

Central city cornucopia celebrates its 25th



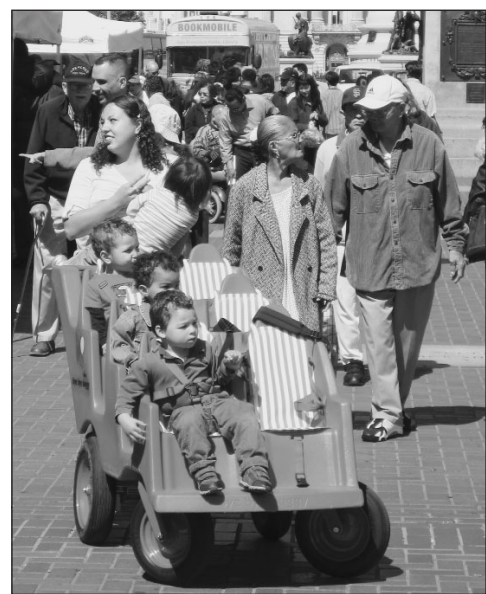
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We slowly had to hone it down. I think everyone is making money now.”
It costs “over \$100,000 to operate the market,” said Adams. “We have a million-dollar coverage for this van. We have a million-dollar coverage for my office, a million-dollar coverage for the plaza, \$700 a month for our garbage. It costs money to run a market.” Adams said the market sells “tons” of fresh produce. “There are thousands of people who walk through on Wednesdays. Right now we’re getting into fresh corn — asparagus just finished, cherries are through. We have apricots, peaches, nectarines, plums, oranges all year, and broccoli. There’s something all year. That’s why this market can hold its own in the

winter.
“The farmers pay \$25 for a booth in the winter,” she said, “and a whopping \$26 in the summer. They pay that each time they come.” To qualify for a booth, “it must be your own grown product,” Adams said. “You have to have all of your paperwork, your certificates with you. And then, if it’s something different and I don’t have it, I’ll give you a shot.” The farmers set the prices, she added. According to Adams, the farmers come from all over — Stockton, Sacramento ... “South City is my closest and my furthest is Death Valley. The best thing about working at the market for the past 25 years is the “idea of getting fresh quality food to the public,” Adams said. “Chris has been a driving force in cleaning up this area,” Gary Alfieri of Alfieri Farms said.

“In the last six years it’s been quite nice.” “I feel bad for the farmers when people come and steal from them,” Adams said. “I hate to say it, but it’s the people who don’t have jobs. I’m not going to call them homeless because a lot are not homeless.” “We’re a year-round grower,” said Alfieri, who offered the reporter a sample of delicious almond brittle. His farm in Modesto specializes in nuts and fruits. “Winters are pretty slow,” he said. “Some days we get 30 to 40 people. “Now, when we have table grapes it can go up to 100 people,” he said. About nine farmers’ markets operate in San Francisco, and Heart of the City is not affiliated with any other farmers’ market, Adams said. “We did that purposely. We can have our own rules and we can open and close when

we want. But we do have rules from City Hall and Sacramento.” “We’ve been coming here for 10 years,” said Anthony Elm, a farmer from Fresno. “We grow mainly a lot of ethnic products — limes, Filipino oranges, different kinds of basil for Indian people, and a lot of different hot peppers — we kind of specialize in those.” Richard Kombrowski has shopped at the market since 1983. “I buy fruits and vegetables; sometimes flowers. I like the atmosphere,” he said. “The produce is very good. It seems to be fresher than what you get in the supermarkets. And in the winter there are tremendous bargains.” The Heart of the City Farmers’ Market is open 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Wednesdays and Sundays. ■



PHOTOS BY LENNY LIMJOCO

Thousands of people who shop on Wednesdays and Sundays may run across Arthur Escoto. The freelance food sculptor is invited by vendors to turn produce into works of art such as these two floral watermelons.

Saturday night and it was no party at the 7-Eleven

Fact or fiction: The Extra checks out a TL resident’s complaint

BY TOM CARTER

IT’S an often heard story in the Tenderloin, a street person is shamefully mistreated, blows the whistle, but gets no satisfaction. Some stories are true, some not, and truth always seems to change according to who’s telling it.
But Sidnie Smart was a witness, and 7-Eleven staff and a corporate investigator confirmed the incident, though they told it somewhat differently.
The police filed a report that doubted Smart’s story of brutality; however, she cited seven errors in the Southern Station report, including the misspelling of her name.
Something happened to Sidnie Smart on June 10, her 55th birthday, around 8:20 p.m. It was a Saturday and she wanted to celebrate. But she didn’t have any money. It was the weekend and the credit union, where she has \$100, was closed, and her poll-worker check hadn’t arrived. She got the bright idea of robbing her piggy bank; it had 107 pennies.
Michael Wood, her friend who lives on the same third floor of the Vincent Hotel, was broke, too.
In the evening, they decided to take the 107 President Lincolns for a walk. It had been a hot day and Smart’s strawberry hair, swept

up on her head, looked like a wilted bouquet. On Market Street, they dropped in at the 7-Eleven between Fifth and Sixth streets. Smart went to the long counter near the door. She chose a little plastic-wrapped sugar cookie and when her turn came lined up 10 stacks of pennies, 10 each. This triggered an abusive and humiliating exchange with the clerk that Smart recalls vividly.
“We don’t take pennies,” the clerk said.
“What about for making change?” Smart asked.
Nope, he said.
A customer, a man in a suit, put down a dollar for her. She thanked him. The clerk took the dollar.
No change? she asked. The clerk responded by pushing the stacks of her pennies off the counter. They clattered on the floor.
“Get down there where you belong and pick them up,” he said.
She bent down and started to pick them up. “I’ll bet in Bangladesh we’d both be down here,” she said, incensing the clerk. He hustled around the counter after her. She yelled, “I want to see the manager, and, if you hit me it’s assault!”
She saw another employee, older than the clerk, come walking out of a back room toward them, but he stopped to observe. Smart said by this time she was retreating, getting

near the front door. So was Wood.
“I’m not going to hit you,” Smart quoted the clerk, “someone else is.” He pulled a \$5 bill from his wallet and stepped outside to where some skinheads and a black man were loitering. “Want to make \$5?” Smart heard him ask a stocky, 5-foot-9 black man. “Then beat her ass.”
The black man, half-drunk and with “bloated cheeks,” she said, took the money, then grabbed Smart who was in the doorway in a headlock. He pulled her east down Market Street, she said. “I was screaming my head off.” Wood, 35, thin, blond hair and large eyes, couldn’t believe what he was seeing, he said.
It was 10 days since the incident and Wood was sitting with Smart at a back table in a donut shop near the Vincent Hotel.
Smart and Wood told their story to The Extra. Smart sometimes sobbing as she digressed into her checkered past of alcohol and heroin addiction, 35 years of prostitution, rape, abuse, “being thrown from cars like garbage,” she said. Her sleeveless top revealed a large floral tattoo on her left shoulder meant to cover scars from surgical digs and skin grafts necessitated by bad smack. But she would gather herself and continue. Her mind was quick, her vocabulary glib and versatile, her pale blue eyes warm and understanding.

“I was screaming and went limp, trying to wiggle out of his grip,” Smart said. “And I did, and there was a phone right there and I got the receiver and was calling 911 and he grabbed it out of my hand and started beating me in the face with it. But then the skinheads yelled, ‘She’s calling the cops,’ and they ran off and the black man did, too.”
Smart said the man had dragged her past Ultra Image and the Social Security office to in front of the abandoned Designer Labels for Less store, a painful 100-foot trip.
She said she talked frantically to a woman at 911 who said the call would go on a priority list. But no cops came. Wood, unable to find help, had then returned to Smart’s side. He said he wiped the blood from her split lip with paper napkins. Smart said next she called the Tenderloin Task Force. An officer there told her the south side of Market was not their territory but call Southern Station, she said.
“I wasn’t going to stand there with that man still loose in the area,” she said. “I was so sick and tired, not having any money, not having help ... the Tenderloin ... my birthday.” She started to sob. “What’s going on in this country?” Her misty eyes were pleading. “People are so hateful and violent. It hurts my heart.” She wiped tears away with napkins Wood handed her.

A week later at the 7-Eleven, clerk Jessie Singh is minding the cash register. Customers come and go, grabbing a drink, packaged food or sweets off the shelves, or asking for cigarettes at the register and paying, all in less than two minutes. Some have lots of change. One man in a wheelchair had 60 nickels. People sometimes bunch up at the register. Still, at 9:30 a.m. the rest of the store is empty. Between occasional lulls, on average, Singh probably served two customers a minute.
His store manager, Baljit (Becky) Kaur, stands by his side. “Yes, sir,” he says to a customer leaving. “Miss, Miss,” he calls after a woman heading for the door after paying. “You forgot this.” She came back to pick up a soft drink.
Singh recalls that a woman came in June 10, about 9 p.m. and put “50 or 60 pennies” on the counter and said she wanted a cookie. The store was busy, Singh said, and there was a long line. “I say to her, ‘I don’t have time to count them,’” he said, growing agitated at the memory. “Then a man — he works at Crazy Horse (a skin club across the street) — gave her a dollar because he was on his break and in a hurry.”
The woman wanted the few cents change but Singh said he told her that she had given him nothing — it was the man’s change.



Sidnie Smart shows a nasty bruise she says she received from a beating on Market Street.

The 7-Eleven owner, Parminder Dhirgra, was in the back room on the computer, Kaur said, and they saw a big line at the cash register on the 15-inch monitor and heard the conversation. Dhirgra went out to the front to

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