

# Pet project at Boys & Girls Club

## *How dogs help Tenderloin kids learn to read*

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

**H**AVE a kid who's struggling with reading? Clutches up when asked to read aloud? The Tenderloin Clubhouse of the Boys & Girls Club may have the answer: Paws for Reading, a program where kids read to dogs.

"No kidding, it really works," new clubhouse Director Pat Zamora told the Tenderloin Futures Collaborative in October.

She was at the meeting to find out what people who live and work here know about the 11-year-old neighborhood clubhouse at 115 Jones, one of nine in the city operated by Boys & Girls Clubs. "I'd like to hear the pros and cons of what you know," Zamora said.

The answers: The club has good name recognition but details are lacking; kids from the program used to come to Boedekker Park for workdays but don't anymore; the club has collaborated with NOMPC on projects; kids in the program don't have much interaction with community events.

The answers were a little thin, so Zamora ran down some facts:

The clubhouse has 329 members, age 6 to 18, who pay only \$10 a year for a raft of programs: baseball, basketball, volleyball and flag football leagues, leadership programs, college prep, tutoring and arts, including clay sculpting, painting, digital photography, crafts, drawing, architecture and design.

Most popular activities are making dioramas, creating original stamps, "power hour" — that's help with homework — and sports.

During the school year, as many as 75 kids are having fun daily at the TL Clubhouse. It jumps to an average of 88 a day in the summer, when there's also the option of going away for 10 days to the 200-acre Camp Mendocino in Fort Bragg. Cost to members is \$30, and if that's too steep, lots of scholarships are available for the adventure away from the city.

And now there's Paws. Starting in November, Thursdays from 4-6:45 p.m., four or more dogs will be brought to the clubhouse by Share-A-Pet, a national organization that brings dogs to schools, nursing homes and other sites, and SFDog, which educates the public about dog handling and safety and the place of dogs in our culture.

"This is the first time we've offered this program," Wade Jansen, Boys & Girls Clubs of San Francisco's marketing and PR manager, told The Extra later. "Studies show that young readers feel self-conscious reading out loud to other people. They feel more comfortable reading to dogs because they aren't judgmental."

Jansen cited research that found children with low self-esteem do especially well in the program because they forget about their limitations. Also, a study found children in a Salt Lake City Paws-like

program for 13 months increased their reading by two to four grade levels.

Tenderloin Clubhouse members are primarily Chinese, Latino and African American. Like their peers in other clubhouses in the city, 95% are from low- or very low-income families.

Clubhouse information is at [www.bgcsf.org](http://www.bgcsf.org) or call 351-3125.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BOYS & GIRLS CLUB

**Tenderloin Clubhouse** members learn how to tend a garden in the club's courtyard, one of many activities for neighborhood kids.

### GOOGLE PROJECT WIRES THE DALT

The Dalt Hotel isn't what you'd think of as a hotbed of cyber-technology, but it's now wired up, actually wireless up, in ways that may turn residents in other SROs green with envy.

Consultant Michael McCarthy explained a pilot project operating at the Dalt since summer. For his time plus \$120 a month for DSL and a \$1,000 investment in hardware — all paid by the mega-search engine Google, which funded the project — he set up a wireless network that every resident with a computer at the 177-room, seven-story SRO can use to get access to the Internet.

"There's one DSL line coming into the building," McCarthy said. "Then there are four small broadcast wireless units called repeaters in various locations in the building that are good up to 500 feet and, on each floor, a couple of mini wall plugs."

Located high up on the wall so they won't be messed with, the minis, about the size of a deck of cards, also repeat the Internet signal.

"I'd say we have about 25 to 30 users every day at the Dalt," McCarthy said, "but it's spread even farther. The Dalt shares a courtyard with neighbors and they can use the wireless communication, too."

The Dalt was chosen for the project, Tomiquia Moss, TNDC community organizer, told The Extra, because of its proximity to the Ambassador and West hotels. They, too, got a couple of repeaters, and some tenants there have been using the wireless connection.

"I was at a tenant meeting at the Ambassador last week where Michael made a presentation about this pilot," Moss told The Extra. "Three of the 14 tenants at the meeting have been using the connection and testified about the benefits and challenges."

To start, tenants must have a computer and must purchase an Internet card, which costs from \$15 up to many thousands of dollars. Besides setting up the Dalt system, McCarthy also helped tenants get their computers squared away and taught them how to navigate the Web, Moss said.

"Do you want to do more Tenderloin projects?" resident activist John Nulty asked McCarthy.

"I'm just here to explain that it's not hard to set up a system like this," he replied. "It can be done block by block, building by building. But no, Google isn't interested in doing any more pilots like this."

McCarthy did suggest some ideas for funding that can be explored: zerodivide.org, the Website of the Community Technology

Foundation, which makes community "investments," and the California Emerging Technology Fund, a nonprofit established and funded through the SBC/AT&T and Verizon/MCI mergers, [dev.cetfund.org](http://dev.cetfund.org). ■

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