

San Francisco

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INSI

KEEPING A ROOF
OVER EVERYONE'S HEAD

Six arts groups get rent subsidies

SLOW ECONOMY MAY
EASE NEED FOR HELP

By Mike Zapler
Mercury News

The misfortune of a slowing economy may be the fortune of city arts organizations trying to stave off eviction.

City officials gave out the first rent subsidies this week, under legislation passed by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in late October. But they were surprised just six arts groups applied. Only \$230,000 of the \$1.5 million available was shelled out in the first go-around.

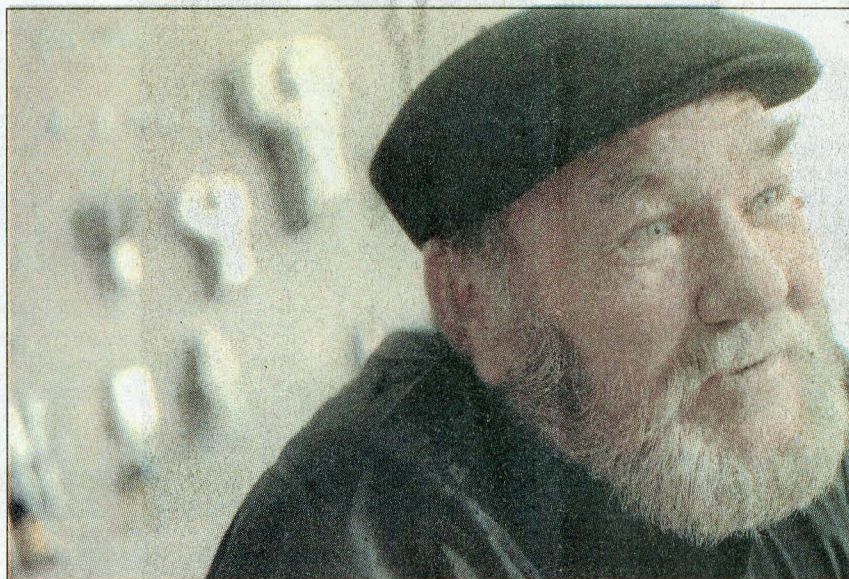
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Just two months ago, cries of an emergency rang throughout San Francisco. The city's arts scene was in trouble, politicians and activists warned, as spiraling office rents threatened to drive cultural organizations into oblivion — or at least across the bay, where prices are lower.

But as the economy has cooled, protests have dwindled and fears seem to have subsided.

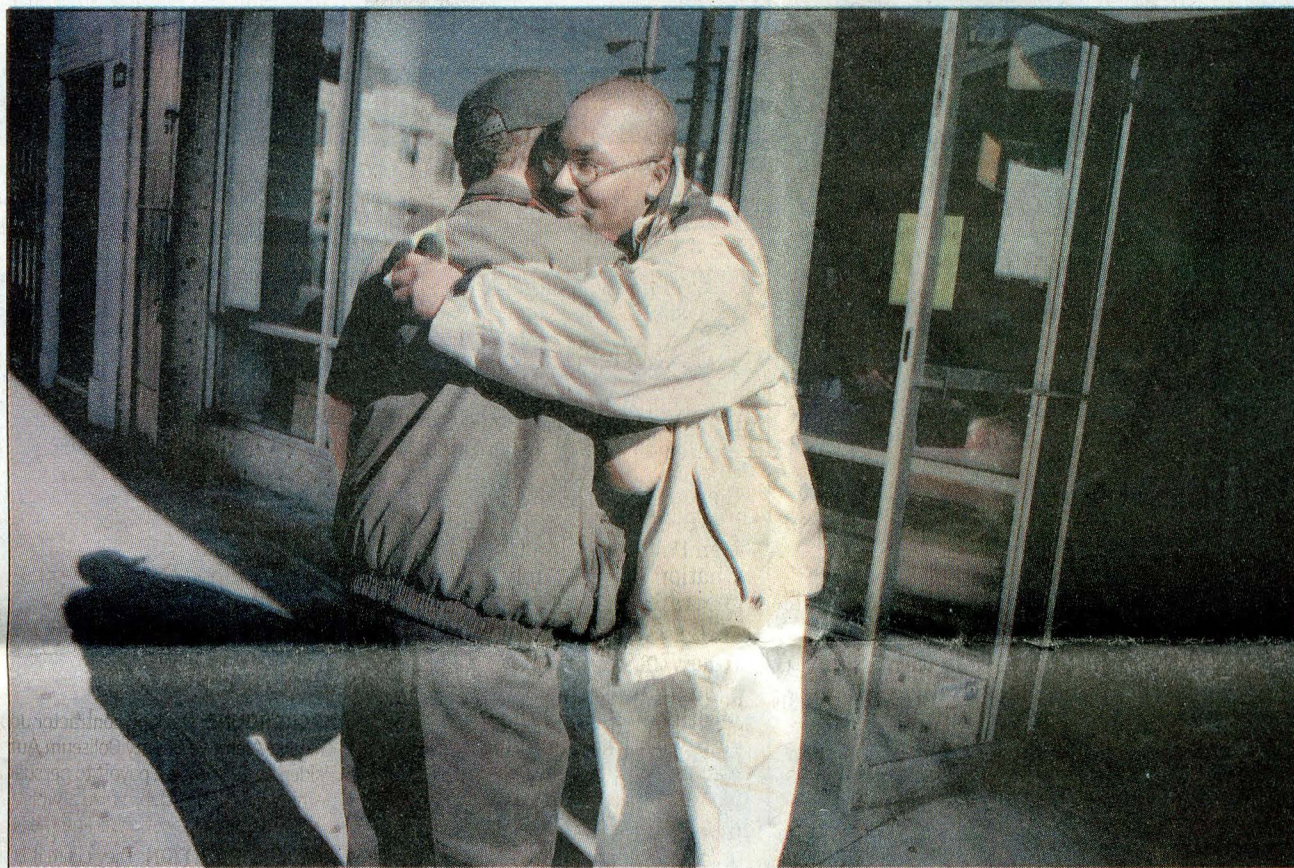
"I think people panicked, and that's not to say it was unjustified," said Richard Newirth, director of the San Francisco Arts Commission. "The office market is in flux. No one knew what was going to happen."

The softening office market is only one reason for the relatively meager response from arts groups, said Newirth, who sat on a three-member panel that awarded



Tool specialist Thomas Wayne Hobby says with the Tool Lending Center, residents "don't need Roto-Rooter anymore."

Tool Lending Center a library for do-it-yourself repairs



SUSANNA FROHMAN — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

Longtime friends Earl Hampton and Ken Hanks greet each other at the grand opening of San Francisco's Tool Lending Center. The facility operates as a home-improvement library, with 1,000 tools available for borrowing.

S.F. FOLLOWS OTHER CITIES WITH FIX-IT BORROWING IN PORTOLA DISTRICT

By Nicole C. Wong

Mercury News

When overflowing toilets, spewing garbage disposals and other household disasters strike, San Francisco residents and property owners can repair the problems themselves by borrowing fix-it equipment from the city's new Tool Lending Center.

The home improvement facility, on San Bruno Avenue in the Portola district, opened Thursday as the city's first free-of-charge home and garden equipment rental center. The center has manuals in English, Spanish and Chinese, videos, and offers free instruction and support.

The center, just down the street from the Portola branch library, is the third to open in the Bay Area. Berkeley began the area's tool lending program in 1979; library officials say it may also have been the nation's first. Oakland started one last year.

City residents who use the new center — a joint project of the San Francisco Public Library and the San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners — can cut costs and eliminate the hair-pulling hassles often associated with maintenance and renovation work, its organizers said.

"If you have a stopped-up drain, you don't need Roto-Rooter anymore," Thomas Wayne Hobby, the center's assistant tool specialist, said while pointing to one of the sump pumps available for checkout. "You come to us and clean it yourself — your bathroom drain, your sink drain, even your sewer."

The center operates just like a library. It issues free "tool lending cards" to adults who present photo identification and proof of city residence or property ownership. A user

can check out up to five tools at any time and keep each one for two, three or seven days — depending on the item's popularity.

The center will fine delinquent borrowers for overdue tools, ranging from \$1 per day for a utility knife to \$15 a day for an electric cement mixer. At those rates, fix-it-fans say, paying the fine is still cheaper than renting the tool from a commercial shop.

Outgoing San Francisco Supervisor Barbara Kaufman and other supporters of the Tool Lending Center expect the city to bustle with home improvement activity.

"People are buying these overpriced fix-uppers and they don't have any money left for necessities and tools," said Ty Yurgelevic, organizer of Oakland's program.

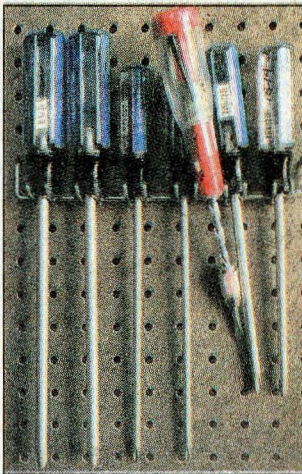
Borrowing a tool is not only cheaper but also can prevent clutter.

"You don't want to spend \$500 for a tool you might need once every couple of years," said Yurgelevic. "It's a way of using community resources."

The lending center has two rooms stocked with 1,000 tools worth about \$30,000. They include carpentry, concrete, electrical, floor and wall, clamps, gardening, ladders, material handling, me-

chanical, plumbing and power tools.

The Berkeley facility lends 4,000 to 6,000 tools each month. Projects for which tools have been borrowed at the East Bay centers range from construction of a mobile food cart to serve the lunch crowd at the University of California-Berkeley to sculptures carved with power tools by an Oakland artist.



TOOLS | S.F. fix-it center lends equipment for home repairs

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But creative uses stretch far beyond cobbling together projects for business or art.

Berkeley's tool-lending specialist, Mike Dakota, said he's helped people "who get locked out of their houses and need a ladder to get back in through the second-floor window."

Then again, he added, "People borrow ladders to get cats out of trees."

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NUTS AND BOLTS

The city's first free home and garden equipment rental center opened Thursday at 2713 San Bruno Ave. in the Portola district.

The center is open from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Monday, Thursday and Friday, and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday.

Manuals in English, Spanish and Chinese, videos and free instruction are also available.

For more information, call (415) 467-TOOL or see
www.toollending.org

Source: SName goes here
