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SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA



MISSION BAY'S BIG PROMISE

Rapidly developing area
begins to take shape **p.14**

Bay Area's Ripe
for Foreign Investment **p.30**

Demystifying San Francisco's
Green Building Plans **p.28**

Check Your Eligibility
for Tax Relief **p.32**

The Presidio's
Transformation **p.12**

Turning a Neighborhood Around

A team of residents, store owners and community leaders are working to revitalize a downtrodden area

By **Jennifer Aquino** and **Vladimir Bosanac**

For many years the neighborhood along Market Street between Fifth and Ninth streets was troubled by homelessness and crime. But thanks to the creation of the Central Market Community District, a team of community leaders and neighborhood residents and store owners is working to turn the area into a safe and pedestrian-friendly place to live, work and shop. In its first full year of operation, the district formed a board of directors, hired an executive director and conducted a neighborhood survey in order to better understand the scope of services desired by the Central Market community. It also launched a Website (www.central-market.org), a monthly neighborhood e-newsletter called Central Market Matters and a monthly Public Safety Seminar series as part of a crime prevention, safety education and neighborhood outreach effort. This year, the organization will take an even more aggressive approach to tackling the crime issues and beautifying the street. We sat down with Executive Director Daniel Hurtado to discuss the group's agenda.

The Registry (TR): What was the impetus behind the creation of the Central Market Community Benefit District?

Daniel Hurtado (DH): The Central Market Community Benefit District (CMCBD) was formed following 25 years of economic decline, physical decay and deterioration of public safety in Central Market. Concerned property owners and community stakeholders in Central Market came together to establish the organization in order to address the concerns of neighborhood residents, workers and merchants regarding crime and cleanliness. Through the CMCBD, property owners are able to fund programs that supplement the city's baseline services and benefit the community, improve the quality of life in the public realm and help create a cleaner, safer and more inviting Central Market for everyone.

TR: How did the CMCBD spend its first year and what are the future plans for the neighborhood?

DH: In February, we launched our long-awaited Clean Streets and Community Guides programs designed to advance the CMCBD's mission of improving the quality of life in Central Market's public realm. ... The Clean Streets program includes daily cleaning and maintenance services for the public right of ways within the boundaries of the Community Benefit District. Through the CMCBD, the program will provide sidewalk sweeping, litter removal, power washing, graffiti removal, and quarterly steam cleaning throughout the neighborhood. The Community Guides service is an innovative approach to addressing safety concerns while also helping to make the area feel friendlier and more welcoming. The Community Guides will act as eyes and ears for the neighborhood's merchants, residents and workers as well as police and social services providers. Working closely with police and social service agencies, the Guides will provide public safety and crime prevention services, social service outreach and hospitality and information service. The program includes two full-time employees supported by a team that includes a field supervisor, operations manager and a dispatcher. The dispatch service will not only connect the Community Guides and the Clean Team to a central dispatch office, but will also serve as a call center for non-emergency safety concerns, cleanliness issues and social service needs in Central Market.

This year, we'll focus on managing and modifying our core services with input from our social service partners, the police and the Central Market community. We'll actively look for ways we can enhance our programs in order to provide the best possible service for Central Market. We'll also develop a comprehensive streetscape improvement plan for Central Market, producing a summer concert series and other neighborhood events, create a retail directory and other promotional pieces and launch a marketing and advertising campaign.



Photo by **Natalia Neuhaus**

TR: Do you see the CMCBD as a model organization for other parts of the city and how?

DH: Absolutely. Because our board is made up of five property owners and five non-property owners, our organization has a broader perspective on issues that impact the neighborhood as a whole. Our organization exemplifies a public-private partnership whose values and mission reflect the community's shared concern for improving the quality of life in Central Market. By having different perspectives represented on our board, we're able to address crime, quality of life issues and anti-social behavior in the neighborhood's public realm in a socially responsible way. The Community Guides program is a perfect example of this well-balanced approach. However, in terms of a Community Benefit District model, the concept is not new. Similar organizations, known elsewhere as Business Improvement Districts, have existed for years in cities throughout the United States and in other parts of the world. These organizations have proven successful in making communities a better place to live and do business. Here in San Francisco, the idea behind a Community Benefit District, however, is that the organization's services benefit the entire community as a whole, rather than from the perspective of businesses. And that's what makes the CMCBD a model organization, because of the diverse perspectives that are represented on our board and reflected in our programs.

TR: Homelessness and crime are still perceived to be an issue in your neighborhood. How is your organization addressing that?

DH: Through our Community Guides and Clean Streets programs we are addressing neighborhood concerns regarding crime, public safety and perception, quality of life issues, cleanliness and social service needs. The well-being and safety of homeless individuals, and of all individuals in Central Market, is a concern. Through our Community Guides program, we are working closely with social service agencies in order to help connect individuals in need who are seeking assistance, whether they are homeless or not, to social service providers. In terms of crime, the No. 1 community concern based on our neighborhood survey has to do with drug dealing and drug-related activity on our streets. Our Community Guides have and will continue to be trained by the police in acting as eyes and ears for the community and in supporting the Southern Station. Captain Daniel McDonagh (of the San Francisco Police Department's Southern Station) has been incredibly supportive of our program. But these core programs are just the beginning in a long-term effort to make our streets clean and safe and foster positive change in the neighborhood.

TR: What have you done to increase pedestrian activity and has it succeeded?

DH: Through our public safety services, social service outreach, cleaning and maintenance, marketing programs and economic development efforts we are working to meet this long-term goal. By improving conditions in the neighborhood and encouraging new investment, we aspire to see an increase in pedestrian safety and activity in Central Market. ■