

History makes way for St. Anthony's future



Demolishing the landmark St. Anthony Foundation offices and Dining Room buildings began Sept. 4. Next door is St. Boniface Church with De Marillac Academy at right.

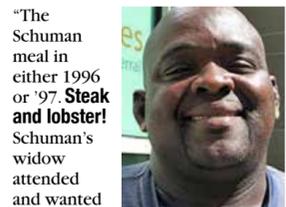
Memorable meals

The Extra went to the demolition site to photograph the spectacle, and to ask observers: What was the best meal you had in the Dining Room.



Bill Lohr

"You know, I always felt confident after a meal there. That's what a full stomach does for you. I'm trying to remember just one. You'd think Thanksgiving or Christmas would stand out but no, **they were all good.** And every meal, I ate all the food."



Kelvin Anderson

"The Schuman meal in either 1996 or '97. **Steak and lobster!** Schuman's widow attended and wanted something really special. The sea and turf menu was advertised in advance. Usually about 2,000 people a day came. That day, it was probably 2,700, a big crowd — and at the beginning of the month."

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

were dance troupes and live music and free fortune cookies. The Dining Room walls that Painters' Union volunteers painted 62 years ago became an outlet for personal feelings; people were invited to write on them or start the demolition by knocking off a piece to take home as a souvenir. As a closing ritual, the St. Anthony of Padua statue that had marked the Dining Room entrance for 50 years was carried down Golden Gate Avenue to the interim spot.

"We can live without the building; we can't live without the love," was one sentiment scrawled on a wall. "Thanks for the love you put out, sharing and uplifting us in moments of grief and sorrow," was another.

Communications Director Karl Robillard remembers an eerie time nine years ago, not quite a miracle, but a quick response to keep the flow of daily meals unbroken. A power outage stopped the legendary hot lunch cold. But, from hundreds of cans of tuna, volunteers fixed 3,000 sandwiches for bag lunches. And as a silent testament to St. Anthony's community building, Robillard said, "most chose to stay and eat together in the dining room" in dim candlelight flickering off the murals.

Another memorable meal wasn't in the Dining Room at all but on the second floor in the Poverello Room, run by secular Franciscans: for a buck on Sundays, a big pancake breakfast. The meal moved to 350 Golden Gate Ave. around 2004, Robillard said.

"For street people," one man on the sidewalk said with pride of the Dining Room, "you can't go wrong.



A ghostly cloud of dust rises from falling plaster and concrete, but a steady stream of water controls the air-borne particles.

And I try to tell people where to go — that's the way I learned about it."

Fallow, scarred and ordinary, the old, though internationally famous, oasis for the poor died loudly over a week of awesome destruction in September. People on the sidewalk stopped to stare. They were mesmerized by the scale of the job. Most had memories from behind the walls they saw being brutally chomped down.

The scene looked like a feeding frenzy. Giant yellow machines with long, flexible necks and gaping steel jaws relentlessly sunk shiny metal teeth into walls and floors like starving mutant dinosaurs. The sounds were tantalizing, sometimes bone-jarring. Steel girders and fire

escapes groaned and screamed in feeble resistance as the jaws ripped them away. At times, the jaws drooled plaster, quivering steel rods and timber hanging out its sides. A constant silver stream of water kept the eerie puffs of gray dust from wafting into the neighborhood. The machines' giant tracks rolled over the debris, crunching it into a sickening mush, once the refuge of the poor and hungry. The motor-noise of the beasts — and the deafening hammering that one machine made with its long ramrod — reverberated in the cavernous concrete neighborhood, jarring office workers blocks away. "The earth moved," one Page Hotel resident said next door. "It was like an earthquake." ■



Once the demolition was under way, the sounds of monster machines reverberated through the neighborhood and shook the ground. At left, the upper floors of Hastings law school's student housing building on nearby McAllister Street can be seen. Below: The place where several thousand people dined daily for 62 years becomes an empty bowl of rubble, as seen from a room in the Boyd Hotel next door. Cleanup operations on the site continue into October.

PHOTOS BY TOM CARTER



Memorable meals



Clarisa Ferguson

rib and real ribs! I love eating at St. Anthony's. That's why I'm here."

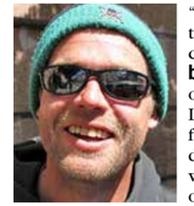
"They feed and feed you, and sometimes I take some home. I liked the chili, the turkey tetrazzini, and oh, Thanksgiving and Christmas. **Prime**

Hot dogs and baked beans

on Labor Day — and chili dogs anytime. She came from Alabama three years ago, was homeless three months and ate every day at St. Anthony's.



Alonda Stevens



David Duffala

"There used to be a special **pancake breakfast** on Sundays. Lunch was free but Sunday breakfast was \$1. Five or six guys would throw in their dollars for anyone who didn't have it. We'd get a big stack of pancakes and good strong coffee that was free, 50 cents more for sausage. It's what I heard about when I first came here in 2003. And it was clean and safe, an amazing place."

Meatloaf

was the best in his 12-year experience. Hurrying to get in line for lunch at the new spot, he didn't have time to say more.



Percy Goodwin



Anthony Biggs

Chicken and rice. Biggs has lived at the Boyd Hotel next door for a year and a half, which made the soup kitchen very convenient.



Mark Anthony

used to be served in whole pieces. Now, they cut it up. I first started coming nine years ago and I eat there every day. They treat everyone with dignity and respect. I volunteered there, too."