family-owned S.F. waste cooking oil and grease collector, has eliminated fees for pickup betting its profit will come

from the sale to bulk processors of waste oil and brown grease — a mixture of vegetable oil, animal fat and other grease found in grease interceptors — for conversion to biodiesel fuel, or electrical power.

With more than 600 restaurants and caterers signed on in San Francisco, GotGrease collects the old cooking oil, filters and cleans it by a heat settling process, then biodiesel-powered trucks haul the purified product — free from contaminants and water — to Bentley Biofuel in Nevada where it is mixed with methanol and sodium or potassium hydroxide. The resulting chemical reaction, known as transesterification, separates glycerin from the waste oil to be reborn in soaps and lotions, and creates methylesters — biodiesel fuel. Ten gallons of purified product can produce nine gallons of biodiesel fuel, according to Bentley General Manager Carlo Luri.

Brown grease, more solid than liquid, is sold off by GotGrease to East Bay Municipal Utility District, which uses it to make biomethane, a key component in the production of electricity. The price paid for the waste products is set on a national commodities market.

Soluna Cafe & Lounge at 272 McAllister St. uses GotGrease. But, says owner Rene Denis, he used to have SFGreasecycle haul away his yellow grease.

WHY SOLUNA DROPPED CITY PROGRAM

"We signed up with the city program 2½ years ago, then switched about eight months ago," Denis said. "GotGrease was already cleaning our grease traps and then they offered to take the yellow grease for no extra charge."

Soluna pays \$125 a month to have GotGrease empty its 10-gallon grease trap, he said. "There were two reasons I switched: GotGrease comes on a regular schedule, but the city required us to call when our [cooking oil] barrel was filled. Also, I wanted to give the business to the little guy."

Like GotGrease, the yellow grease — 530,000 gallons collected by SFGreasecycle since 2007 — also travels far on its transforming journey into biodiesel. About 22,000 gallons a month are trucked to PUC's Southeast Water Pollution Control Plant in Hunters Point, then are sold to three biodiesel manufacturers in California and one in Nevada. After processing, PUC buys back biodiesel — 6,800 gallons through May 2010 — from People's Fuel Cooperative, a dis-

tributor in San Rafael.

Steve Hunter, spokesman for Project Open Hand, the nonprofit that prepares and delivers thousands of meals a month to homebound people, reports that it once was part of SFGreasecycle, but dropped out, because it doesn't generate enough waste cooking oil.

"The SFGreasecycle program focuses on larger amounts of waste oil — ideally oil from deep fat fryers — and we don't prepare our foods that way," Hunter noted. He added that Open Hand pays Darling International, the nation's largest refiner, with a San Francisco office, to clean traps and haul away that grease. ■



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PHONE: (415) 626-1650

FAX: (415) 626-7276

EMAIL: centralcityextra@studycenter.org

EDITOR AND PUBLISHER: Geoffrey Link

ADVERTISING DIRECTOR: Heidi Swillinger

SENIOR WRITER/EDITOR: Marjorie Beggs

COMMUNITY REPORTER: Tom Carter

REPORTERS: Ed Bowers, Jonathan Newman, Mark Hedin, Anne Marie Jordan

DESIGNER: Lenny Limjoco

PHOTOGRAPHER: Lenny Limjoco

CONTRIBUTORS: John Burks, Diamond Dave, Charlie Wormhoudt

DESIGN CONSULTANT: Don McCartney

DISTRIBUTION: Mark Hedin

EDITORIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE: David Baker, Michael Nulty, Debbie Larkin, Nicholas Rosenberg, Brad Paul, Tariq Alazraie

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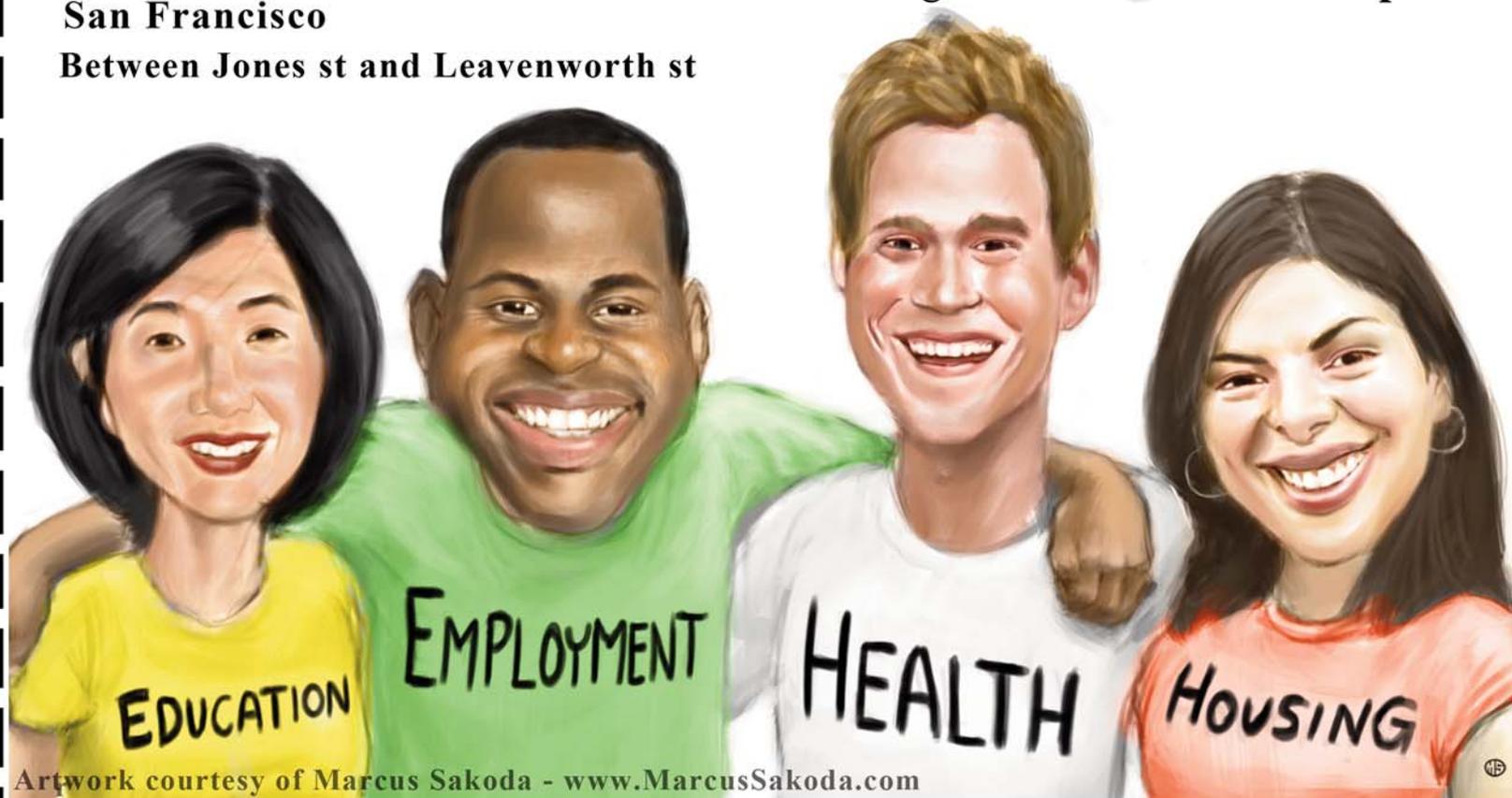
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