Born in San Francisco’s Mid-Market district, St. Anthony’s has long been a refuge of hope and an agent of change in San Francisco. Over one hundred years ago, Franciscans began passing out food to people whose lives were left in ruins after the 1906 earthquake. Today, St. Anthony’s begins construction on a New Dining Room for a new century, keenly aware of the critical role the new building will play in a rapidly changing world.

The recent boom of the burgeoning Mid-Market district, often dismissed as an eyesore, has placed St. Anthony’s at the epicenter of San Francisco’s next gold rush. Seniors, veterans, the working poor, and people struggling with physical disability or with mental health issues who turn to St. Anthony’s for a meal and safe place to land will now join a flood of software engineers, venture capitalists, and up and coming artists looking to stake a claim in this economic boom.

Without a degree in software engineering or a Masters in Business Administration, how do people who have lived in the Tenderloin for decades make their voices heard among the droves of highly educated, business savvy entrepreneurs converging on this once overlooked neighborhood?

Earlier this spring, St. Anthony’s convened a symposium on the future of the Mid-Market district, inviting leaders who represent technology, business, the arts, nonprofits, and other community interests to explore possibilities and challenges in a neighborhood poised for explosive growth. Key mid-Market developers KOR Realty Group and ZenDesk, the nonprofit organizations Community Housing Partnership, Burning Man LLC, and American Conservatory Theater, a writer for Forbes, and a representative of the Office of Economic and Workforce Development shared their views with an equally diverse audience, including Tenderloin residents.

“Our tenants are excited to have cleaner, safer streets and healthier food” in the neighborhood, said the Community Housing Partnership’s Gail Gilman. She and others saw mid-Market as a possible demonstration project for responsible development, integrating Tenderloin residents with technological and real estate interests in the future.

Alexander Samek of KOR and Mikkel Svané of ZenDesk expressed openness to hiring residents to positions in their new offices, but would need help on what steps to take. The Business Times’ Macy Huss asked how companies will use the payroll tax breaks they will receive. “How will they know they are putting back enough into the neighborhood?”

One of the audience members who spoke up at the symposium was a 23 year resident of the Tenderloin who has seen his fair share of changes in the neighborhood. He shared his optimism for what he perceived as a world of new opportunities while also expressing his fears of being left out of the rising tide of prosperity.

St. Anthony’s Executive Director, Barry Stenger, urged an integrated model of development. “We want to avoid the zero-sum battle that pits the folks all in favor of encouraging new business but are callous to the concerns of current residents against those in favor of affordable housing but are resistant to those who would gentrify the neighborhood.”

For St. Anthony’s, the critical issue is how to embrace future innovation while honoring the past. When many San Franciscans were struggling in a post World War II economy in 1950, Fr. Alfred responded by opening the doors to St. Anthony’s Dining Room. When the rates of homelessness spiked post World War II in 1980’s, St. Anthony’s extended our Dining Room meal service from 6 to 7 days of the week. When Dining Room numbers increased by 25% in 2003, St. Anthony’s made plans to ensure the Dining Room would be able to meet future needs of the poor well into the next century by initiating plans to build the New St. Anthony’s Dining Room.

St. Anthony’s is building a future on the fundamental belief that when people work together, a better world is always possible.
Have you moved or changed your email address? Please let us know by emailing info@stanthonysf.org, or calling 415-592-2858.

St. Anthony Medical Director, Dr. Ana Valdés, underscores the importance of supportive wellness activities on prevention and community health: “All of our efforts began with a focus on our patients. In time, we realized that if we really want to have a positive impact on the health of our patients, we really need to look beyond them to our community. Patients don’t make decisions about their health in a vacuum. The first thing they do is consult a family member or friend. If we wanted to really make a difference we had to widen our view. So now we take a ‘community approach’. We not only engage our patients but also encourage them to bring family members, friends, and neighbors to wellness classes or activities.” For patients like John, healthy activities at SAMC not only improve his diabetes, they provide community and an opportunity to give back.

There has been significant public discussion recently on the role of neighborhoods on health. The HBO documentary Weight of the Nation demonstrated clearly that ‘where’ we live determines in large part ‘how’ we live, not to mention ‘how well’ we live. Put simply: ‘wealth = health.’

That assessment does not bode well for the health of impoverished neighborhoods like the Tenderloin, where poverty and its attendant health disparities weigh heavily on the community: 61% of the neighborhood’s population live below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, 3 out of 4 children live below 100% of the FPL, and it has the highest rates of preventable Emergency Room visits in the city. Chronic disease is costly, disproportionately affects the poor, and yet it is largely preventable. St. Anthony Medical Clinic (SAMC) places prevention and chronic care management at the center of patient care. The patients who make SAMC their medical home represent the poorest segment of an already challenged community. Among the top ten causes of preventable ER visits are conditions seen every day at SAMC: asthma, COPD, diabetes, pneumonia, and their precursors: overweight, obesity and hypertension. “A majority of the most costly health conditions are preventable,” asserts a 2007 study prepared by The Prevention Institute and The California Endowment with The Urban Institute entitled, “Reducing Health Care Costs through Prevention.” By educating patients in chronic disease self-management, SAMC is helping to reduce the number of preventable ER visits impacting the city’s resources.

Chronic disease treatment and management requires a holistic approach. St. Anthony Medical Clinic uses patient education, therapeutic counseling sessions, nutrition coaching, and group exercise classes to address all aspects of disease management. A multi-pronged approach vastly increases the chances that that patient will become an engaged, active participant in their own health. ‘Depression is strongly correlated with the costs and consequences of a chronic condition,’ notes Clinic therapist Nikku Dhesi, who works with patients individually and in groups.

Clinic patient John Frank has been coming to the Clinic for many years for his diabetes. Having been a track coach and an active sports enthusiast for most of his life, John was understandably depressed by his diagnosis and his weakening health. After some encouragement and work with Clinic therapists, John got reconnected to exercise, first with the Walking Group and later with Dexter Louie’s Fitness 101 class. This experience reminded him of the things he had always enjoyed about sports, the understanding that “we are more limited by our beliefs than by our abilities.” John decided he wanted to give something back and recently made a donation of medicine balls for use in Fitness 101. As John used to tell his track team, “God has given you the talent but not necessarily the means.” Knowing that he can help provide the means and positively impact people’s lives in this way is empowering and gratifying; for John, that is what athletics is all about, helping people discover what they are capable of.

IN MEMORIAM

Michael Hurd, former Manager of the Father Alfred Center, passed away February 26, 2013. Michael not only served as a Recovery Counselor and then as Manager, but in every moment lived out his commitment to support others in their recovery from addictive illness. Michael’s devotion and gifts caring for others touched the lives of many people at St. Anthony’s and the larger recovery community. His love and concern knew no bounds.
As many of the alumni who regularly attend Encouragement and advice like this is offered Eric says. He attends graduation every month, Father Alfred Center staff and current residents is often an essential ingredient of a successful Center in October of 2011. “I feel in order to stay three years on the streets of San Francisco. One those years he had run-ins with the law and to achieve the sobriety he knows today. Over using drugs at the age of fifteen in his home experiences have been like,” he said. Eric Booker graduated from the Father Alfred Center in October of 2011. “I feel in order to stay clean, I need to stay connected to the program,” Eric says. He attends graduation every month, and goes back to the house three times a week, every Monday night to lead a process group. “I run into one of the counselors (after leaving the program), and he said ‘come on back, come on back.’”

Today, three years sober, Eric works as the manager of the St. Francis Living Room, a day program a few blocks away from St. Anthony’s, where low-income seniors receive a free meal and a safe, comfortable place to sit, play games, and enjoy the company of others. Eric’s path to continued success is built on a commitment one day at a time to staying connected to a recovery community and to helping others. Going back to drugs just doesn’t fit into his life anymore. “I would have to tell my sponsees that they need to find a new sponsor ‘cause I had gone back out,” Eric said. “I don’t see myself doing that.”

staying clean means staying connected at Fr. Alfred Center

ST. ANTHONY’S DRUG AND ALCOHOL RECOVERY PROGRAM

“KEEP COMING BACK.”
“STAY CONNECTED.”
“YOU NEED US AND WE NEED YOU.”

Encouragement and advice like this is offered during graduation ceremonies at the Father Alfred Center, St. Anthony’s year-long drug and alcohol recovery program for men. Upon graduation, a resident has achieved a year of sobriety and a readiness to live and work outside of the community of support found in the house.

As many of the alumni who regularly attend graduation will tell you, staying in touch with Father Alfred Center staff and current residents is often an essential ingredient of a successful recovery after graduation.

As much as we will miss Shari’s presence, I am happy to join Fr. John Hardin, OFM, the President of our Board of Trustees in announcing the appointment of Barry Stenger as Interim Executive Director. Barry has over twenty years of nonprofit management experience. He has been St. Anthony’s Director of Development for the past seven years. He holds a Ph.D. in social ethics from the University of Chicago and has contributed to the work of the Franciscans in a variety of capacities. We have great confidence in Barry and the entire executive management team, together they bring over fifty years in management experience.

Change is an integral part of any institution that strives to remain responsive and relevant. Recently we learned from our Executive Director, Shari Roeseler, that after a time of reflection and discernment, she has made the personal decision to leave St. Anthony’s and relocate to Sacramento in order to be closer to her family.

In her tenure as Executive Director, Shari worked tirelessly on behalf of those we are blessed to serve. She reinvigorated St. Anthony Foundation’s capital campaign and championed work with our staff to instill Franciscan values in all that we do.

As the chair of the Board of Directors of St. Anthony Foundation I have the privilege to witness and to guide some amazing developments here at this venerable yet vibrant organization. In this newsletter you’ll read about some of them. After 62 years of serving San Francisco’s poor, we continue to hold true to our foundational values. At the same time we are launching new ventures like the New Dining Room building and recreating programs to adapt to new needs.

Peace and all good,
Suzanne B. Swift
Chair, Board of Directors
St. Anthony Foundation

A WORD FROM SUZANNE B. SWIFT AND BARRY STENGER