

# Activist sparks anti-flier fight

BY CARL HOLCOMBE

As far as Cole Valley resident Rick Thurber is concerned, those fliers on poles around the Haight and in the city are coming down.

Whether for a lost cat, a garage sale, a missing person or a budding new band, the signs are graffiti ruining the neighborhood, said Thurber, founder of the Community Clean Up Project.

He's taken it upon himself to rid the neighborhood of the offending fliers, and his aggressive tactics are causing controversy.

"We live in a community and we can't just do our own thing," said Thurber, who early in the morning on March 12 yanked down 600-some signs and has assumed a local point-man role in the crusade against sign posting.

"We have to all live

together...Just because people have the freedom to do something doesn't mean they should. We have to have a higher regard for things."

Thurber, who cites city, police, and public utility codes, has drawn the ire of many in the Haight community for his anti-flier campaign. He and his crew, made up of volunteers and some workers that are paid by the CCUP, work several days a week taking down fliers and posting stickers warning people that posting fliers breaks the law. The Department of Public Works provides Thurber with money, tools, paint supplies and other materials.

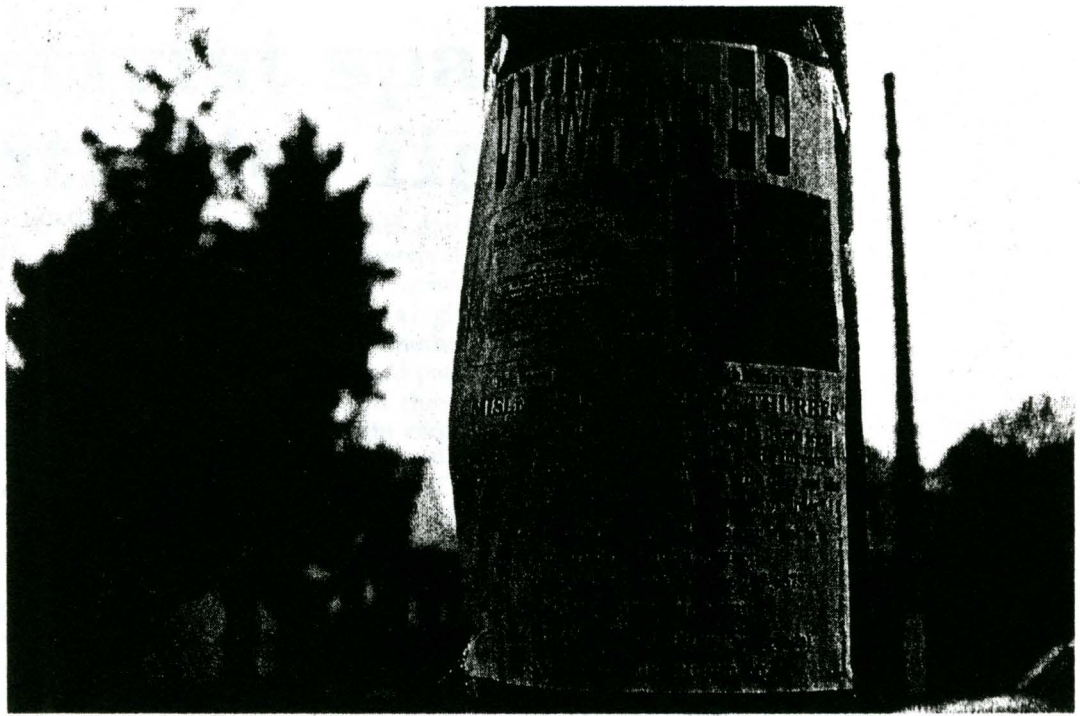
Musicians, activists, and other Haight Ashbury residents said Thurber's tactics and Supervisor

See POSTERS, Page 17

S. F. Observer April 1999  
p. 1



# Poles picked clean of all postings



OBSERVER / CHRISTINE JEGAN

**Fliers which attack neighborhood activist Rick Thurber have been put up by the Free Speech Ad-Hoc Committee for the last several weeks in the Haight and Duboce Triangle neighborhoods.**

## POSTERS, From Page 1

Barbara Kauffman's proposed sign ordinance are unconstitutional attempts to restrict free speech. According to them, fliers promote communication and community building.

In an ironic twist, the recently-formed Ad Hoc Committee Defending Free Speech in San Francisco has made Thurber their poster boy. Thurber's picture is on "unwanted" posters on Haight Street, which call for an end to his tactics, challenge his citations of public codes, and ask members of the community to work against him and Kauffman.

"(Thurber) doesn't understand the way he cleans poles is disrespectful...it seems unjust," said Kathy Ketman, a 30-year city resident, who just started a Web site to address the issue. "Sometimes the codes affect how fliers are posted but it's not a blanket against all of them."

"If he's reasonable, people might agree...if (he) would develop a system of periodic cleaning."

Thurber said the discussion should be based on issues and on "what's best for the community." He tries not to take it personally when his picture turns up on public fliers, but he admits "some days it hurts."

Pablo Heising, director of the Haight Street Fair, said the attack on flier posting is an assault on constitutional rights in the name of a cleaner city.

"It definitely diminishes free speech," said Heising, who has lived in the Haight Ashbury since the mid '60s. "These 'NIMBY' types think it's offensive. They're very strange. Instead, you give up liberties to have a supposedly cleaner city? I'm not willing to give up liberties. (They're) used to the suburbs and aren't used to the city's ways of doing things...they want

things they way they're used to."

Heising points out flier posting in the Haight has been acceptable for more than 30 years, and San Francisco's reputation as a strong activist town can be traced in part to sign posting for rallies and meetings. He said as long as tape is used, it's okay.

Thurber and CCUP are at odds with other neighborhood groups, like the Duboce Triangle Neighborhood Association, which has asked them to stay out of the neighborhood.

Janice Tanaka, bass player for Our Lady of Napalm and previously Stone Fox, said posting signs is one of the few ways an underground or struggling band can promote shows.

"Foot traffic and newspaper ads are about all you get and for many (fliers are) the only ad they get," said Tanaka, who has posted gig fliers for years. "It might be illegal, but it's accepted."

She admitted, however, that sometimes flier posting can get out of hand. Posters for clubs and bands can cover entire poles, including other people's fliers, she said.

According to Thurber, Kauffman's ordinance, which would require people to register and pay fees for taping up fliers on poles, doesn't go far enough. Thurber said politicians who rely on posting campaign signs during elections are looking out for their own interests by allowing signs at all.

Thurber said poles are private property owned by the utility companies and the signs are fire and health hazards. When they end up as litter, it creates disrespect for an area, which leads to crime.

Thurber, a former state agriculture officer who inspected grocery store produce, rents out several residential properties in the city. His quest for cleaner neighbor-

hoods has led to conflicts on more than one occasion, including a complaint filed with the S.F.P.D. that he ran over a woman's foot after he was confronted for tearing down signs. Thurber said the complaint is bogus.

Sarge Holtzman, the woman's attorney, said Thurber has misread the codes he cites and ignores the free speech issues inherent in his actions.

"There is a vitality in community communication that's much more valuable," said Holtzman. "Even the Kauffman ordinance recognizes that phone and lamp poles are a public forum. No law prevents (sign posting), and (prevention) is a violation of the First Amendment."

As a prime example of the need to post signs, Heising cited the death of a long-time neighborhood man, who sat on his home's steps on Cole Street for years, wearing odd hats and cheering people's days by exchanging pleasantries.

Signs announcing the man's memorial service were torn down within a day of being posted. Since many didn't know him by name, a newspaper memorial notice would have gone unnoticed, said Heising.

But Thurber does have some neighborhood support.

"It's all about respecting the neighborhood, to show people, to be role models and hope it catches on with them...It's a constant war between the two sides," said a Haight Ashbury resident, who also tears down fliers and paints over graffiti, and asked that his name not be used. "Some people see the point in what we're doing, others are really adamant about putting up their fliers."

*The S.F. Board of Supervisors' Housing and Social Policy Committee will discuss Kauffman's flier ordinance at City Hall on Tuesday, April 6, at 10 a.m., at City Hall.*