

Mel Inman stands inside his repaired freezer.
Photo: Andrew Lightman



BY PETER J. WALDRON

The North Hall Update

At the September Eastern Market Community Advisory Committee meeting, Barry Margeson, interim market manager, reported there has been an avalanche of inquiries about the North Hall (capacity 750), a huge potential revenue source for the Eastern Market. Margeson is now engaged in finding a balance between strong revenue growth and appropriate community use as mandated by the Market legislation.

Margeson presented a complicated draft price structure of rental rates which act as current booking prices. Weddings, fundraisers and receptions prices range from \$ 2800 to \$5100 depending on the hours, time of day and the number of expected guests. Community groups and Hill residents are to be offered a discounted structure with prices starting at \$150 for “instructional events” and growing to between \$500 to \$1000 for public or private arts and community events.

EMCAC members raised a number of salient issues. Its members were in near unanimity that the pricing was too confusing and needed to be simplified. Other concerns were how and when the space could be made available for community groups, the break-even cost of an event, and the definition of who is a community member when in the end it

has been District taxpayers who have paid for the Market restoration. Costs for a typical event which include management and maintenance are expected to be \$400 according to Margeson. Alcohol may be served, but there are some restrictions.

Currently the North Hall has held one major fundraiser with 18 events scheduled over the next three months: among them a square dance, a Girl's Rock benefit and the return of the tango classes held weekly before the fire. Larry Gallo, EMCAC's Treasurer, asked for financial data, a budget and a financial plan for both the Market and specifically the North Hall and this request was echoed by other EMCAC members.

For information on booking an event contact Barry Margeson at 202-741-0940 or barry.margeson@dc.gov.

Progress on Punch List

Eastern Market crowds were strong through the traditionally slow months of July and August. The South Hall's list of unfinished construction items at the time of the opening was 44 pages, due in part to a mayoral commitment to get the Market open by summer. According to John Crudele, Senior Superintendent of Forney Construction, the contractual documents are being reviewed carefully with the last of the major issues being the tweaking of the new sophisticated computerized HVAC system and its coordination with skylight ceiling fans and windows that are temperature dependent. Crudele, in wrapping up the Market restoration project, said: “There are no big things to do. We are down to one page.”

However, since the opening of the \$20 million renovation project, the newly plastered walls have developed significant cracks along the northwestern wall. A whole section of wall has now been removed and samples are under study. According to Crudele, “It is not a normal thing. The plaster is being evaluated and then we will take corrective action.”

Another issue which clearly affected business was the horrific stench emanating from the walk-in refrigeration at Market Poultry, which spread throughout the Market. The initial cause according to owner Mel Inman was that no drain had been installed in the refrigerated unit. Then when the drain was installed, it was done incorrectly, leaving no way to drain off water and decomposing chicken parts. According to Inman, his business and that of adjacent merchants suffered even as the Market soared through its opening months. In-

man, shaking his head in relief that this three month ordeal is over, says: “It is fixed now. It killed my business. But I am pleased with the city. I am happy to say they have done what is necessary “

Newly purchased display counters are too high and inaccessible to both customers and employees many of whom continue to stand on plastic milk cartons. The solution of whether to lower these units or replace them awaits a decision by Market architects, Quinn Evans. The Capitol Hill Community Foundation has again stepped forward and offered to pay part of this cost with revenues raised from the community after the April 2007 fire.

Eastern Market Community Advisory Committee representative and owner of Union Meats Bill Glasgow predicted throughout the post fire planning that strong light produced from the restored windows and new skylight would produce discoloration of meat and fresh food products. Three months after the June opening, market management is now testing blinds for blocking out strong daily light. “The light is cooking Bill's meat in the cases and killing my flowers” said Angie Brunson of Blue Iris Flowers.

Hine & Weekend Flea Markets

Ken Golding, a partner at Stanton Development / East Banc, which was awarded the redevelopment rights to the closed Hine school, said that there is no intention to end the weekend flea market, noting that part of the winning Hine proposal includes the placement of the flea market along the newly created C St as well as space in the interior piazza which will also be populated with shops and restaurants. Groundbreaking is expected to take place, according to one source familiar with the details, in late 2011. Hine is the site of the two privately managed weekend flea markets.

Golding states there are a multitude of issues to be worked out with the District and several public

EMCAC Elections

EMCAC will hold elections for officers at its October 21st monthly meeting beginning at 7:00PM at the Old Naval Hospital. There will be an additional election for the independent community seat. Interested residents are welcome to contact Donna Scheeder at dsch@loc.gov

Mayoral Appointment

Just announced, Neil Albert, the City Administrator, has been appointed by Mayor Fenty to EMCAC and will serve as the Mayor's representative.

agencies including EMCAC, but makes clear that "we will provide space on Saturday and Sunday" for the flea markets. One suggestion proposed is that lower 7th St. be closed from C St. to Pennsylvania Ave. during the construction to accommodate the flea market.

Tom Rall, operator of the Sunday flea market who has been severely impacted by the loss of revenue from the North Hall with its lease expiration, worries that he will not be protected and thus displaced in this complicated process. Rall, instrumental in the incubation and growth of the flea market for 26 years, contends it was his promotional work while the Market advertising was otherwise fallow that was singular in driving the arts and craft market forward. "For 26 years I was the only promoter for Eastern Market. It fell on my shoulders totally. There was no consistent advertising except from me. I spent almost \$250,000 in out-of-pocket expenses."

Carol Wright, whose Saturday flea market has been operational since 1997, insists that her contract must be honored. "Everything is status quo for the next 15 months" she said. Wright actively supported Stanton Development/East Banc in its bid and the payoff is they "made the commitment of a long term relationship." Wright responded by email about the impending disruption: "We know we have to be flexible. If we could make it through a market fire and reconstruction, the construction of a tent(the East Hall) , the closing of Hine, the creation of a parking lot and -- most difficult of all -- the streetscape [construction] while never missing a day's business, we feel we are experienced at being flexible."

Currently both Rall and Wright have contracts with District of Columbia Public Schools through 2010, but these become problematic if and when the District turns the property over to Stanton/East Blanc. ★

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