News from the Glen Park Association

Sunnyside conservatory gets citywide recognition

By Bonnee Waldstein

San Francisco Beautiful is an organization in its 64th year of working “to assure that the city retains and enhances its unique and memorable sense of place, balance and diversity as a beautiful, livable, green and vibrant urban center.” This year, in a gala masquerade soiree at the Palace Hotel, San Francisco Beautiful bestowed one of its annual Beautification Awards to our own Sunnyside Conservatory.

A dozen years ago or so, a feisty group of Sunnyside neighbors got together and, with pluck and persistence, turned a derelict, diamond-in-the-rough site on Monterey Boulevard into a neighborhood treasure, offering concerts, community events and private venue rentals.

San Francisco Beautiful cited the Sunnyside Conservatory as the best historical renovation under five million dollars: “...once slated for demolition...the Sunnyside Conservatory was saved by a dedicated group of community members to preserve and repurpose this cherished neighborhood landmark.” Arnold Levine and Stacy Garfinkel received the award on behalf of Friends of Sunnyside Conservatory.
Says Garfinkel: “It’s really thrilling and deeply satisfying — this has been a labor of love for over twelve years and it’s just spectacular to see our hard work and dedication acknowledged on a citywide level. We’ve been saying for so long, this is a jewel in the City, and now the City is saying back, ‘This is a jewel in the City!’”
Arnold Levine fairly swooned, “I’m just head over heels, it’s so lovely to be recognized for all the years we worked in the trenches. We saw it in its pupating state!” (Note: Free wine increases one’s vocabulary.) Levine has since moved to Sebastopol where he’s involved in the local library and trails. “I like to be involved.” He comes back to San Francisco often for concerts and to see friends and, of course, the Conservatory. Also, he has a long running radio show out of the little town of Occidental, north of San Francisco.

Vera Gates, a Glen Park resident, and a landscape architect with Arterra, nominated the project. “Stacy and Arnold asked if I’d create a master plan eleven years ago. Then we got approval and funding from Rec and Park. This is a wonderful example of what a community can get together and accomplish.” Sally Ross, a Friend of Sunnyside Conservatory, gives a shout out to an oft-vilified city agency: “I’d like to give a nod to the Department of Public Works, they were very welcoming during the process. We had many meetings and then we were able to choose the shape of the structure, and the design of the walks, and the finishes. They were very nice and cooperative.”
The gala brought out all sorts of local luminaries and politicos, including our District 8 Supervisor, Scott Wiener: He describes the Conservatory, as “a civic treasure in our City and a lot of people don’t know about it. It’s a unique community building and space.”

Other bold face names in attendance were Supervisor David Chiu, former Supervisors Ross Mirkarimi, and Aaron Peskin.

Another organization that was recognized by San Francisco Beautiful is Literacy for Environmental Justice, which built the EcoCenter of Heron’s Head Park. Once an infill at Hunter’s Point, it’s now an off-the-grid, sustainable classroom that teaches youth about environmental justice and urban sustainability. It’s now the only facility in San Francisco that treats sewage on-site.

Part-time Glen Park resident Stan Wrzeski worked on getting the old PG&E power plant removed and cleaning up the site so that LEJ could come into being.