

Redevelopment Agency demise a body blow to Sixth Street

\$4 million a year lost, along with the loss of momentum

BY BRIAN RINKER

WHILE city agencies scramble to fill the gaps left by the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, projects to resuscitate the Sixth Street Corridor have ceased, funding is gone, and the future is uncertain.

"We fear," says Jenny McNulty, executive director of Urban Solutions, "that without support, the revitalization efforts of Sixth Street might be reversed and it will be once again filled with shuttered businesses."

In more than 20 years, Redevelopment spent \$85 million trying to revitalize a 70-acre area south of Market Street. It concentrated on the Sixth Street Corridor, an area notorious for crime, homelessness, alcohol, drugs and worse. With its public advisory committee SOM-

PAC, and community-based organization, Urban Solutions, an open dialogue with the diverse community occurred and slow growth began.

Initially, the agency was only authorized to repair damage caused by the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake and develop affordable housing. Then, in 2005, the

agency increased its scope and officially began to combat neighborhood blight and encourage economic growth.

"It's not the same Sixth Street it was," says Mike Grisso, senior project manager of the former Redevelopment Agency. "It is a much better place now."

The agency spent \$66 million over the years on affordable housing, creating 1,100 new and renovated units. The Public Initiative Development Organization, a non-profit arm of Redevelopment, owns and operates the \$23 million Plaza Apartments on Sixth and Howard

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TENDERLOIN STARS



PHOTO BY LENNY LIMJOCO

Thrift-driven artist Virginia Miller works up to 12 hours daily painting and beading, rarely leaving her Alexander Residence room.

Art is thriving in SROs

Amazing residents surrounded by their own creations

BY TOM CARTER

THERE are many artists in the Tenderloin. Home is often an SRO, where life can be rich and varied. "It takes all kinds" is practically a neighborhood mantra. The three people profiled here are both SRO dwellers and artists. One works with beads, one combines art with compassion, the other raises collecting to a curatorial art. Our kind of stars.

ARTIST ON THE RUN

Anyone visiting affable but insular Virginia Miller is astounded by her walls and inclined to call her eighth-floor room in the Alexander Residence a "museum."

More than 130 masks from all over the world share wall space with seven of Miller's large, colorfully beaded artworks, plus paintings she has created, mostly images of gods from old Mexico. Some of the beaded pieces took her a year to make.

"I work five to 12 hours a day, seven days a week," Miller says, "It's just something I must do — I'm an artist. And I don't go anywhere or spend any money — except when I travel."

For several years that meant Mexico, cheap and accessible. In every town, she makes a beeline to the mercado to find merchants' shelves in 5- by-10-foot stalls

wildly bedecked with colorful strands of tiny plastic beads that she uses to create her intricate tapestries.

"A pound of beads may cost \$108 here, but just \$20 there," she says, as jocular and disarming as Julia Child. "It pays me to go and they treat me like a queen because I clear out their shelves."

She has been to Puerto Vallarta, La Zapitilla, Zuatecu and Zapopan recently. In Zapitilla she was inspired by the quality of glass sculptures children make at an art school from melted down pop bottles. In Zuatecu, she sought out the Huichol Indians, the peyote yarn painters who also work famously with the same small beads she does. She thought she might learn something from them.

"But they are very protected by the government," Miller said. "They smoke peyote — and I have no judgment on that — and come down out of the hills and sell their stuff, which is pretty high-priced — a mask is \$100. Then they go back up into the hills to their mud huts. I found them unfriendly and uncommunicative."

Squirreled away in drawers in her living area are more than a dozen large shoeboxes each holding at least 10 plastic bags of tiny, colored beads, some fluorescent or iridescent. She uses tweezers to fix them to a glued surface. But now she is painting a 2-foot-square cityscape that must be finished before she turns to a new beading project.

Another work is a slightly smaller painting. "It's my concept of the world. It's banks, churches, prisons and the government. They run everything. The hands in the picture are praying to a light bulb."

Miller has never had a show of her

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PHOTO BY LENNY LIMJOCO

Pearl's Deluxe Burgers anchors Sixth Street at Market; Dottie's is far left.