

Fitness SF signs up for Twitter tax break

CBA contrarian One Kings Lane severs ties to CAC

By *MARK HEDIN*

THERE'S A NEWCOMER at the tax-break trough. Fitness SF, a 22,000-square-foot gym on the ground floor of the building behind Twitter headquarters, joined the dating site Zoosk and the music pirate Spotify in December in getting community benefit agreements endorsed by the neighborhood's only voice in the process, the short-staffed Citizens Advisory Committee of volunteers.

The CBAs have been a disappointment to those who expected Twitter, Microsoft, Zendesk and other companies to fully deliver on expectations of benefits accruing from the 2011 legislation — that each would return a third of the value of its tax break to the community under these agreements. But Twitter, Yammer and Zendesk's CBAs are no longer up for annual review, as they locked in multiyear pacts in 2014.

Some of the companies have not experienced the growth that they had hoped

for either. Twitter community liaison Carolyn Barlerin, for one, noted that the company let many workers go this fall, as did its downstairs neighbor Yammer once Microsoft took it over. And One Kings Lane, which had largely boycotted communi-

"We'll offer discounts to anybody who needs it, but we don't advertise it."

Donald Emmerich
COMMUNITY LIAISON,
FITNESS SF

ty reviews of its benefits activity, will no longer take the tax break or provide CBA benefits, its liaison told the Advisory Committee at the CAC's December meeting.

The CAC, too, is not what it once was. At least six of its 11 members must be present for a quorum. There was no quorum in November, and hence no community advocacy occurred.

The panel has three vacant seats. The one reserved for a person with commercial real estate and lending experience in the neighborhood has been unfilled for two full years. The seat for low-income Tenderloin families has been unfilled since Eva Perring's four-year term expired in August. The same is true for Steven Suzuki's seat, intended for a job developer.

But at Fitness SF, things are looking up. Don Emmerich, its representative, described it as a family-owned business with six locations in the Bay Area. It used to be the Gold's Gym franchise operation, he said.

"Business is very good," he told The Extra. "We're still growing and expect 2016 to be better." They've hired new trainers, he told the CAC, and payroll for the 46 people working at 1 10th St. tops \$1 million, which triggers the requirement for creating a community benefit agreement so that the firm gets the tax break. The gym opened in late 2014 and has been working with the community even without a for-

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CENTRAL CITY

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TENDERLOIN'S VIETNAMESE



Thanh Nguyen, who prefers to be called John, and wife, Van, kneel in prayer at St. Boniface Catholic Church, where they attend Mass and work for Franciscan Charity.

The second wave

Those in wake of boat people trapped in hood

By *TOM CARTER*, PHOTOS *PAUL DUNN*

JOHN NGUYEN has just returned from his massive mailing project in San Jose and slips into a seat at Mangosteen restaurant on Larkin Street, which has a granite pillar outside that holds a marble, mythical lion welcoming all to Little Saigon.

It's not a spot he'd normally pick for a late lunch. He likes things a little higher end, places that speak more to his aspirations, like the Bistro Cafe in the Westfield mall overlooking Market Street or the Samovar Tea Lounge in Yerba Buena Gardens with global cuisine and tea pairings and a grand view of the glittering cityscape.

"I don't want to be reminded of what my parents went through," he says, ordering banana blossom salad and a large vegetable dish. "But they loved this area and kept coming back to eat at the restaurant where they worked. I don't know why."

They were dishwashers at Them Ky, a restaurant around the corner on Ellis Street. It was hard work, long hours, little pay.

John and his parents arrived from Vietnam in 1992. It was a struggle to find work, nearly impossible to learn the language and a daunting daily ordeal to face Tenderloin street life. John was 15. They lived at Leavenworth and Ellis, near the restaurant. Now, they and John's wife, Van, live at TNDC's Curran House on Taylor Street, marking 23 years in the hood.

"I remember my grandfather standing in

line at Glide for free food, and it was pretty good. He was happy. But I remember him as a powerful man — we always thought he could move the Earth."

In Saigon, the grandfather had his own business, selling refrigerators and refrigeration systems. But the city fell in 1975, and the Communists jailed him for three years as "a capitalist pig," for "being a businessman," John says.

Warring in Vietnam continued after the U.S. left. There were shortages of everything and long lines for the government-controlled rations, the only food available. The battered populace fled by sea by the thousands in flimsy, leaky boats, many drowning. John's grandfather was one of the "boat people" survivors who made it to San Francisco in 1980. But he couldn't tame the language, was getting old and didn't find the success he'd had in Vietnam.

"It's sad," John says. "He died a broken man."

Even so, his grandfather put in the paperwork to get the family to San Francisco and succeeded. It took 10 years.

Not that much has changed in the Tenderloin over his 23 years here, John says. "A lot more building," he says with a shrug, but "it doesn't seem to be affecting those (street) people. The world is moving on without them. I see them every day, and I did as a teenager — the same blank looks back at me." The soup kitchen lines too, just as long, if not longer.

"So many," John says. "There should be a place for them. Why are they suffering like this? This is one of the richest nations, and people are lying in the street — and they speak perfect English and have the ability to work — and they don't have a house. I don't see it as much wherever I travel."

Moreover, he thinks the TL's Vietnamese population, an estimated 3,500, is dwindling.

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