

Safe passage for kids along gritty route

Boys & Girls Club, CBD, Kelly Moore depict secure path to school

BY TOM CARTER

WORK began on the Tenderloin's version of the yellow brick road when 60 volunteers picked up paint brushes on Martin Luther King Day to color sidewalks on Jones Street for the neighborhood's delayed Safe Passage program for kids.

Unlike in "The Wizard of Oz," this 11-block yellow road doesn't lead to the wizard; it's meant to promote security for kids walking to school through the seedy neighborhood and to motivate ill-behaved adults to respect the children and make nice.

"This community has the highest concentration of kids in the city," said Pat Zamora, supervisor of the Boys and Girls Clubs in the TL and on Treasure Island, as youngsters around her used cardboard stencils and brushes to paint the west sidewalk between Golden Gate Avenue and Turk Street yellow. "We're designating the area visually — it's a presence."

"People don't think of the kids," she explained. "Sometimes kids can't speak for themselves. So it's making them more visible and community-involved. It's not against anybody. It's for the community."

Winnie Phan, club alumna and California Boys and Girls Club 2010 Youth of the Year, later said at a sidewalk news conference she was happy with the caution-colored route.

"We were never safe," she said.

A version of Safe Passage began in 2006 when concern mounted over exposing the neighborhood's 5,000 children to rampant drug dealing and street violence.

"Older Boys and Girls Club members started walking the younger ones home," Dina Hilliard, TL CBD executive director, said. The idea spread as after school program staffs and volunteers emulated the practice. Police and the TL CBD got involved and volunteers started coming from the Salvation Army and Glide Memorial United Methodist church.

"We're just formalizing it," Hilliard said. "We're giving it a name and providing a visual designation."

The sidewalk mural project, which was to have started in June, is the second phase, made possible by a collaboration of a dozen nonprofits, government agencies and private companies. It had to have DPW permits and Arts Commission approval.



PHOTO BY TOM CARTER

Itziel and Lisbeth Macias, sisters in matching jackets, came with their mother, standing behind, from their Turk Street apartment just around the corner to pitch in for Safe Passage.

"The project is not reliant upon any public funding or resources," said Hilliard. "It is completely self-sustained within the community and more likely to be successful because of the personal investment and interest from the community."

On the nation's official MLK Day of Service, volunteers came from the Boys and Girls Club, La Voz Latina, the Bay Area Local Initiatives Support Corp., and from nearby apartment buildings. Many youth volunteers wore orange T-shirts and passed out colorful informational cards explaining Safe Passage.

One Latino family showed up with the mother holding her infant while supervising her two daughters, Itziel and Lisbeth Macias, who attend Redding Elementary School and live on Turk Street. Local artists volunteered, too, as well as three Kelly Moore Paint Co. executives who supervised paint distribution. The company donated 30 gallons of non-slip yellow paint for this initial phase, plus buckets and brushes.

"This is extremely expensive paint," Hilliard reported at the Tenderloin Futures Collaborative meeting two days later. Originally, the CBD estimated paint would cost \$25,000. But Kelly Moore stepped in and took care of it all.

The CBD has budgeted \$10,000 for the project, \$6,000 for the artist to complete it. The neon yellow, blue, pink and green mural design that runs on the outer half of sidewalks from Golden Gate up Jones and Leavenworth streets to Ellis Street where it jogs west for one block. The path is also on one block of Golden Gate, Turk and Eddy streets between Jones and Leavenworth. Several service organizations with children's programs are on the route.

Artist Sylvester Guard's design is a procession of large yellow brick-like rectangles outlined in black. Groups of them are separated on the pavement by encircled icons such as butterflies and keys. Guard's ver-

sion varies from the predominantly green sidewalk mural by John Janonis. His original design in 2010 went before the Arts Commission for approval last year when he died in his SoMa apartment in August, delaying the project and causing a search for another artist. (See The Extra, October 2011.)

Volunteers were to complete the yellow "brick" work on all 11 blocks that day, leaving Guard to paint the circles. But only two blocks were finished in three hours.

"The scope is huge," Hilliard said, "much bigger than we thought." The CBD will organize another volunteer day, she said.

Before the painting is done, the TL police will put volunteers through a two-hour training session to become orange-shirt safety monitors. Capt. Joe Garrity said he can commit only a few officers during the to-and-from school hours.

When the trial period ends in June, Hilliard said, the CBD will assess how well the paint held up under routine pressure water cleanings. Probably a CBD survey then will ask Safe Passage users and supporters for project evaluations. If it is successful, Hilliard said, the CBD would consider making the mural permanent by burning it into the pavement. ■

Volunteers on MLK Day were able to only paint two blocks, leaving nine more to complete the route, for future sessions.



PHOTO COURTESY TENDERLOIN CBD

Artist Sylvester Guard reworked the sidewalk design of the late John Janonis and made a yellow brick passage, recalling the "Wizard of Oz."



PHOTO BY TOM CARTER