

# Focaccia, Anyone?

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DEXTER DONG

Helen Murray of Marin County looks on as Michael Soracco prepares her focaccia order.

## An Italian Specialty Thrives in North Beach

By Peter Tira

A late-afternoon visit to North Beach's Liguria Bakery might make you wonder how the small shop stays in business in one of the highest rent districts in the city.

The bakery, nestled at the corner of Filbert and

Stockton streets, frequently closes well before the 5 p.m. closing time listed in its window. Store windows sit vacant, save for an ancient cash register, scales that are no longer used and a couple of bags of dried pasta that aren't even for sale.

Three walls are lined from floor to ceiling with empty shelves. This "bakery" decades ago stopped baking loaves of bread, cookies and desserts.

The picture doesn't change much after the bakery opens every day at 8 a.m.

But the line of people wait-

ing to get in quickly dismisses any doubts about the bakery's popularity or its success.

"We don't do any advertising," said Michael Soracco, a member of the third generation of Soraccos who have owned and oper-

*See Bakery, page 3*

# Mission Irked by Proposed Rezoning

Residents claim city planners have not listened to input

By Joe Strupp

Some Mission District residents are angry about the city's handling of a major business and industrial rezoning of their area, saying neighborhood input has not been taken into account.

At issue is the North East Mission Industrial Zone (NEMIZ), about which city officials plan to hold public hearings later this month. Some who live on or near the 400-acre parcel slated for rezoning and development claim that a pro-

posed biotechnology-research zone is being "rammed down our throats." But city planners say they have been open to neighborhood concerns.

"There has been dissension among us about the way the city has gone about this," said Fred Snyder, a 20-year Mission resident and member of the NEMIZ task force. "There is no sound proposal out there, and they have discouraged other [non-biotechnology] uses of the area."

Hilda Bernstein, a long-

time Mission activist, also said that nothing was being done to listen to neighbors and that residents were anxious about the situation.

"We need to get on with it and start attracting businesses. We have spent two years and nothing is done," said Bernstein.

The mayor's chief of administration, Jim Wunderman, defended the city, saying that no final decisions had been made and that all opinions on

*See Rezoning, page 3*

## Bayview Campus Moving?

By Susan Herbert

City College officials are considering a plan to move the community college's Southeast Campus out of the Southeast Community Facility at 1800 Oakdale Ave. to a new site at 1400 Evans Ave.

The news of the proposed relocation is drawing fire from top staff at the community facility.

"Why use tax dollars to renovate 1401 Evans when this facility can continue to be used?" asked Toye Moses, ex-

ecutive director of the community facility. "I know the community will fight against this move."

The relocation is part of an overall plan to establish a new School for Applied Arts and Technology in the Bayview District. That plan calls for moving the welding school and the auto center from the John O'Connell campus at Fourth and Harrison streets — in addition to moving trade skill classes now located at other campuses — to Evans Avenue.

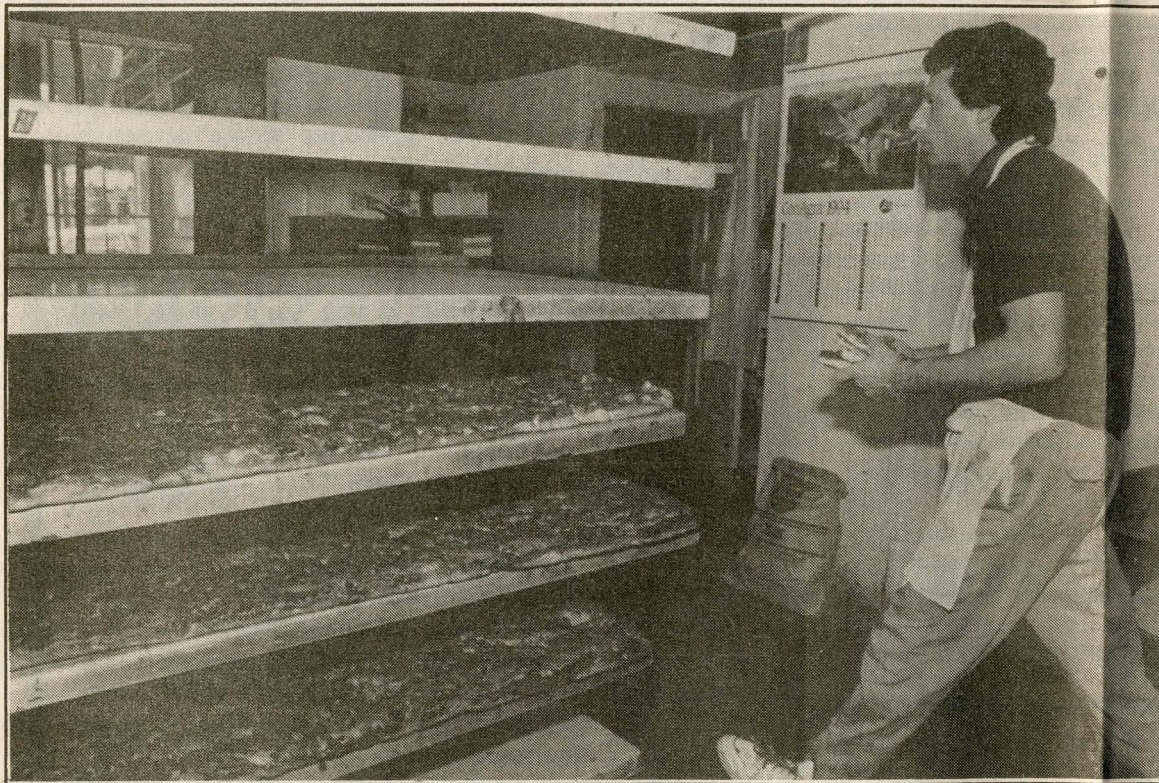
Bayview activist Espanola Jackson said she couldn't understand the reason for the move.

"Why not just locate all the programs at 1800 Oakdale?" she said. "We will definitely protest if they try to vacate the Southeast facility."

Stephanie Galinson, spokesperson for City College, said the Evans Avenue building with its 90,000 square feet of space would provide enough room to house all the programs

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DEXTER DONG

After all of the focaccia is sold, Michael Soracco can call it a day.

## BAKERY: Italian Specialty in North Beach

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ated the family business. "Our advertising is our product."

That product is focaccia, a flat, square bread made with flour, vegetable oil and occasionally some spices sprinkled sparingly on top.

"It's the best focaccia in San Francisco," said Cathy Cogliandro, who, in her 20s, has been eating Liguria Bakery's focaccia since she was a child. Cogliandro frequents the bakery during her lunch break.

**'Our advertising is our product.'**

— Michael Soracco, Liguria Bakery

She said the small-scale, family-run character of the bakery adds to the experience.

"It reminds you what San Francisco must have been like when a lot of Italians lived in the neighborhood,"

she said.

### Now a trend

Focaccia, like the first generation of Soraccos that came to San Francisco, originated in Liguria, the slim, crescent-shaped region in northwestern Italy.

To the delight of those at Liguria Bakery, focaccia has gone the route of polenta and a host of other Italian fare originally created and eaten by that country's poorest people. It has

become the rage at some of the city's most fashionable cafes and restaurants.

"Before, it was pretty much an Italian thing," Soracco said. "Now people are becoming more familiar with it."

Soracco, his father, George, and business partner August Azzalini continue to make the flattened bread almost exactly the way the bakery did when it opened 83 years ago.

The process starts long before sunrise, with the mixing of some 250 pounds of flour with yeast. The mixture is placed into large, square trays, covered with olive and cotton-seed oil, and baked in a voluminous brick oven for 7 to 15 minutes.

Instead of using a wood-heated oven to reach the required 800 to 900 degrees, the bakers heat the oven the night before with gas flames — one of the few modern conveniences that have found their way into the baking process.

The gas-heating device is removed at night, and by the next morning the oven has cooled down to the appropriate baking temperatures.

Liguria Bakery sells focaccia in \$2 slices and in four varieties: plain, onion, raisin and "pizza." The "pizza" is focaccia topped with tomato sauce and green onions.

The bakery supplies the bread to 25 restaurants, delis and cafes — some as far away as Napa. And since Liguria Bakery no longer delivers, all of its customers come to the North Beach store for their focaccia fix.

"It makes a real good sandwich and some people like to spice it up, but the best way to eat it, for me, is just

the way it is — maybe with a glass of wine," Soracco said. "And I like the plain one the best, because it's the one where you can actually taste the bread."

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