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LOCAL INTELLIGENCE

Tenderloin National Forest



Adithya Sambamurthy/The Bay Citizen

The Tenderloin National Forest is a soothing bit of green space in the heart of a densely packed neighborhood.

By ANDY WRIGHT Published: May 28, 2011

Nestled between a cluster of residential buildings and hotels in San Francisco's Tenderloin district is a surprising outcropping of green — the so-called Tenderloin National Forest. Formerly known as Cohen Alley, the small urban enclave is not really a national forest but a former dumping ground for hypodermic needles and garbage.

A Forest Blooms

In 1989 a group of artists formed the nonprofit Luggage Store Gallery. The artists annexed the 25 by 136 foot alley between Hyde and Leavenworth Streets and began slowly transforming it. The idea to build a forest was sparked when the group covered the area with rolls of sod as part of one of its many public events.

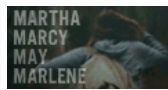
City Love

The site is now officially sanctioned by the city, which charges the gallery a symbolic annual rent of \$1. The alley is protected by a steel gate designed by the artist Kevin Leeper, and it is left open for visitors daily between roughly noon and 5 p.m.

Green Thumb

The forest consists of cherry, cypress and Japanese maple trees plus a pair of redwoods, the tallest of which is four

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Adithya Sambamurthy/The Bay Citizen

stories high. Edible plants and herbs grow in raised boxes, and aloe, cactus, ginkgo and ferns are scattered throughout.

### Art Crops Up

Murals rise up every wall of the forest. The floor is inlaid with mosaic. Goldfish dart about in two small ponds. A small mud-and-straw building is home to a continuing photo series featuring portraits of neighbors and passers-by. Visitors often leave glass hearts, figures of Hindu deities or other items.

### Sew Free

On the 15th of every month, the artist Michael Swaine arrives with his mobile sewing cart, outfitted with an old sewing machine and an umbrella, and repairs clothing without charge.

### The Anonymous Gardener

Any visitor has access to gardening tools. Caretakers, volunteers and staff members from the gallery often find that a good Samaritan has tended to some corner of the forest in their absence.

### A Meaty Past




There are many stories about how the Tenderloin got its name, but one of the most popular suggests that police officers were once paid more to work there, and were thus able to afford the tender cut of meat.

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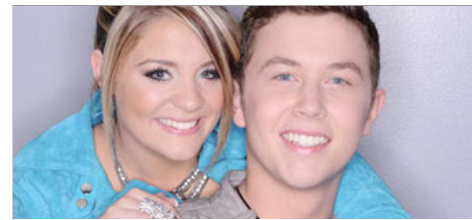
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