

REAL ESTATE



NURTURING NONPROFITS

Thoreau Center at old Letterman Hospital in the Presidio blooms as a campus for all things sustainable

Page K8



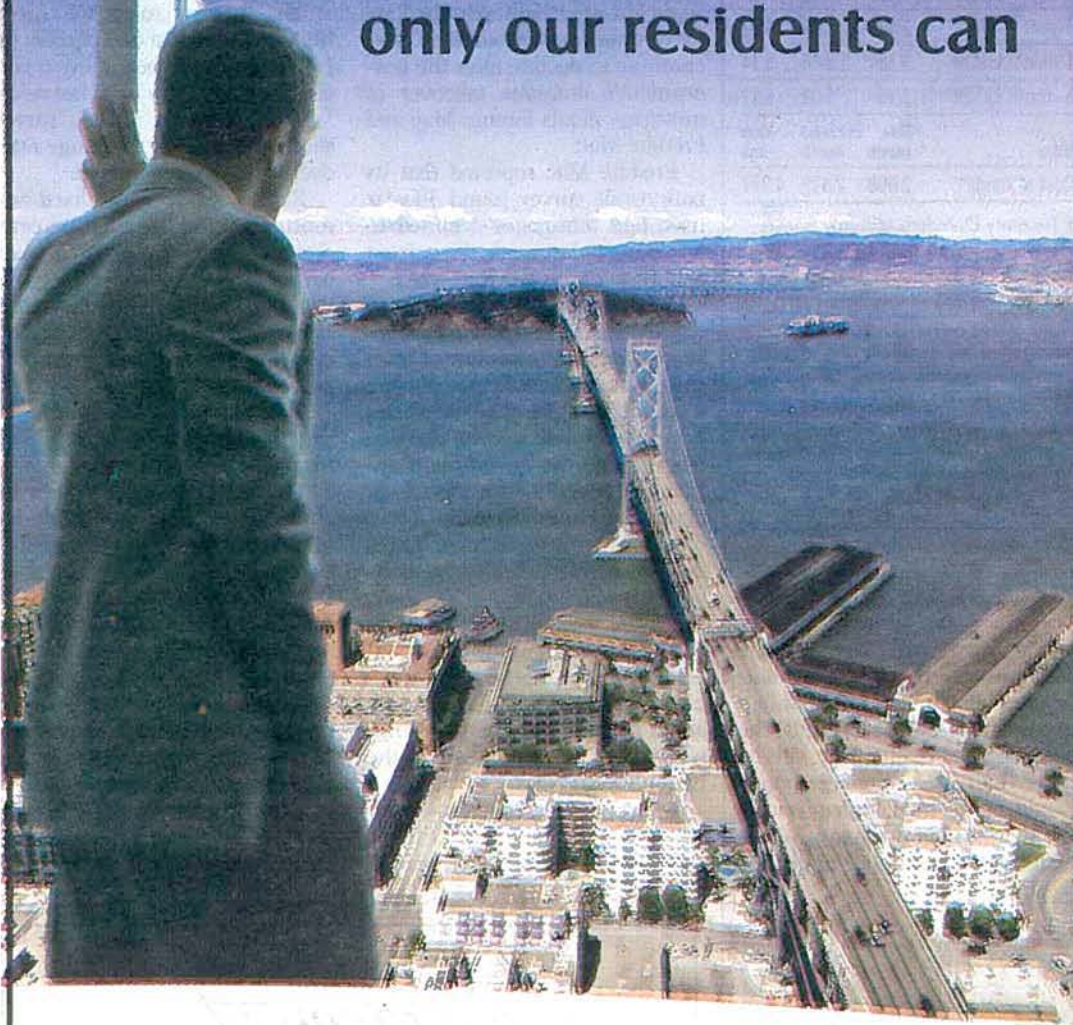
Lunchtime: Every day, workers at the nonprofits that make up Thoreau Center get to spend their mid-day break in a national park, above. Walls in the longtime hospital now contain art and photography exhibits, left.

Photos by LANCE IVERSEN / The Chronicle



Actual View

See San Francisco as
only our residents can



Tower Model Now Open

ONE RINCON HILL

415.744.8886 | OneRinconHill.com

Immediate Occupancy
1, 2 and 3 bedroom tower
residences from the \$700s
to over \$3 million

Take advantage of mortgage interest rates near historic lows

Tours start from sales center, 511 Harrison Street at First Street.
Open Monday-Friday 11 to 5, closed Wednesday, Saturday-Sunday 12 to 5.

Marketed by Pacific Marketing Associates. Broker cooperation welcomed.

Obtain the Property Report or its equivalent, required by Federal and State law and read it before signing anything.
No Federal or State agency has judged the merits or value, if any, of this property.

UrbanWest
ASSOCIATES

Thoreau Center nurtures nonprofits

Converted Letterman Hospital
helps with space, community

By Carolyn Said
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Strewing garbage onto a conference table, two women proceeded to dramatize recycling do's and don'ts for a couple dozen people who munched on pizza and asked thoughtful questions afterward. It was a typical lunchtime presentation at the Thoreau Center for Sustainability, a campus for nonprofits run by San Francisco's Tides nonprofit network in a historic Presidio complex.

Even the details of the "Waste Not" event reflected Thoreau's mission to raise awareness of sus-

tainability. The marble in the conference table was reclaimed from the floors of the former Letterman Hospital that houses the center. The gathered staffers hailed from some of the 63 small enterprises that have found a home at Thoreau. Ranging from ArtSeed to World Wildlife Fund, the nonprofits (plus a handful of like-minded for-profits), occupy offices in 12 clustered Presidio buildings, with the massive Letterman, which was built in 1898, as the anchor.

(A later incarnation of Letterman, located next door, was razed

► **CENTER** : Next page



LANCE IVERSEN / The Chronicle

Thoreau Center for Sustainability

- Web: www.thoreau.org
- Located at the former Letterman Hospital buildings (circa 1898) in San Francisco's Presidio National Park
- Building renovation and launch in 1996
- Total cost: \$12.7 million
- Started and operated by Tides Shared Spaces
- Approximately 500 employees
- 12 buildings; 150,000 square feet; 63 tenant organizations; 2 common conference rooms; 2 common kitchens; 2 art galleries; 1 cafe
- Some exhibits and programs open to the public; check the Web site.

Bruce DeMartini, program director at the Thoreau Center, stands under solar cells in the lobby area.

Some Thoreau Center tenants

Art Seed
 Bay Area Ridge Trail Council
 Center for Resource Solutions
 Community Clinics Initiative
 Door Dog Music Productions
 Friends of the Urban Forest
 Geographic Expeditions Inc.
 Lawyers for Clean Water
 Northern California Independent Booksellers
 Pottruck Family Foundation
 Social Venture Network
 World Wildlife Fund

► CENTER

From previous page

several years ago to make way for George Lucas' digital entertainment headquarters.)

Thoreau tenants enjoy plenty of green and groovy perks. There are two art galleries, an organic cafe and a library. Lunchtime events range from yoga to a discussion on "traveling to despotic countries" to talks from visiting lamas. Needless to say, recycling here goes far beyond just paper and glass; there are bins for "tech-no trash," keys and telephones, and composting is de rigueur.

Financially, Thoreau offers rents about 10 to 25 percent below Class B commercial full-service leases and eschews market-driven rent hikes. Although it is self-supporting through rents, the center says it has saved tenants about \$13 million over the past dozen years compared with what they would have paid for comparable space elsewhere.

Shared amenities

Thoreau is like a utopian community for its tenants, who get synergies with similar enterprises, below-market rate rents in a beautiful setting, and access to shared amenities, such as the conference rooms and educational programs, plus utilities, janitorial, maintenance, free parking, bike lockers and showers.

But more importantly, the Thoreau Center is an exemplar for other nonprofits that want to replicate its shared-space model to create their own stable homes.

"We've been riding the tip of the trend to enable people to carry out social change by providing infrastructure," said China Brodsky, Tides senior vice president.



LANCE IVERSEN / The Chronicle

"Whenever there is a commercial real estate boom, nonprofits lose space. They're in church basements, low-rent places and can't be close to their constituency. Space is their second-biggest expense after staff."

Nonprofit centers

Tides, whose philanthropic work focuses on economic justice, democratic practices and environmental sustainability, operates the Thoreau Center through its real estate arm, Tides Shared Spaces.

Besides running the Thoreau Center, Tides Shared Spaces manages the NonprofitCenters Network, a program to help nonprofits strengthen their access to real estate by creating multitenant centers. It now numbers 150 centers as members, including existing nonprofit centers, groups that are just starting nonprofit centers, real estate partners, financial institutions and others. About 10 percent of members are international.

In the Bay Area, some include the Ninth Street Film Center in San Francisco, Presentation Park in Oakland, the Sobrato Center for Nonprofits in Milpitas, and the Marin Community Foundation in Novato. Two centers now under construction, both in Berkeley, are the David Brower Center and the Ed Roberts Campus.

► CENTER : Next page

Urban Sophistication
 in the heart of
 Downtown
 Walnut Creek

**Luxury Condominiums starting at the high \$400's
 Receive up to a \$30k flex credit***

MERCER

Luxury Condominiums

VISIT OUR SALES CENTER 11-6 DAILY
 1655 North California Boulevard, Unit #116
 Walnut Creek, CA 94596 (Entrance on Trinity Avenue)
 Tel 925.988.0400 | mercerWalnutCreek.com

2 Bed / 2 Bath + Den (Approx. 1-00sqft)

*Limited time offer on select homes. Buyers must pre-qualify and be approved by Preferred Lender. Other terms and conditions may apply. Ask for details. This is not an offer to sell, but is intended for information only. The developer reserves the right to make modifications in materials, specifications, plans, pricing, various fees, designs, scheduling, and delivery of the homes without prior notice.

© Trinity Ave, LLC, Inc. | Exclusively represented by The Mark Company.

Tides' tentacles push for change in many directions

Tides and its affiliated networks organizations are the major tenants at San Francisco's Thoreau Center with about 120 employees, as well as running the space through its Tides Shared Spaces organization.

- ▶ Tides, www.tides.org, is a network of three organizations — Tides Foundation, Tides Center and Tides Shared Spaces — that collaborate as partners in a shared mission of supporting social change. In 2007, Tides managed projects and grant-making of \$165 million and had assets of about \$270 million.
- ▶ Tides Shared Spaces, www.tidessharedspaces.org/. Creates, operates and promotes sustainable work spaces for nonprofits, such as the Thoreau Centers in New York and San Francisco. Sponsors the NonprofitCenters Network.
- ▶ NonprofitCenters Network,

www.nonprofitcenters.org. Helps nonprofits complete multitenant centers and other programs, providing peer networking, education, online resources, regional workshops and national conferences.

- ▶ Tides Foundation, www.tidesfoundation.org, a grant-making institution that partners with donors to help them direct resources for positive social change.
- ▶ Tides Center, www.tidescenter.org, provides fiscal sponsorship for nonprofits, handling financial and legal activities for them. It has over 200 fiscally sponsored projects across the country.

— C.S.



LANCE IVERSEN / The Chronicle

Tides employee Lena Strayhorn participates in a recycling demonstration at the Thoreau Center during the noon hour.

► CENTER

From previous page

Although some members, such as San Francisco's Women's Building, predate Thoreau, many took inspiration from it. To help centers, the Network offers access to a wealth of information on "co-location," which it shares through local seminars, national conferences, its Web site, training materials and peer education.

It helps walk fledgling centers through such strategic considerations as finances, real estate, ownership and governance, building operations, projects and amenities, said Roxanne Hanson, associate director of the NonprofitCenters Network.

Condos for nonprofits

The nonprofit-center idea is also popular with foundations, which see it as a way to get more bang for their buck. "Foundations take a real interest in these as social investments to benefit multiple organizations with one single investment," Hanson said.

Last year, Tides Shared Spaces created Thoreau Center New York in the former JP Morgan headquarters on Wall Street. Unlike the San Francisco center, it uses an ownership model, "essentially condos for nonprofits," Brodsky said.

"From stock exchange to social change" is how she characterized the JP Morgan transformation, a variation of the Presidio's swords-to-plowshares leitmotif.

Brodsky was instrumental in helping Tides start the Thoreau Center in 1996 — just as the dot-com boom was causing nonprofits to get evicted to make way for well-capitalized startups.

Preserving Letterman

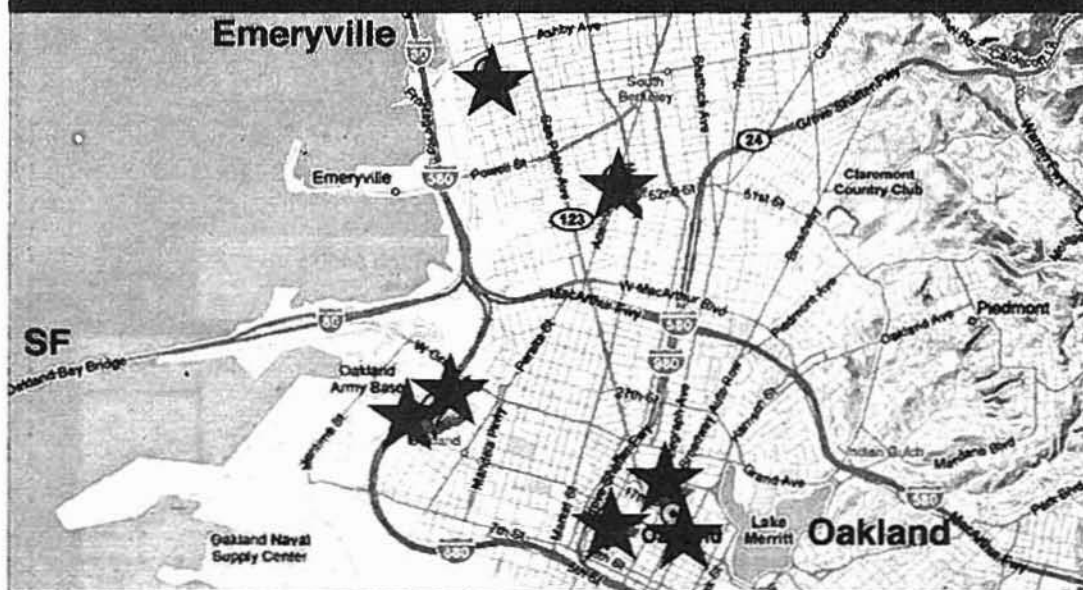
Creating the space itself was a challenge. At the time services and infrastructure at the Presidio were minimal. Preserving Letterman's historic integrity was a key goal. Tides worked hard to do a green renovation even before standards for one existed, said Bruce DeMartini, Thoreau Center program director, pointing out such features as an energy-generating photovoltaic solar panel in the entrance way, natural-linoleum floors and formaldehyde-free counters.

"It's wonderful being here," said Barbara Hartford from United Religions Initiative, whose space at Thoreau — formerly a hospital ward — includes a meditation room. "It's nourishing and you get the sensibility of sustainability in all aspects."

E-mail Carolyn Said at csaid@sfchronicle.com.

HOME OWNERSHIP IS STILL A REALITY!

Tour 7 Stunning New Residences on our Complimentary Shuttle!



L4EB

LivingForTheEastBay.com

Sept 20 & 21, 11a - 4p

Pacific Cannery Lofts, Cathedral Building, VUE 46
Market Square II, Zephyr Gate, Golden Bridges

It's your
Chronicle,
and it's all
about you.

It's not just
about the arts.

It's about a museum trip
your family will enjoy.

San Francisco Chronicle
SFGate.com

Get your copy today.
Call 1-877-CHRONICLE
or visit SFGate.com.