

Free toilet use soars; street waste plunges

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Mindful of disgusting filth in the streets and mounting complaints about it, the CBD tried to get a number of nonprofits last year to open their restrooms to the public but had no luck — until it turned inward.

CBD President Clint Ladine is Rescue Mission's program director. He helped form an agreement for the mission bathroom at 140 Turk St. to be open for public use during a three-month pilot.

Soon after, the CBD intensified its campaign in another direction. It awarded Hyphae Design Laboratory in Oakland \$20,000 seed money to develop a compostable outdoor potty for the public. It would be the nation's first.

Hyphae's plan for the prototype, based on its neighborhood surveys and feedback from public meetings, is to be delivered to a CBD committee June 10. Hyphae needs \$100,000 total to finance the toilet's development but has only the CBD grant.

Meanwhile, recent data from the mission's toilet show that CBD's gamble has paid off.

Results for the last three months show the toilet was used about 4,500 times, a great leap from the pilot's 748 uses for the same three months in 2011 when, on average, just 11 people a day visited the john. By fall the average had climbed to 32 per day.

Ladine attributed the popularity

burst to two main influences.

"The ink in The Extra and then other places, and word of mouth," he said. "I get calls from (Hospitality House) Self-Help wanting to know if it's open so they can send people down here. The numbers were so low in the beginning because it was new. But when it got consistency, and word was on the street, people started rolling in."

Typically, twice as many men as women use the toilet.

Ladine worried in the beginning that the program might get wrecked by plumbing stoppages that the mission couldn't afford.

"I thought we'd have problems with people shooting up, the toilet getting clogged and having hassles with people. But it hasn't been bad. We had one stoppage and I bought a \$40 snake and fixed it. A couple of times we've had to knock on the door to get someone out. But it has been a good surprise. Maybe we're just lucky. It's a model that can work in other places — with people taking care of it, it gets respect."

The CBD pays \$1,300 a month for supplies and a monitor, Carlos Jackson, who keeps an eye on things and maintains the data from the clipboard hanging on the wall next to the bathroom door. The CBD approved the project for all of 2012, with a review due this month.

Ladine and Jackson said they expect the toilet's usage during sum-



PHOTO BY TOM CARTER

The Rescue Mission's toilet survived a six-fold increase in usage and incurred only one plumbing problem.

'May I use your restroom?' Nearly 1/3 of businesses say yes

Hyphae Labs hosted a "public toilet workshop night" April 12, a rainy evening meeting attended by 14 people, most connected with Hyphae. On one wall were results of an unusual survey, accompanied by neighborhood crime data from one week in December to indicate "hot spots" unsuitable for siting the toilet.

The survey sought to find how hospitable Tenderloin and SoMa merchants are to someone off the street needing a bathroom. In both areas, nearly a third of the businesses said yes, an encouraging show of civility.

Hyphae had sent a white, formerly homeless man out in the Tenderloin and SoMa on sunny weekdays between 4 and 6 p.m. for a month. He was clean and casually dressed. Hyphae's Julia Schmitt. He asked markets, shops and hotels if he could please use the restroom. He visited 123 places in the Tenderloin, Schmitt said, and 40 said yes (32.5%). In SoMa, he hit 240 places and 70

said yes (29.2%).

"In the evening, though, I think people would have more problems," Schmitt said. "There were a lot of variables, so I took it with a grain of salt. Maybe it depends on the person coming in. We'll send a different ethnicity next time, or a woman. I think our guy looked too much like a tourist. He was wearing a sweat-shirt," suggesting that a shabby person would be less welcome.

Bankrolling the survey was \$3,000 from an anonymous donor. There's money left for a second survey, which Hyphae intends, Bucknum said.

Hyphae preferred anonymity for the businesses willing to help a noncustomer in need. Yes-and-no dots on a map showed no dominant area. Larger ringed areas showed four main spots where public voting last year suggested placing a public toilet. The main site was a Jones Street parking space near Golden Gate Avenue.

— Tom Carter



The Knox and Bayanihan House SROs provided by the Tenants and Owners Development Corporation (TODCO), has an open wait list for low-income affordable housing.

If you are looking for a safe and comfortable place to call HOME surrounded by compassionate residents and a caring staff, The Knox and Bayanihan House are designed with you in mind.

All of our rooms have a two-burner stove, refrigerator, single or full sized bed with a closet, along with outstanding amenities in each building. The income limits for these affordable properties are as follows:

Maximum / Minimum Income Limit

Knox:	1 person - \$34,600 per year (maximum income) \$854 per month (minimum income) Rent: \$545.00 Deposit \$545.00
	2 person - \$39,520 per year (maximum income) \$854 per month (minimum income)
Bayanihan:	1 person - \$30,275 per year (maximum income) \$854 per month (minimum income)
	2 person - \$34,580 per year (maximum income) \$854 per month (minimum income) Rent: \$545.00 Deposit \$545.00

For more information or to pick up an application for The Knox and Bayanihan House, please stop by the lobby of the TODCO Marketing Office located at 241 - 6th Street in San Francisco.

If you have a disability that prevents you from fully participating in this process please call (415) 957-0227.



TDD: (415) 345-4470



mer to increase.

Meanwhile, Hyphae has ended its major public outreach after holding a monthlong informational drop-in at the Luggage Store's 509 Ellis St. storefront. The staff was available weekdays 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. for toilet talk, to hear ideas for a dream compostable W.C. in the Tenderloin, or to listen to grousing about the crapping on the concrete outdoors.

"We got a lot of people living on the street — 30 or 40 — who we wouldn't see at public meetings," said Bucknum. "Sometimes we had to walk out on the sidewalk to talk to them."

"We've met a lot of characters, junkies, too," Bucknum said. "But you see a sense of pride in the neighborhood. Some wanted to just talk about issues like crack and cocaine. So we'd talk about that, then ask how they'd design it (a toilet) so that wouldn't happen (inside). They came up with 15 to 20 features to consider."

On the storefront's outside, a sign invited people to write something, anything, about toilets with dry eraser markers on the windows. A lot written

was illegible. Sidewalk conversations varied. One man suggested the toilet should have a vibrating floor to signal when a user's time was up, and shake hard enough to wake a sleeper.

The ecological public toilet would be portable, maybe a three-unit stall, one each for men, women and disabled. Waste would be trucked to the Southeast Water Pollution Control Plant on Jerrold Street where 80% of the city's sewage is treated, including porto-potty "humanure." Hyphae hopes its contributions will return to the TL as "soil" to fertilize inedible vegetation.

If the toilet uses water, possibly the city's or rainwater, it would be only in a sink and for maintenance.

When perfected, Hyphae wants to sell models for \$50,000 to \$80,000 each.

Delivering the master plan will end the CBD's contract with Hyphae.

"The CBD will decide next steps then — whether to stand pat and let Hyphae go on its way alone, seeking grants, or to hook up with them in another arrangement," Hilliard said.