Free Spring 2026 Issue 2

Gazetteer

San Francisco



Is Marc Benioff the unfunniest CEO in San Francisco?

Sylvester, now and forever

Mayor Lurie's big RESET

SF's looming 911 crisis

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Way off the Marc



Matt Haber
Editor-in-Chief

In mid-February, my colleague Joshua Bote came running into our office on fire. He'd gotten a tip that Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff had made a tone deaf joke at a staff gathering in Las Vegas and he wanted to write it up fast.

As headlines go, "CEO Says Something Stupid" is usually up there with "Dog Bites Man," but Benioff's joke wasn't merely stupid, it was awful. After asking which of his employees had traveled from other countries to be there, Benioff cracked that ICE agents were in the back waiting to deport them.

If this were an episode of *The Office*, the camera would whip pan to Jim making his highly-memed "What the fuck?" face then cut to a direct-to-camera address by Oscar who'd say something like, "Let's just say it wasn't my *favorite* joke."

But Marc Benioff isn't a regional manager of a paper company, he's the head of a global software empire worth about $175 billion despite some pretty big drops that may hint at investors doing more than rolling their eyes at his antics. We expect more of someone in such a position, although, honestly, given the last few years (DOGE, the Epstein emails, just about anything involving Palantir) I don't know why.

Benioff was supposed to be a "good" billionaire, the one who's given away at least $1 billion to charity. He's a frequent dining companion of Barack Obama (they like Quince) and has spent time in India with the Dalai Lama. Shouldn't that have given him a soupçon of enlightenment to go with his piles and piles of money?

Like other tech billionaires who once aligned themselves with progressive causes, Benioff has shown his willingness to be a useful idiot in Trump's second term.

Most recently, Benioff helped convince President Trump not to send federal troops to San Francisco, something many of us continue to be grateful for.

So what in the hell was this guy doing cracking jokes about ICE — especially while agents are still laying siege to neighborhoods in Minnesota, Maine, and California?

Shouldn't someone responsible for the livelihoods (and work visas) of so many people be a little bit more careful? Benioff is also the owner of *Time* Magazine, once the most important publication in the country; he's the human avatar of a company whose headquarters forever changed the San Francisco skyline; his name adorns children's hospitals on both sides of the Bay.



Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff, left, with Michael Dell, CEO of Dell Technologies, a Salesforce customer, at Dreamforce 2025 in San Francisco.

SALESFORCE

Surely, someone like that should strive for a little bit of gravitas.

Actually, who am I kidding? Why should anyone assume that Benioff is above a dumb joke your racist uncle would crack simply because he's rich?

We all wanted to believe Benioff was different because he portrayed himself as different. The Dreamforce conference starts with a land acknowledgement and used to invite Buddhist monks from Thích Nhất Hạnh's Plum Village. The truth is that Dreamforce is a corporate orgy of self-promotion populated by cartoon mascots and middle managers who'll give their swag backpacks and water bottles to their kids' soccer coaches as Christmas presents. Sure, it has a "Mindfulness Meadow," but that doesn't make Benioff some kind of holy man.

It makes him kind of a joke, especially now that he's more likely to be spotted at a White House dinner in a selfie with Pam Bondi than in Dharamshala with the Dalai Lama.

Like other tech billionaires who once aligned themselves with progressive causes (remember Mark Zuckerberg's pro-immigration group FWD.us, because he sure hopes you don't), Benioff has shown his willingness to be a useful idiot in Trump's second term.

Which brings us back to his truly idiotic ICE joke.

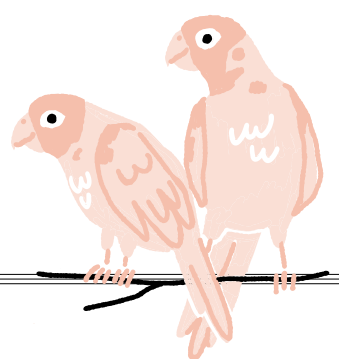
That joke showed that Benioff is not only willing to pal around with the worst and most destructive members of our current kakistocracy, he's willing to take a page straight from their playbook. Making jokes that aren't funny — that are, in fact, deeply offensive — while impugning anyone offended for not having a sense of humor isn't being a comedian, it's being a bully.

Michael Scott in *The Office* could force his bad jokes down his employees' throats (that's what she said!), because he was a loser and had no actual power over their careers or lives. Benioff is, by nearly any definition, one of history's biggest winners, which is why his little joke rubbed them so wrong. (That's what she said!)

For decades, Benioff has draped himself in leis, appropriating the most colorful elements of Hawaiian culture to promote Salesforce's "Ohana" corporate ethos.

Somehow this corny display of cultural appropriation was meant to distinguish him from his nerdier, less approachable fellow CEOs. With his slicked back, un-corporate haircut and cuddly proportions, Benioff convinced the world he's not a hardcharging oligarch, but a laid back beach bum in an Aloha shirt who just happens to be the biggest private employer in San Francisco.

Now we know he's not. Unlike those ICE agents he joked about, the mask is off. Just because the face underneath is laughing at his own jokes, doesn't mean we have to. ●



Inside

Digest
The best of *Gazetteer SF* in delicious bite-sized morsels.
PAGE 5



Computer Blue
Cydney Hayes speaks with Anil Dash about AI, VCs, and why platforms need Nazis on them.
PAGE 8



Deep Roots
Chasity Hale meets Mohammad Ribhi, whose family has cultivated olives for generations in Palestine.
PAGE 12



A Night at the Opera
Joshua Bote revisits disco diva Sylvester's legendary 1979 concert.
PAGE 20

On the cover
COVER PHOTOS FROM SALESFORCE AND GAZETTEER SF; STAFF ILLUSTRATION

Gazetteer
San Francisco
News for humans by humans since 2024

Contact Us

ONLINE
sf.gazetteer.co

EMAIL
info@gazetteer.co

TEXT
(415) 787-6570

MAIL
575 Market St.
Fourth Floor
San Francisco, CA 94105

We welcome feedback.

About Us

Gazetteer publishes original local news written by humans and delivers it directly to subscribers via email, text, and print, bypassing algorithms. *Gazetteer SF* is published on the web five days a week and quarterly in print every March, June, September, and December.

Subscribe

Get unlimited local news stories by *Gazetteer SF* online, quarterly newspapers mailed to your home, and free access to our events. Subscriptions start as low as $7.77 per month.

TO SUBSCRIBE
https://sf.gazetteer.co/products

Editorial

Matt Haber
Editor-in-Chief

Joshua Bote
Associate Editor

Eddie Kim
City Reporter

Joel Rosenblatt
Reporter

Cydney Hayes
Business & Technology Reporter

Olivia Peluso
Food & Drink Reporter

CONTRIBUTORS

Sofi Cisneros

Carlos Dengler

Chasity Hale

Omar Mamoon

Zack Ruskin

Julie Zigoris

Visuals

Eloïse Billois
Photo Editor

Jack Browning
Art Director, print

PHOTOGRAPHY

Ximena Natera
Felix Uribe
Tâm Vũ
among others

ILLUSTRATION

Tomás Cortés
Gillian Dreher

Corporate

Chelly Guzman
Operations Coordinator

Brooke Ley
Community and Partnerships

Byron Perry
Publisher

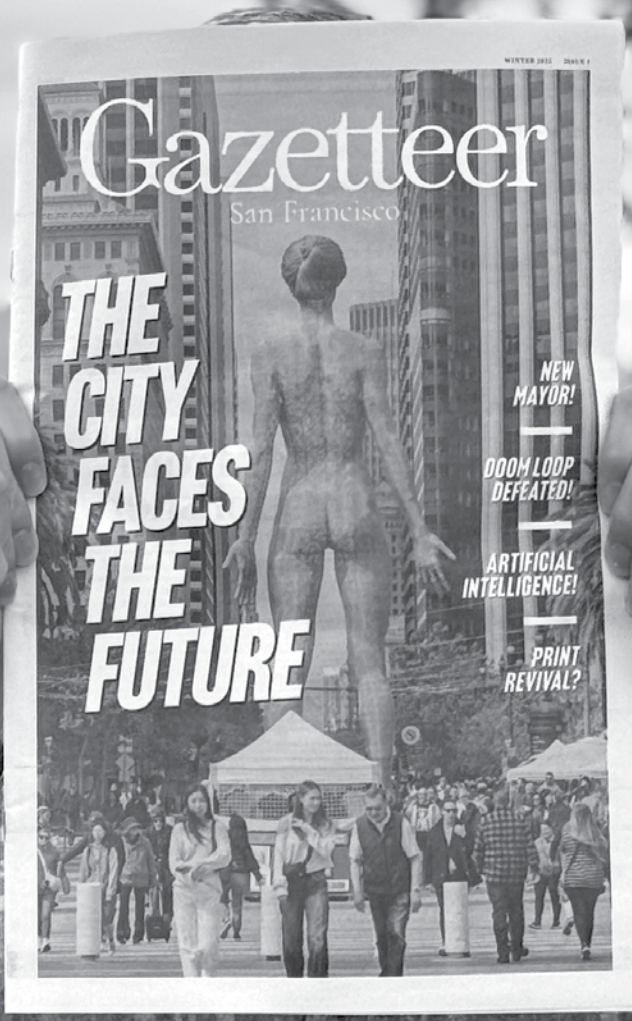
All rights reserved.
Gazetteer Inc. © 2026

Reproduction of the materials of this newspaper in any manner is not permitted without the punisher's prior consent.
"Gazetteer" is a registered trade mark of Gazetteer Inc.

Feel something real.

We distribute 10,000 copies to hundreds
of the best gathering spaces in San Francisco.

Advertise in our quarterly newspaper.



Get in touch to request our 2026 media kit.

Gazetteer
San Francisco

Email: info@gazetteer.co Text: (415) 787-6570

Contributors



David Jack Browning

Art Director

David Jack Browning works as art director for ***Gazetteer SF***'s print edition. Following a long designing and editing career at ***The Times-Picayune***, the ***Houston Chronicle*** and in various other newsrooms, he founded DJB Design, which specializes in editorial, book, and brand design.



Sofi Cisneros

The Memory Palace, p. 16

Sofi Cisneros is a freelance culture and fashion reporter based in San Francisco and New York. Her work has appeared in CNN, ***Document Journal***, and ***Byline*** Magazine. She is a recent graduate of NYU's Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute.



Tomás Cortés

Illustrator, Flat Lurie, p. 22

Tomás Cortés is a published illustrator, story artist, and photographer in San Francisco who is passionate about telling stories through his work.



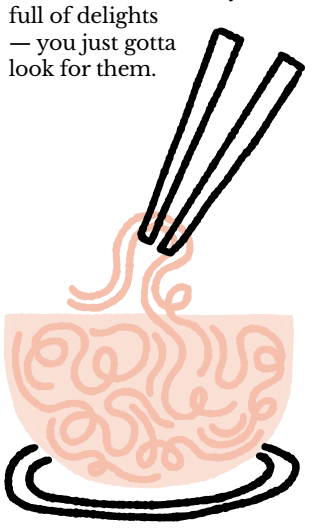
Carlos Dengler

Fatiguing fascism, p. 21

Carlos Dengler is a multi-instrumentalist, record producer, actor and writer-at-large based in Troy, NY and New York City. He has written for ***Compact***, ***n +1***, ***Tablet*** and others. In the 2000s, he cofounded the rock group Interpol and performed as their bassist and keyboardist.

Throughout this issue, we've sprinkled Gillian Dreher's wonderful illustrations of iconic San Francisco things: buildings, foods and drinks, modes of transportation, etc.

Not only do Dreher's drawings break up our writers' texts, adding visual pop to our print publication, they're a small reminder that this city is full of delights — you just gotta look for them.





Gillian Dreher

Illustrator throughout

Gillian Dreher is an artist, designer, and therapist who works at the intersection of art, tech, and mental health. When she's not drawing and designing for clients or walking her dog Roo, you can find her providing therapy to youth and families in Alameda County.



Chasity Hale

Olive Oilman, p. 12

Chasity Hale is a journalist and writer in San Francisco. Her work has been featured in ***Mother Jones***, NPR, ***The San Francisco Chronicle***, and elsewhere. In her free time, she enjoys perusing bookstores, antique shops, and parks, and cultivating community through poetry.



Zack Ruskin

Why is This Woman Laughing?, p. 5

Zack Ruskin is a freelance reporter living in San Francisco. His bylines include ***Vanity Fair***, ***The Washington Post***, ***Rolling Stone***, ***Alta Journal***, and ***The San Francisco Chronicle***.



Julie Zigoris

Save the Mothers Building!, p. 11

Julie Zigoris reports on arts and culture in the Bay Area and beyond. Her writing has appeared in ***The New York Times***, ***The Boston Globe***, ***HuffPost***, ***Lit Hub***, ***Atlas Obscura***, KQED, ***SFGATE***, ***The San Francisco Standard*** and other outlets. She's the author of ***Belomor: Criminality and Creativity in Stalin's Gulag***.

ADVERTISEMENT

HEAD WEST

11AM MARKETPLACE DATES

FERRY BUILDING SAN FRANCISCO
1ST SUNDAYS · MARCH - DECEMBER

N.MAIN ST WALNUT CREEK
(4X) 2ND SUNDAYS · MAR 8, MAY 10, OCT 11 + DEC 13

HAYES VALLEY SAN FRANCISCO
(4X) 2ND SUNDAYS · APR 12, JUN 14, SEPT 13 + NOV 8

SOUTH B ST SAN MATEO
3RD SATURDAYS · MARCH - DECEMBER

THE BARLOW SEBASTOPOL
3RD SUNDAYS · MARCH - DECEMBER

STATE STREET LOS ALTOS
4TH SUNDAYS · MARCH - OCTOBER

FOURTH STREET BERKELEY
(3X) 5TH SUNDAYS · MAR 29, MAY 31 + AUG 30

LOT 2270 BROADWAY OAKLAND
SUMMER SUNDAYS + HOLIDAY · JUL 12, AUG 9 + NOV 29

LOCAL MAKERS +ARTISTS
LIVE Music!
VINTAGE FINDS
We'll See YOU SOON

ADVERTISEMENT



Digest

The unfunniest CEO in San Francisco

Marc Benioff joked about ICE agents being present at an internal Salesforce event in February, as first reported by *Gazetteer SF*.

At Salesforce's annual company kickoff in Las Vegas on Feb. 10, Benioff presented a keynote address that was broadcast to all Salesforce employees. In a room filled with hundreds of Salesforce staffers, he asked who traveled from abroad to stand up for recognition. He then proceeded to make a joke about ICE agents being in the back of the room, an anonymous tipster told *Gazetteer*. There were faint boos from the crowd.

Later, he offered a callback to that groaner: He asked how many people had not yet used a Slackbot tool, the tipster said, then cracked another joke about ICE being present. He then took a jab at Bad Bunny's instant-classic Super Bowl halftime performance, saying that he wasn't sure what it was about.

Salesforce employees were not pleased.

"It's hard to believe this company still has values when you make completely off-base jokes about ICE in your opening keynote," said one employee inside an internal Slack viewed by *Gazetteer*. "That's unacceptable." (The comment received almost 800 emoji reactions in support.)



Marc Benioff's groaners about ICE and Bad Bunny elicited boos from his own employees.
SALESFORCE

Another said that the jokes are "tone-deaf and quite cruel," and are at odds with Salesforce's self-avowed culture of equality.

Some employees talked about loved ones and other Salesforce "ohana" feeling unsafe, while one suggested that employees present at the kickoff walk out in protest.

These remarks from Benioff are particularly repugnant, but perhaps not surprising given his political about-face in recent years. He told *The New York Times* last October, in the lead-up to the Dreamforce conference in San Francisco, that he "fully" supports President Donald Trump. Benioff apologized days later on X after suggesting, in the same interview, that President Donald Trump deploy the National Guard to San Francisco.

Benioff did not respond to multiple requests for comment. *—J.B.*

WHY IS THIS WOMAN LAUGHING?

By Zack Ruskin

For decades, she has haunted San Franciscans' dreams. Her smile never fades; her spastic movements never still. Her laugh — a piercing caterwaul, equal parts delight and terror — echoes in the minds of everyone who encountered her at Playland by the Beach, the amusement park near Ocean Beach that closed in 1972.

Her name is Laffing Sal.

"As kids, we used to cover our ears as we passed Sal," wrote Herb Caen in 1972. In a 1995 KQED documentary, Caen was still thinking about Sal, calling her "a kind of hideous creature with a horrible, manic laugh."

Sal is still laughing, greeting guests at Musée Mecanique at Fisherman's Wharf where for a few quarters you can activate her hulking figure and set off the hidden phonograph in her pedestal that plays her persistent guffaws.

Sal measures a mighty 6'10" if you include her pedestal. Constructed out of paper mâché, her spring-loaded inside allows her to wave her arms and lean both forward and backwards. Further recognizable by her trademark missing upper tooth (an incisor), Sal is a singular, if eerie, presence even in our much more jaded age.

Dan Zelinsky, who oversees his late father Ed's collection of coin-operated arcade machines at the Musée, boasted that Sal is still doing her thing. "She creeps people out all the time," he said proudly.

"I saw this mom come in with her 10-year-old-daughter," Zelinsky said. "She was telling her daughter how great Sal was, but once Sal started laughing, the little girl slowly hid behind her mom and asked, 'Mom, are you sure this is fun?' It was great."

How Sal found her way to the Musée is a tortuous tale that feels almost like a legend.



Laffing Sal delights and terrifies guests at Musée Méchanique at Fisherman's Wharf.
MATT HABER / GAZETTEER SF

"One day," Zelinsky recalled, "I got a call from a guy who said he had an original Laffing Sal from Playland and that he wanted to sell it. He lived in a Victorian on Fell Street, so I went down there, looked at it, and there she was. It was fantastic."

Zelinsky immediately agreed to the man's desired price (he can't recall the figure), then went home to write a check. When he returned the following day, check in hand, the seller had already changed his mind.

"He told me he'd decided not to sell it," Zelinsky said. "I told him to let me know if he ever changes his mind. Then, about ten years later, he passed away, and his parents put it up for auction with Butterfields & Butterfields."

Thinking he'd have "no chance" of winning, Zelinsky made a silent bid of $3,000, fully assuming he'd be outbid.

The joke was on him: Apparently not a single other person bid on Sal.

$3,000 is a small price to pay for a lifetime of laughter. The nightmares that come with it? Priceless.

Drinking neoliberally

Fresh off the March for Billionaires, a viral stunt that brought their name into wider awareness, the Bay Area New Liberals gathered at The Irish Bank in Union Square.

The vibes at the happy hour were nowhere near as ridiculous as those at the March for Billionaires, where some 20 feverish, billionaire-supporting members goaded nearly as many journalists into quoting several brainless and irony-poisoned takes on why the proposed California Billionaire's Tax is bad.

At the table were 10 men between the ages of 25 and 40, and one 25-year-old woman. (The group's co-leader, a 40-year-old product manager named Jeremy Linden, said this tends to happen because the New Liberals are most active on X and Reddit.) Notably absent was Derik Kauffman, the 26-year-old self-described AI founder who organized the March for Billionaires on Feb. 7. No one seemed to know him well. "He's in our circles and comes around sometimes," Linden said of Kauffman.

The group, the regional chapter of a national center-left organization called Center for New Liberalism, seemed torn on how to feel about the Billionaire's March. It appeared to be a sort of fringe spinoff from the New Liberals' regular programming. The virality of the march had attracted two new members to this night's gathering, but none of these neolibs actually went to the march.

Some members called the stunt "too tacky," but Linden was mostly okay with the notoriety. It got the word out about their club, but "definitely no one at this table likes Trump," he told a visitor, before explaining that he's noticed a lot of Gen Z-ers joining tech these days are far more right-wing than neoliberals are.

Co-leader Kevin Gray, 33, seemed the most put-off by Saturday's spectacle. "The name was provocative," he said. "Which I guess was kind of the point, but it doesn't add to the goal."

So what is the goal of the Bay Area New Liberals?

They tweet a lot and make a few flaccid attempts at engagement-baiting, but they don't actively recruit new members. Almost all of them are middle managers in tech, and the way they make moves politically is generally unprovocative.

Usually, they just meet up to hang out and debate a little policy.

They think wealth taxes are stupid but love the Georgist concept of land taxes. (They made sure to explain Georgism in great detail.) They argued politely over whether they would consider themselves libertarians. They like billionaires and the innovations that made them their fortunes, but they don't like the way the tech giants have cozied up to Trump. They want a redemption arc for Sam Altman.

"We're just a bunch of depressed millennials," one member named George said.

Immediately, Rebecca, the lone, well-kempt Gen Z woman, told him to speak for his goddamn self. *— C.H.*



Projectionist Jim Cassedy at work in the booth at the Alamo Drafthouse New Mission. MATT HABER / GAZETTEER SF

A LIFE IN THE DARK

On a recent afternoon, Jim Cassedy was in the place he can be found most days: the projection booth of the Alamo Drafthouse's New Mission. Cassedy was keeping an eye on a digital projection as he talked with a visitor about the thing he's done since he was a teenager and which, in his early 70s, he still does better than probably anyone else: Show movies.

"Some kids are natural musicians," Cassedy said. "For whatever reason, I've got the quote-unquote talent to understand these machines. Everybody's got something they're good at. The lucky ones are fortunate enough to find a career in it."

As an A.V.-besotted teenager on Long Island, Cassedy was always more interested in what went on in the projection booth than on the screen at his local movie theater. When someone explained the Cue-mark — that tiny blob-like marker on the upper right corner of the screen that tells the projectionist it's almost time to switch projectors and seamlessly change reels — Cassedy would turn around to see the switch.

Eventually, Cassedy made it into the booth himself. This was at a time when movies like *Oliver!* (1968), *Funny Girl* (1968), and *Patton* (1970) played to sold out crowds of movie palaces that had yet to be sliced up into multiplexes. He showed *Jaws* (1975) three summers in a row, four or five shows a day, overtime every night. "I bought a new car just with the money I made," he says with a twinkle in his eye. When he projected *Carrie* (1976), he'd slip into the back of the auditorium for the final scene just to watch the audience scream.

It wasn't always so glamorous. For a while, Cassedy worked in a theater in East Islip, a small New York hamlet, where the projection booth was littered with beer cans and bottles left by the usual projectionist, who eventually ended up in jail. Cassedy devised an emergency escape plan just in case. Looking back, he sees a bright spot. "It was a great education because every night something would fly off of the projector, and I had to deal with it."

On Christmas Eve 1980, the East Islip Theatre finally burned down.

At an age when many people might enjoy retirement, Cassedy is working as hard as ever. He still hoists the reels onto the projectors even when the films are long like last year's two-hour-50-minute *One Battle After Another* or *The Brutalist* (2024), which tipped in at three-hour-35-minutes with intermission. At three straight hours, *Oppenheimer* (2024) required so many reels, Cassedy joked to a friend that if the film's physicist subject "was so damn smart, he should've been able to invent a bomb in fewer than 10 reels."

"The last reel is always the heaviest," Cassedy confessed, but he clearly has many more reels to go before he rolls credits and fades to black. *—M.H.*

Hazie's memories

In December, a scuffle between patrons and staff at Hazie's, a Hayes Valley bar and restaurant, made headlines around the world. It would eventually lead to the firing of bartender Miguel Marchese and Shireen Afkari, the woman who was filmed yanking Marchese's hair.

Marchese, who worked at Hazie's until early January, said the whole thing started when Afkari and her companion arrived for dinner, appearing to have already gotten very much in the holiday spirit. At one point, they asked to speak to the manager, who then took their drinks from the table.

Sometime after that, Afkari entered the restaurant's kitchen in a rage and began filming. When the hostess tried to get her out, the customer slapped away one of her hands as she held it up in the classic de-escalation gesture.

Afkari then went behind the bar. That's when other people began filming. After hitting a busser who was filming the incident and then attempting to attack someone sitting at the bar, a combination of patrons and staff attempted to escort the couple out of the restaurant. Marchese was among them.

Once on the sidewalk, Afkari grabbed hold of Marchese's hair and refused to let go. She ignored pleas by others involved until, as Marchese explained, "I needed to give her an incentive to let me go. So, I grabbed her phone out of her hands," Marchese said. "And I chucked that shit."

Letting his hair go, Afkari ran after her phone, tripping over someone's feet and falling to the sidewalk. Soon, police arrived, and the couple were arrested.

After being identified by an X user, Afkari was fired from her job as a senior manager of growth marketing and retention at Strava and had her name in headlines from publications like *The New York Post*, *People*, and TMZ.

Marchese, for his trouble, was also let go. He told *The San Francisco Standard* he was thinking of moving to Los Angeles. *— O.P.*

America's favorite anchorman hits the Castro for soundbites

Tony Dokoupil was in San Francisco at the beginning of the year, standing on the corner of 17th and Castro.

"I'm Tony Dokoupil, I'm the new anchor of the CBS Evening News," he told me when I ran into his crew after dropping my kids off at school.

Dokoupil has the bland good looks, strong chin, and immovable hair of an actor playing a news anchor in a movie. As it happens, news anchor is a job that has lost almost all of its cache in the 21st century, yet Dokoupil's hiring has been closely watched since his network's parent company, Paramount, was gobbled up last year by David Ellison's Skydance Media. Ellison, son of Oracle founder Larry Ellison, installed controversial anti-woke opinion editor Bari Weiss as CBS News's editor-in-chief; Dokoupil is Weiss's first big hire.

Dokoupil's rollout started with him in Grand Central Terminal seeing if anyone could pronounce his last name. (They mostly couldn't.) He was supposed to go on a 10-city tour to meet the "average Americans" but had to postpone it when he was drafted to do a special Saturday night broadcast about the kidnapping of Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela.

That broadcast featured a softball interview with Pete Hegseth. As *Variety*'s Daniel D'Addario wrote, "the administration's perspective was aired so thoroughly as to raise the question of when an interview becomes a press release."



CBS News anchor Tony Dokoupil ponders the future with an interviewee.
JOEL ROSENBLATT / GAZETTEER SF

Dokoupil followed that interview with a tribute to Secretary of State Marco Rubio that ended with the anchor saying, "Marco Rubio, we salute you! You're the ultimate Florida man."

"I'm asking people where they would rather live, the past, the present or the future, because San Francisco has built so much of the future," Dokoupil told me.

"Amazingly and mysteriously, people mostly say they want to live in the past or the present. I mean, overwhelmingly, almost no one says the future. So the future has kind of a marketing problem."

Dokoupil said he lived in lower Pacific Heights about 20 years ago when he worked for a PR company; he's been back to the city since to cover news stories. His next stop would be Cincinnati, then Denver, Detroit, Chicago, and Pittsburgh.

I watched as Dokoupil interviewed Quinta Chapman and her husband Matthew Thomas, both from England, who were fresh from their morning workouts and had no idea who he was.

Chapman said she'd like to live in the present because she's concerned about it, and can affect the future.

Dokoupil said her answer was "mindful." *—J.R.*

UNMADE BEDS

The mayor wants to put the fentanyl crisis to rest, but is the new RESET center the best way to do it?

By Joel Rosenblatt

On the first Monday in November, at least ten San Francisco officials from five different city agencies flew to Tucson, Arizona. Their destination: a crisis response center for psychiatric care and substance abuse operated by Connections Health Solutions, a privately owned company based in Phoenix, where it operates another similar center.

The day trip, described in city documents obtained by *Gazetteer SF*, included a lunch meeting and a drive to the facility less than 15 minutes from the Tucson airport, where they got a tour of the center and met with local law enforcement.

The group included Kunal Modi, Mayor Daniel Lurie's chief policy wonk and a former partner at the consulting firm McKinsey; Department of Public Health (DPH) Director Dan Tsai, also a former McKinsey partner; and officials from the city's police and fire departments, and sheriff's office.

The trip was hardly necessary. Two weeks earlier, on Oct. 21, DPH official Krista Gaeta emailed the group traveling to Tucson to explain that that Connections was "our top candidate for operating San Francisco's 24/7 Deflection Center," a reference to facilities, like Tuscon's, that "deflect" drug users from jails or emergency departments and into medical and psychiatric treatment.

On Feb. 10, leveraging his soon-to-expire power to fast-track legislation, Lurie won approval from the Board of Supervisors for a $14.5 million contract with Connections to run a new crisis center in San Francisco for two years. Located in the South of Market neighborhood at 444 Sixth St., the city has named it RESET: Rapid Enforcement, Support, Evaluation, and Triage.

According to the city's plan, RESET patients will rest in 25 reclining chairs for up to 23 hours to sober up, and then, ideally, move into longer-term care. Originally scheduled to open late last year, officials say it is now set to open in April.

Whenever it opens, RESET will be central to Lurie's war on fentanyl. Hardly a week of the mayor's first year in office went by when Lurie wasn't asked about fentanyl, or raised the issue himself.

The rollout of RESET, however delayed it has been, is a high-stakes proposition. If it succeeds, Lurie will have taken a significant step forward in his promise to address the fentanyl crisis and related homelessness. If it fails, it will be seen as a setback for one of the most pressing problems the mayor was elected to solve.

RESET is hardly the first or only sobriety center in San Francisco, though it will be the only facility where drug users are taken involuntarily by law enforcement. The deepest skepticism about it comes from sobriety experts who predict RESET may get drug abusers off the street in the short term, but without meaningful longer-term treatment, they are unlikely to address their addictions.

The model of high-acuity care that Connections pitches is based on treating patients in substance use or mental health crises as quickly as possible. "The faster you get patients into care, the better their recovery is, the better the outcome is," Colin LeClair, the company's CEO, told me.

There's also the financial pitch. By diverting drug users to RESET, the city stands to save the expense, resources, and time required to process and care for intoxicated people sent to jails or hospitals.

At about a half dozen centers across the US, Connections also pitches its "No Wrong Door Policy," under which it claims it never denies treatment to anyone, no matter what state they're in, if they are brought in by first responders or transferred from an emergency room, or whether or not their admission is voluntary.

Once a patient at RESET is stabilized, the center must match them with services that can help with continued addiction treatment, homelessness, or mental health issues. "This is the beginning of a path to recovery," LeClair stressed. "It's not a panacea."

On a chilly night recently, I stood on Sixth Street just off of Market Street, four blocks from the site of the RESET building. All around me, the problem of the fentanyl crisis was starkly visible.

I was greeted by an older man, sitting in a chair on the corner, who said his name was Uncle Baldy. He offered to procure any drugs I might want. I asked him about fentanyl.

"I don't mess with it," Baldy told me over the thump of Cumbia music pouring out of Club OMG. "Look how many people it's killed."

According to data from the Office of the City Administrator and the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, 624 people died of unintentional drug overdoses in San Francisco last year, 467 — just about 75 percent — by fentanyl.

Baldy told me fentanyl is easily available for $10 a "point," or one-tenth of a gram. "Look around, you see them leaning over," he said, referring to its users. A half-block away, outside the Rumpus Room, one man inhaled from a glass pipe he moved across a piece of tinfoil. He was surrounded by about a half dozen people stooped over.





Sixth Street is an epicenter of San Francisco's drug overdose epidemic.

JOEL ROSENBLATT / GAZETTEER SF

Directly across the street, an SFPD officer sat in his vehicle with his sirens flashing but silent. He agreed to talk with me on condition of anonymity because he's not permitted to speak on behalf of the police department.

The officer said he was well aware of the fentanyl use, but he wasn't there to make drug arrests. That job, for now, remains the purview of the multi-agency Drug Market Agency Coordination Center, he said. The officer explained that his duty that night was to serve as a "scarecrow," positioned to make sure pedestrians could safely pass by.

In February, *Mission Local* reported that the San Francisco City Attorney's Office issued a memo to the Board of Supervisors warning that RESET poses a "very high" legal risk because it doesn't meet state standards of a detention center.

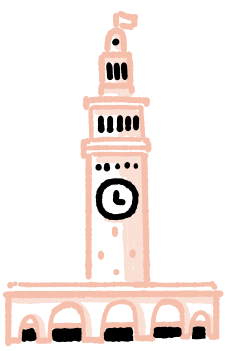
Sheriff Paul Miyamoto brushed the concern aside. "What we're doing is absolutely legal," he told me.

Supervisor Matt Dorsey, who represents the district RESET is located in, said the City Attorney routinely issues such warnings, and told me if necessary, state law could be amended.

When it opens, RESET will be a place for San Francisco law enforcement to bring drug users they pick up off the street. "No walk-ins" will be permitted, according to a city pamphlet printed for the public. Everyone who passes through its doors will first be arrested for public intoxication, a misdemeanor.

This approach is the kind of "heavy hand" San Francisco Sheriff Paul Miyamoto has long pushed for. Patients will have to remain at the center until they're sober in order to get a certificate of release, which allows them to leave without being charged.

"We don't want to criminalize people in crisis, we want to get them help," Miyamoto said. "But we're past the point of having that be a voluntary kind of thing. We want to break the cycle that they're in, and this is the kind of tough love approach to breaking that cycle."



Modi, the McKinsey consultant turned Lurie's chief of health, homelessness, and family services, explained at a recent public discussion at Manny's that the arrests won't be on people's records. The point is "not to add to someone's rap sheet, it's to get them into a pathway to treatment."

That is, if they can find a place to get treatment. "There aren't enough beds anywhere," said Shannon Smith-Bernardin, a co-founder of the National Sobering Collaborative.

A registered nurse for two decades, Smith-Bernardin has worked at sobering centers in San Francisco for at least half that period. Drug users who are homeless, on Medicaid, and even those with private insurance must wait three to six months to get a bed at organizations that offer detoxification and rehabilitation programs, she said. San Francisco can have "the best sobering center in the history of the world, and still not get people anywhere unless they're running a detox themselves," Smith-Bernardin said.

In September, Lurie told me about the need for "the right kind of beds" to help the homeless and addicted. The right kind of bed, meaning one where people can get the type of treatment they need, has become a kind of shibboleth among members of the mayor's administration; Modi repeated it at Manny's several months later, noting the city is undertaking "interesting pilots" to place drug users in crisis, once sober, directly into shelters.

Sheriff Miyamoto, too, said that to address the fentanyl crisis, "the biggest key is getting beds."

Even without a more concrete plan, Miyamoto's deputies and police officers will start arresting more drug users and sending them to RESET. Some of these people may seek treatment after their mandatory stays; others may wind up back on the street.

Smith-Bernardin told me she's seen patients who've gone to sobering centers a dozen or more times before she hears them say the one phrase that, in her experience, signals their openness to long-term treatment: "I'm tired."

The deepest skepticism about RESET comes from sobriety experts who predict it may get drug abusers off the street in the short term, but without meaningful longer-term treatment, they are unlikely to address their addictions.

The Gazetteer *Interview*

Anil Dash

The blogger and entrepreneur has seen it all, but today's brain-pickled generation may be the worst. 'Everyone else who could have told an alternate narrative has been hounded out of the industry.'

By Cydney Hayes

These are tough times for tech workers. Half-a-million tech workers lost their jobs in 2025 as their companies continued to invest, insatiably, in AI and deploy products that have caused psychosis in their own investors, seamlessly produced and proliferated child sex abuse material, and encouraged teenagers to kill themselves.

Anil Dash is not surprised by the dark turn the industry has taken. As a seasoned entrepreneur, prolific early blogger, and proponent for civil liberties in the digital world (he sits on the board of the Electronic Frontier Foundation), Dash has kept a close eye on tech leaders and chronicled their impacts on the workforce on his blog.

Gazetteer SF's tech and business reporter Cydney Hayes got Dash on the phone for a chat about AI, labor, why the MAGA ethos has taken hold of the industry, and a grand VC conspiracy.

The following conversation has been edited for length and clarity.



ANIL DASH

You said this moment in tech is "grim" and "about as bad as you've seen." What are the forces that have brought us to this moment?

A great one, that is going somewhat underreported, is just the numbers. ChatGPT came out in late 2022, a little over three years ago, and since then there have been over half-a-million layoffs across the tech sector. Just that one signal — put all the other things aside — that's decimation. That's twice as much as the DOGE guys cut in the federal government. This would be devastating if it was the auto industry. It's ten times as many people as those in the entirety of coal mining. It's shocking to think about that many jobs gone. This industry's been gutted.

In any normal time, people would say, "Oh, this is a recession." But because those same companies [who are doing layoffs] are doing this financial sleight-of-hand where they're doing deals with each other — like "We'll buy machines from you and you buy AI from us," — they make it look like the share prices are going up, so it doesn't look like a recession. That's part one.

Part two is what we're seeing at the top, which trickles down to tech workers and creates this really grim outlook. What I mean is we're seeing this new technique of the leaders of these companies — the investors, owners, CEOs — are now able to make money even if the companies never make money. That's new. It started a little over ten years ago, and I'll give you Uber as an example.

Before they went public, Uber had only ever lost money. Billions and billions of dollars. And yet, their investors were still able to make billions of billions of dollars in profit by making this thing public and recouping that money on IPO day. That is different than everything else in the prior history of the industry. What they figured out was if you tell a great story, and, importantly, if you get a legal monopoly, which Uber and Lyft basically did, you can print money kind of without regard to whether it ever makes sense as a business or not.



So that's been a pattern with everything that's followed, whether it's crypto or AI. This isn't even venture capital anymore. Venture capital means you take a risk. High risk, high reward. If there's no risk, that's not venture capital.

If you wouldn't call this venture capitalism, what would you call it?

It's pure crony capitalism. Corruption capitalism. These days, when you go to raise, the VCs are explicit about how they're all talking to each other about what your business is, what your economics are, what they think of your company, what they each think they might offer you. That is collusion. They're not competitors. It is essentially one company with different divisions, openly sharing information against entrepreneurs.

If you get to even a Series B, you will have to take money from either Andreessen Horowitz or Founders Fund or Ron Conway, and it's straight-up Godfather shit. They'll say, "You're gonna need help some day, and we can help you. We know PR. If you get stuck, we know someone in the White House."

When we think of the tech industry of the 2010s, we think of progressive, optimistic ideals. For those of us who weren't there, was the tech industry of the 2010s just marketed differently, or did it really operate differently?

For workers, it was genuinely really different. It was peak Obama optimism era, and it was 100 percent sincere. The creature comforts were really good, the benefits were great, the holiday parties were huge. And structurally, tech companies were genuinely providing upward mobility for people. They were genuine advocates for H-1B visas.

People now are at this point where they're so beaten down they're kind of like, "Was it all a lie?" But I had enough visibility and access, like I've had dinner with Jeff Bezos, I've been in the room, and I can say they were different. They have changed, and been changed by intentional political actors like Peter Thiel and Curtis Yarvin. And now they've pickled each others' brains.

Do you think today's founders have to move in this more libertarian direction to survive in this industry?

They don't even have to move. I talk to young founders these days and for them, there's no other world than the Trump world. I ask them what inspired them to go into tech and they say they read Marc Andreessen's manifesto, they read Peter Thiel's books, and I think, "Oh, your brain's cooked." They come in pre-pickled. But everyone else who could have told an alternate narrative has been hounded out of the industry.

In terms of the libertarian bent, those political actors like Peter Thiel were very intentional about it. They created their own media ecosystem. They created Substack — they, meaning Andreessen Horowitz is a big investor — and paid to have content on there that would drive users to their own media. They took over culture.

I saw the Thread you posted about common things VCs believe. One was "Platforms need Nazis on them." What do you mean by that?

Well, it's inciting. These guys like Thiel and [White House AI and crypto czar David] Sacks have been fixated for 30 years on trying to normalize and re-assert the public use of slurs. One of the examples they use [in their 1998 polemic *The Diversity Myth*] is the r-slur, which had just fallen out of favor in the early '90s. And they were explicitly saying not being able to use these slurs reflects growing political power from these groups, and that's why we need to bring them back.

> **"I ask them what inspired them to go into tech and they say they read Marc Andreessen's manifesto, they read Peter Thiel's books, and I think, 'Oh, your brain's cooked.' "**

I have these notes that I've written, and I need to wait until I can, like, spend my entire waking hours defending the onslaught of shit I'll get for writing it, but I really think the thing that they've been working towards for 10 years is to get Trump to be able to use the n-word in public. And I think we are less than a year away.

That is dark. I can't even contain my reaction to that. That is scary.

I want to be wrong. But, yeah, they want to make sure [marginalized groups] don't have power, and that's signified by having Nazis on a platform.

On that note of power, with all the layoffs and the bleakness among the workforce, do you think we're going to see any sort of labor power movement in the tech industry?

I'm hopeful. There was a moment in 2018, 2019, 2020, early Covid, when I thought there was going to be a moment. That's when you had Amazon workers unionize in Staten Island [in 2022] and the first Google union [in 2021]. And I don't think it's a coincidence that in the next 18 months after that they put $10 billion into teaching tools how to code. Like, ChatGPT comes at the end of 2022, right? It's not entirely because of that, but it's not *not* because of that.

To somebody graduating college in 2026, would you recommend a career in tech?

I think it's hard. But compared to what? Compared to being a prison guard? Yes. But I do think tech is going to be the industry that is most changed by AI. Right now, ChatGPT can write a memo for you, write code for you. But the tools they're building now, it'll be more like one tool will replace an entire team of software engineers.

Last year, we heard so much about the AI bubble. Do you think we'll see a crash in 2026?

They've sort of economically engineered themselves out of crashing, and this is sort of similar to the de-risking of venture capital. When there's no risk, you don't have crashes and you don't have bailouts. And this is sort of, again, a feature of fascism versus capitalism.

It was trendy in the last couple of years to call where we're at "late-stage capitalism." Would you call this fascism?

Yeah, we're there.

O brother, where post thou?

Real estate agent Alexander Lurie, like his mayor half-brother Daniel, is going all in on social media

By Joshua Bote

Like the Kardashian-Jenners of Calabasas, the D'Amelios of Norwalk, Conn., the Paul brothers of Westlake, Ohio, and, er, the Culpo sisters of Cranston, R.I., the Luries of San Francisco are establishing themselves as a preeminent, multiplatform influencer family.

I am still very much not into Mayor Daniel Lurie's social media performances, but I hate to admit that he, in his own "How do you do fellow kids" way, has managed to charm many users of Instagram and, to a much lesser extent, TikTok. Now, Alexander Lurie, the mayor's Schlossbergian younger half-brother, is ramping up his activity on TikTok in a way that suggests that he's trying to crib some of his influencer brother's clout.

Alexander is the founder of real estate agency The Lurie Group, and has handled his share of pretty swanky properties in the city's toniest neighborhoods. In 2024, he sold a Bolinas farm owned by Annie Leibovitz for a cool $8.5 million; he represented a $7.5 million Noe Valley home last year. Selling these homes probably made him a very decent living, but there are some things money can't buy, mostly internet fame.



This isn't Alexander's first foray into making content. Like many an enterprising real estate agent before him, he's been posting on Instagram for a hot minute — doing the whole "selling homes" thing but also the city boosterism bit to raise civic pride and property values.

To his credit, he's been clearly taking notes from his brother, who is arguably a distant second-best social media mayor after New York's Zohran Mamdani. Alexander hits all the right power poses; his speaking cadence is nearly identical to big brother Daniel's. If you watched one of his videos for a half-second before moving onto a TikTok Shop ad or something, you would think that the mayor moonlights in real estate and sometimes looks really young. The only difference, really, is that the mayor is partial to a front-facing video for relatability and celebrity proximity purposes, while Alexander tends to gravitate toward a full-body shot, all the better to show himself inside these multi-million dollar properties.

Alexander has been posting consistently on TikTok since last December, but this pivot has not really panned out for him. He only has a couple of hundred followers and a couple thousand views. His most viral clip, a video where he proclaims that he's "gonna do something crazy" and then proceeds to go on a perfectly regular broker tour, has 25,000 views; the top comment is a withering one-liner from local drag queen Fran Zaya: "So you're all like that." Oof. Another viewer inquired about the possible conflicts of interest that could emerge between the two social media brothers, both of whom have such deeply vested interests in the city. Alexander did not respond. It also doesn't help that TikTok real estate scams are prevalent enough now that even a KRON reporter could get fooled by them; he's tardy to the real estate TikToker party.



After grabbing a cup of joe, Alexander Lurie took TikTok followers on a broker tour of houses across the city in this video from January.

TIKTOK

Younger (and arguably more jaded) TikTok users (so, all of them) have mistaken Alexander for Daniel's son; about half of all his comments are pondering whether or not Alexander and Daniel are a son-and-dad duo, which is flattering only for Alexander. He seems to have a much more sympathetic audience on Instagram, where everyone from your mother on down enjoys looking at houses they could never buy.

What has worked for him is the evergreen celeb move of starting a real podcast and almost immediately abandoning it, but not before clip farming it on social media. A couple of those clips have gone viral on Instagram, and he's even landed Supervisor Rafael Mandelman in one. Maybe he could stick to the podcast bro shtick; that's where the real clout is.





The smell of deli meats and sweat permeated the air at a recent hardcore show in Oakland. OLIVIA PELUSO / GAZETTEER SF

Never Mind the Brisket

Oakland's Stay Gold is as famous for its hardcore shows as it is for its pastrami

By Olivia Peluso

OAKLAND — Stay Gold Deli is known for its large portions, true-to-tradition slaws, and, for fans of hardcore music, spin kicks.

On a recent evening, it was host to a show headlined by Catalyst, a Providence, Rhode Island-based skramz band that dropped its debut album in 2021 and now enjoys Spotify plays in the millions.

Located at the crooked intersection of San Pablo Avenue and 27th Street, Stay Gold has a laid-back disposition, from its dirty white facade to the records that line its wall inside. The floor is sticky, checkered, and linoleum. Outside, there are several large picnic tables under tents and an outdoor pool table. Food and beer are both counter-service, but food service stops once the punk show begins, lest your po'boy be pummelled.

Since opening in 2016, Stay Gold has long earned a reputation as a place for kids to scream and thrash. Show deposits are south of $200 and the venue's only true requirements are that ticketing is enforced, the space is respected, and the bands get paid. This modest barrier to entry has nurtured newcomers and underground acts, especially in punk, emo, and hardcore who have added Stay Gold as a stop on many a West Coast tour.

When I got there, the door was wide open and no one checked my ticket. Inside, a four-piece teenage band occupied the opposite wall, and a few dozen people crowded around them. Their name, I'd later learn, was Eclypso from Santa Rosa. It was their third time playing Stay Gold.

"It's a legendary DIY spot," said Steven Baltodano, 21, who planned the sold-out event.

Baltodano grew up in Antioch and had attended several shows at Stay Gold before promoting the Catalyst one. "They're just like, trying to do good for the scene and not trying to be greedy. And they want us to do the same."

For bands like headliner Catalyst, who are on their first US tour, combination spaces and DIY spots are more common than traditional venues. In fact, some of the most famous hardcore moments of the past 15 years have taken place outside sanctioned concert halls, such Live Without's classic Denny's show in Santa Ana, or, more recently, when Gel and Scowl took over the parking lot of a South Jersey Sonic Drive-In. A couple years ago, Bay Area-based bands False Flag and Surprise Privilege threw a show on a moving BART train. I used to routinely beg for rides to the now-closed Everybody Hits batting cages in Philadelphia, where bands like Soul Glo played before graduating to Coachella. And nearly a decade before their Gen Z dreamboat rebrand and subsequent festival appearances, Turnstile was playing arcades in rural New Jersey.

I wonder if a similar pipeline is in store for Catalyst. For most of my life, the general population hasn't had a palate for the genre's high-pitched screams, blast beats, and breakdowns.

Standing among a diverse group of emoviolence and hardcore punk fans at Stay Gold, it seems like Catalyst is reaching listeners beyond the underground.

The inside quickly filled up and the crowd swelled forward the moment Catalyst got on the mic. Those in the front row were often inches from the musicians' faces, simultaneously screaming along to the music and battling the crowd behind. Two concertgoers on either side of the band tried to hold the PA speakers steady, though like everyone else, they swayed within inches of collapse for most of the set. Crowdsurfers writhed just below the ceiling beams. Some stood on chairs. Off to the side, the bartenders leaned on the counter and nodded along. The mic was periodically handed to especially eager people in the front, many of them younger than me, who yelled "Fuck ICE" over and over again.

These kinds of shows are, by their very nature, chaotic, anti-grammable, and uncomfortable. They're electric and, at times, familial in ways that are impossible to achieve at other venues, from dive-y staples such as the Rickshaw Stop to the hyper-engineered productions at Chase Center.

When some people hear "hardcore," they probably think about getting knocked down. Not me: I think about getting lifted up. There are so many elements of the subculture — straight-edge, anti-fascist, anti-capitalist, queer-positive, and radically nonhierarchical — that have always made these shows some of the safest of my life.

"The thing with DIY venues, especially one like this, is that it's a much more intimate setting for bands and the crowd. Being able to connect with people not just through the music, but through contact and being on the same level as them because at the end of the day we're all just like, the same type of people," said Eclypso vocalist Anthony (we're leaving his last name out because he's a minor).

The strangeness of a hardcore show at a deli was driven home to me when one of the Catalyst members got so drenched in his (and other people's) sweat that he ripped his tank top in half and tossed it offstage onto an unfortunate onlooker, where, two hours earlier, Stay Gold diners were eating Reubens and pork belly.



Save the Mothers Building!

The slow race to rescue the historic landmark at the San Francisco Zoo before its WPA-era art is overtaken by time

By Julie Zigoris



Helen Forbes, left, and Dorothy Puccinelli painting egg tempura murals at the Mothers Building, circa 1934.
FANG FAMILY SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER PHOTOGRAPH ARCHIVE © *The Regents of the University of California, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.*



The Mothers Building SAN FRANCISCO ZOO

Since 1925, the Mothers Building has sat on the grounds of the San Francisco Zoo, its walls adorned by entirely women artists, some of whom worked alongside Diego Rivera. The building served as the zoo's welcome center and gift shop from 1973 through 2002 before it was deemed seismically unsound and not ADA-accessible.

And so, the Mothers Building passed its triple-digit birthday with barely any notice, a sad and strange non-event given that its murals were celebrated in 2015 with the release of 2,000 pigeons.

"I recall it being spectacular," said Nancy Chan, the zoo's current director of communications, who was with the organization when the building was still operational. "A little crowded with merchandise, but so enchanting."

"Here we have really important women artists who did amazing work inside and outside that building," said Supervisor Myrna Melgar, who sponsored the structure's landmark designation in 2022. "And people just don't really know about it."

When it opened in 1925, the Mothers Building was one of the only structures in the West dedicated specifically to the needs of women. The elegant Italianate villa was a place for mothers to nurse their children, rest, and refresh themselves in privacy. (Boys over the age of six were not allowed inside until the 1970s.)

When Supervisor Melgar spearheaded the initiative to landmark the building in March 2022, she timed it to coincide with Women's History Month. Melgar's hope was that the landmarking would prevent the building from being knocked down. Yet as the years have passed without a restoration plan, the structure has become more compromised and the possibility of development more complicated.

"I'm worried that if things aren't done, the building will fail," said Richard Rothman, a retired city worker and Mothers Building advocate. A wooden lattice and metal mesh was added to the structure in 1989 to protect zoogoers from falling plaster. That wooden structure extends into the loggia, partially obscuring the exterior mosaics made by Helen Bruton, with help from her sisters Margaret and Esther.

Bruton is credited with kicking off the modern mosaic movement, an art form well-suited for the New Deal, since projects could be viewed from the outside where the public could enjoy them.

Bruton crafted her two appropriately-themed mosaics "Children and Their Animal Friends" and "St. Francis" on the cheap with seconds from the Solon and Schemmel Tile Company in San Jose. The variations in color were an annoyance for installers needing uniformity, but a boon for Bruton, not only for the price but because they added a depth to St. Francis's cloak with their varying browns, according to Wendy Van Wyck Good in Sisters in Art, her 2021 biography of the Bruton sisters.

> **"Here we have really important women artists who did amazing work inside and outside that building. And people just don't really know about it."**
>
> MYRNA MELGAR,
> *Supervisor who sponsored the structure's landmark designation in 2022*

The Mothers Building is a monument to WPA-era pieces of art, a time period revered in other parts of the city like Coit Tower. The Works Progress Adminstration (WPA), created by the government in 1935, was established to combat unemployment by providing jobs to millions of people suffering in the wake of the Great Depression. The artistic arm of the WPA employed over 10,000 artists and offered women the opportunity to make a living, often for the first time, from their art. Bruton would later work alongside Diego Rivera on Treasure Island at the Golden Gate International Exposition in 1939. And while originally commissioned to paint only the lunettes of the building, Helen Forbes and Dorothy Puccinelli's Noah's Ark-themed egg tempera murals grace the 10-foot wainscot of all four walls.

Despite all the artistry and historical import of the Mothers Building, today it languishes. The wooden front doors are swollen shut, the walls laced with cobwebs, the air inside so musty it's difficult to breathe. The murals on the western wall are slowly disappearing due to water intrusion. Others, however, remain vivid and are worth saving before it's too late.

"Money is always brought up as the primary problem," said Woody LaBounty, president of SF Heritage, who has been following the building's fate for two decades. A 2024 feasibility study by the Architectural Resources Study put the price tag at $13 million for a complete rehabilitation, noting that cost "will continue to increase."

That's a hefty cost, but LaBounty has witnessed bigger projects get funded easily. "I am shocked how much money people have that they're able to put into a building that they love," LaBounty said. "People put $20 million into a building, or $8 million into a little movie theater."

Rothman agreed. "We have all these billionaires in the city," he said. "Why can't we tap them and help fix this building?" LaBounty argued it's less about the money than usefulness: in 2026, there may be no clear purpose for the Mothers Building.

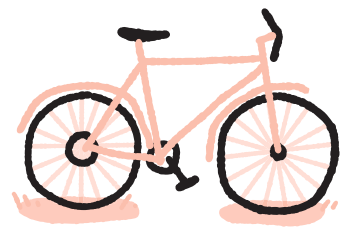
It also doesn't help that the Mothers Building sits in a sort of civic limbo, a victim of competing agencies. The building is owned by the San Francisco Recreation & Park Department, but it stands on land leased by the San Francisco Zoo; meanwhile, the artwork contained within the building is under the governance of the San Francisco Arts Commission, creating a thicket of inter-agency red tape.

Yet everyone — Rothman, LaBounty, Chan, Melgar — agrees there are many purposes the building could serve, especially since the zoo does not have much in the way of indoor event space. "This could be an incredible cultural center for the zoo and for the city where you could have talks, you could have screenings, you could have parties where artists come," LaBounty mused.

Melgar can imagine a rentable venue for weddings and events or a community resource with a separate entrance from the zoo so a ticket is not required for entry. But one thing is clear: "Absolutely the wrong thing to do is just let it decay into nature and have the salt water take it over," she said.

Yet there may be new hope on the horizon.

The Sunset Dunes are thriving; both the San Francisco Zoo and Recreation & Park have new heads coming in and the possibility of fresh eyes and ideas. "There's an opportunity to re-envision what goes on at the zoo," said Melgar. "Including the Mothers Building." ◉



Olive Oilman

Despite climate change, war, and other challenges, Mohammad Ribhi's family has been making olive oil from their grove in Palestine for generations

By Chasity Hale



Mohammad Ribhi stands inside O'Looney's Market, the Haight Street store his father opened over 40 years ago. He now sells his family's olive oil there, harvested and produced in Palestine.

FELIX URIBE JR. FOR GAZETTEER SF / CATCHLIGHT LOCAL



The trees produce olives that are small, and range from light green to deep purple, depending on their ripeness.

HANAN MOHAMMAD

In 2013, Mohammad Ribhi left his home in San Francisco and took over his family's land in Beit Hanina, East Jerusalem, which included 200 ancient olive trees. Born in Palestine, Ribhi, 56, spent most of his life in San Francisco. Over the next five years, he tended to the groves that his ancestors had cultivated for generations.

Ribhi returned to the Lower Haight shortly before the pandemic ground travel to a halt. He couldn't visit Beit Hanina for the olive harvest in 2020 as he'd planned, but he nonetheless shared samples with his neighbors so they could have some "experience of a real olive oil."

Five years later, bottles of Ribhi's Beit Hanina Jerusalem Olive Oil — rich, raw, and unfiltered — are sold in stores like Bi-Rite and served in restaurants like Abu Salim across the city and beyond.

Each fall, the olive trees in the Levant fruit, bringing together family, friends, and volunteers to partake in the age-old Palestinian tradition of harvesting olives. But this year, Ribhi watched from afar a season marred by punishingly dry conditions and escalating violence under Israeli occupation of Palestine. Despite "one of the worst crops ever," his mother, sisters, and children on the ground in Jerusalem still managed to pick and press the olives. Ribhi remains determined to share the fruits of their labor from his base in San Francisco.

When I spoke with Hanan Mohammad, one of Ribhi's sisters, after the first rain of the season in late September marked the start of the harvest, her excitement was palpable. Mohammad, 46, lives in East Jerusalem with her three sons and her husband, an ironworker. They have their own acres of olive trees, whose oil they sell to her brother. They also assist their elderly mother with her land, although help is in no short supply.

"Everywhere you look, there's hundreds of people," Mohammad told me over the phone. While handpicking olives is hard work, she explained, it's also a celebration. During the day, the smells of *maqluba* (layers of meat, rice, and veggies) and *galayet bandora* (fried tomatoes) waft up through the trees, and children's laughter echoes through the groves. There are "no phones, no social media," Mohammad said. It's a "time to get to know each other better." The joyous occasion culminates in a bonfire, fueled by pruned branches.

The olive harvest is many things: a source of financial survival for many Palestinians, a symbol of resilience and rootedness in the land, and, sometimes, respite from the unrelenting warfare of recent years. "There's something about being under those huge olive trees. It makes you feel like you're in a whole different world," said Mohammad. "That there's no wars, there's no problems, that you're living in a life that doesn't exist."

From October to November, the harvesters rise before dawn, picking olives from 5 a.m. to 7 p.m., long after sunset. When he's there, Ribhi prefers to handpick the olives so as not to harm the trees, but he sometimes uses machinery with "little fingers" to safely reach their crowns.

"It's like milking a cow," Ribhi said, explaining how you simply grab a branch heavy with fruit and "just pull it down." Sometimes the "olive trees will slap you," he cautioned. "That has happened to me so many times."

"It's a traditional thing," he conceded, noting that some of the younger generations would rather use machines to get the job done in a few hours as opposed to a whole day by hand.

There's one olive tree that, from the thickness of its twisted trunk and stories passed down through generations, is believed to be around 2,500 years old. It belonged to Ribhi's late maternal grandmother whose trees are, to this day, some of the best kept in all of East Jerusalem, according to him.

The oil business has always led Ribhi back to his ancestral home, even as he has spent most of his life in San Francisco. It was 1977, around the time that his grandfather and great-uncle closed the family's nearly 40-year-old olive mill, that Ribhi's parents moved him and his siblings to California. His father, a gifted tile setter, was called to work in the city where some of Ribhi's aunts and uncles on his mom's side already lived.

From the time that he was eight years old, Ribhi — the only boy of ten children — has been here with visits back to Jerusalem every other year in the summer or fall for months at a time. After studying at City College, he ran a mobile auto repair service for 25 years, mostly working on Ford Mustangs. When his grandfather passed away in 1993, he bequeathed to his son, Ribhi's father, his acres of land.

His father chose not to move back to Jerusalem, but maintained the land for 20 years with the help of cousins living in Beit Hanina. Despite their efforts, the orchards fell into neglect, prompting Ribhi, a father of six, to take up the mantle of farmer in the late 2010s.

While olive oil from the family's orchards was already being sold in Jerusalem and elsewhere in the region, Ribhi wanted to bring it to the States. He started with tiny 8.5-ounce bottles at the turn of the decade; today they sell bottles four times that size, plus Middle Eastern spices like sumac and za'atar, to about 20 retailers around the Bay and online.





Above: Mohammad Ribhi as a young man. Right: A man works in the olive harvest in Beit Hanina, East Jerusalem.

HANAN MOHAMMAD, MOHAMMAD RIBHI

Unlike some brands of olive oil found in supermarkets that may contain different varieties of olives from various countries, Beit Hanina is single sourced to one family's centuries-old Rumi trees. The Rumi, also known as the Souri tree, is a variety commonly cultivated in Palestine and dating back to Roman times. Its olives are small, and range from light green to deep purple, depending on their ripeness.

The trees have "on" and "off" years, depending on how much fruit they bear, Ribhi explained. This year was an off year. In a good harvest, Ribhi would produce between around 400 to 500 gallons of olive oil from his groves. This time around, he made less than half of the low end of that range, in part due to extreme heat and a lack of rain, issues exacerbated by climate change, which studies show will significantly impact olive tree growth and olive oil production in the Mediterranean basin.

While olive trees are drought-resistant, each needs about five gallons of water a week. Empty wells and restrictions on water resources make nourishing the trees difficult. The Israeli government controls the water infrastructure, which flows to the settlements — illegal under international law — but not to Beit Hanina.

On top of the lack of water, "it's hard to get around," Ribhi said. Seven acres of his land is cut off by a wall, which fragments the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. Ribhi's family must get a permit from the Israeli military to access that land once a year. "They've denied all the requests, so we weren't able to get to it this year," he explained.

This year's harvest has also been plagued by a surge in Israeli settler violence, with more than 126 attacks and thousands of trees vandalized in Palestinian towns and villages, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. All this comes at a devastating cost to Palestinian farmers, many of whom rely on olive trees for their livelihoods.

While the olives typically take at least a month to harvest, Ribhi's crew in Beit Hanina started early, fearful of the violence and theft that has struck other Palestinian towns. They completed the harvest in four days because of the low yield and poor weather conditions. In spite of the many factors outside of their control, a batch of Beit Hanina Olive Oil is en route to San Francisco.

Because of when it's harvested and how it's extracted, Beit Hanina Olive oil is thick, green, and slightly sharp to taste. As soon as they're harvested, bags and crates brimming with olives are sent to the mill where they're cleaned and immediately cold pressed. It takes a few hours for them to be ground into a pulpy paste and malaxed, releasing the oil, which is then separated from the solid material and transferred into metal containers and bottles to be sold.

There's one olive tree that, from the thickness of its twisted trunk and stories passed down through generations, is believed to be around 2,500 years old.

You can cook with it, but due to its relatively low smoke point compared to an avocado or grapeseed oil, Ribhi says it's better for garnishing dishes like hummus — advice echoed by Beit Hanina Olive Oil's biggest local buyer, the San Francisco-based grocery mini chain Bi-Rite.

In an email, Raph Mogannam, Bi-Rite Market's category manager, praised Beit Hanina Olive Oil's "balanced flavors" and "rich profile with notes of wild herbs that lead the way to a peppery finish." He recommends drizzling it over Mediterranean appetizers such as labneh and grilled halloumi, using it to finish grilled meats, or topping off soups and grilled vegetables.

Extra virgin olive oil like this has other non-culinary uses as well. Ribhi's mother uses it on her hair; some people use it to soothe muscle aches. You can even drink it, as Ribhi's grandmother did (an eight-ounce glass each day, Ribhi recalled), or as he does now, as a shot in the morning and sometimes before bed.

Ribhi is hopeful for a better crop next year. His family's resilient olive trees, the sort the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Dawish called "a friendly sister of eternity," will continue to connect his family in San Francisco and Palestine. "The olives that we pick mean a lot to our families and our culture," Mohammad said. "The trees are like a part of us."

San Francisco's 911 dispatchers are being asked to work with antiquated equipment, crazy hours, lack of mental health breaks, and alongside new trainees who aren't prepared



Dial D for dysfunction

By Eddie Kim

"Jamie" is one of San Francisco's most experienced 911 emergency dispatchers, and she has seen many evolutions in the department during her time there. Nothing has made her want to speak out, however, as much as the struggles in staffing and competence she has witnessed in the last several years.

Those struggles are endangering lives, said Jamie, who, like other dispatchers, asked that she not be named for fear of professional repercussions.

She recalled one newly trained dispatcher who, in the span of a single week, made two potentially fatal errors. In the first, he delayed a "not breathing/no pulse" dispatch by several minutes due to confusion, instead of immediately triggering a medical response within 60 seconds and then gathering more information. A few days later, he allegedly fumbled another crucial incident: A call from a 10-year-old for his unconscious mother.

The new dispatcher wasn't sure of how to route the call, and asked a supervisor for assistance. Instead of sending EMTs immediately, the supervisor allegedly told the dispatcher to treat it as an "unknown" medical call and send a street crisis team, sans medics. By the time they realized a medic was needed, about seven minutes had passed — an eternity in dispatch, Jamie said. (Other dispatchers who spoke to *Gazetteer SF* corroborated the details of both incidents.)

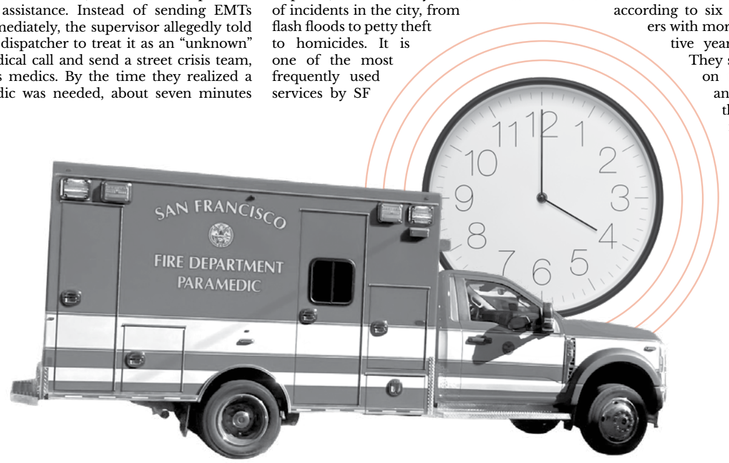
Most frustrating for Jamie and others, however, was the lack of accountability afterward. "They weren't pulled off the phones or put into retraining. They didn't get more monitoring. You should be off the phones if you messed up that big, twice in one week," she said. "None of that happened, even though the [new dispatcher] was still in a probationary period."

Talk to the city's veteran dispatchers, and all of them have similar stories. They say the problem isn't individual, but systemic: Rampant burnout in the dispatch office, poorly trained colleagues, and long-standing mismanagement have shredded morale and strained capacity over several years.

The city Department of Emergency Management, which operates the 911 center, oversees planning, preparation, response, and recovery for all kinds of incidents in the city, from flash floods to petty theft to homicides. It is one of the most frequently used services by SF residents; the DEM oversees 162 dispatchers, including 26 who are currently working while in training and not fully "released." The department's budget for the 2025-26 fiscal year is $161.6 million

"I've been working 12-hour days since I started. I do 14-hour days right now, four days a week. And they're asking more from us."

SAN FRANCISCO 911
EMERGENCY DISPATCHER



In a statement to *Gazetteer*, the department suggested that it is emerging from pandemic-era staffing shortages stronger than ever. But glaring systemic issues continue to hurt the dispatch office, according to six veteran dispatchers with more than 100 collective years of experience. They spoke to *Gazetteer* on the condition of anonymity because they are not authorized to speak to the media.

Their descriptions paint a picture of a crucial department in disarray, with dispatchers struggling with exhaustion, grossly outdated equipment, inconsistent enforcement, and a deep-seated feeling that DEM's leaders, Executive Director Mary Ellen Carroll and Deputy Director Robert Smuts, do not care about the welfare of rank-and-file dispatchers.

"The feeling in the air is that we basically have a vote of no confidence in management," said "Roger," a dispatcher who has been in the SF office for decades.

DEM declined *Gazetteer*'s request to sit in at the dispatch office and to speak with Carroll and Smuts for this article.

The cumulative impact of these problems, dispatchers say, is eroding public safety while wasting city dollars. Those who spoke for this story agreed that the problems they see can and will put citizens and first responders at risk of critical delays or other, potentially fatal mistakes.

"I've been trying to talk to anybody who will listen for the past 10 years, trying to let them know that people are dying because of negligence there," Jamie said. "People are miserable here."

"The public safety element has not improved, despite what the department says about improved hiring," added "Mandy," who has trained new dispatch recruits in addition to her job taking calls.

As Mandy puts it, the issue for dispatchers "isn't that we're negligent or don't care." It's that an extensive history of poor management, even since before the pandemic, has created a system that fails to consistently address, let alone improve, the performance of dispatchers, their mental health, and the lack of experience from supervisors.

One problem of this system is the chronic struggle for dispatchers to get time off, be it for vacation or bereavement, coupled with a major push for dispatchers to take on overtime in the last several years.

The need for overtime grew substantially as hiring plummeted amid covid lockdowns, but even before then, existing dispatchers were pushed to pick up extra shifts or face mandatory, manager-assigned overtime without any choice in scheduling. The dispatchers in this story acknowledged that they are getting paid well, but they also stressed that the pay doesn't blunt the negative effects of not being able to properly rest.

"I've been working 12-hour days since I started. I do 14-hour days right now, four days a week. And they're asking more from us," Roger said. "Dispatchers are going to leave. Or they'll just call in sick. Why would they care? They're burned out, and you can't get time off. So it throws our staffing numbers off. Management is constantly scrambling for overtime."

"It's absolutely mind-boggling. This is San Francisco. We have the biggest tech companies in the world. And somehow we're on pen and paper for schedules."

SAN FRANCISCO 911 EMERGENCY DISPATCHER

While dispatchers do technically have discretionary time off, Mandy told *Gazetteer* that it "only exists on paper."

"You will never get approval for it," she said. Mandy also described an instance last year when management allegedly made it difficult for her coworker and dispatchers close to him to attend his mother's funeral.

"We have a job where our mental health is so important, but we can't take our choice of a day off?" she said. "I joke with some coworkers that I've been treated better in a retail gig."

The dispatchers also criticized DEM's decision last year to kill compensatory time off, in which workers trade overtime wages for days off. The practice was "standard for decades," Jamie said, and was a helpful workaround for dispatchers, especially those who need to use the unpaid time off provided to them by the Family and Medical Leave Act or workman's comp, but want to "catch up" with overtime later.

In an emailed response to *Gazetteer*'s questions, DEM stated that "mandatory overtime is down about 75 percent" and that the dispatch office, for the first time since 2021, met the state standard for answering 90% of emergency calls within 15 seconds. Spokesperson Jackie Thornhill said compensatory time off was eliminated because it "creates operational challenges" and that "Division of Emergency Communications leadership consistently work to grant as many discretionary days off as possible."

Some dispatchers hope the improvement in staffing could make it easier to take time off. Others aren't buying it. "I consider it smoke and mirrors. We're going to run into issues again when we lose staff during the year," Roger said.

In addition to the burnout, the dispatchers in this story all said that inconsistent standards with recruiting, hiring, and training has led to a crisis of competency, made worse by a lack of intervention and accountability from dispatch supervisors and their managers.

Hirees are paid full salary (which starts at about $110,000 a year) when they begin training, which includes six weeks of classroom work, three months of on-the-job phone training, two to three months of solo call-answering, and three more months for police radio training.

After completing training, new dispatchers are put on a six-month probationary period. According to DEM, eight hires from its September 2024 class passed training and have stayed as dispatchers. Of the three classes in 2025, 31 hires remain in training currently. The department says the "recent low" in total dispatchers, including those in training, was 131 staffers in 2023.

Even with a rise in hiring, Roger remains very concerned about what he calls the "lowered standards" for dispatchers-in-training and the total cost of putting someone through training with a full salary, which he estimates is in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. Fellow veterans on the dispatch floor "know right off the bat who we ain't going to hire," Roger said, and the tension has only grown with DEM's recent recruiting push to improve its staffing numbers.



"With civil service rules, you have to be fair and give people an equal chance, but does management want to just waste money?" Roger said. "I think the level of candidates has dropped, and that's because of recruiting as much as it is the candidate or training. It's a let's-grab-anybody mentality."

"Norah," a fellow senior dispatcher, believes the same thing.

"They're hiring anyone with a pulse," she said. "There's a lot of intelligence that left the building already because they were not treating people well."

In one example from 2025, a dispatch trainer was working with a new recruit who had a history of failing training tasks. The recruit racked up multiple "remedial extensions" to fix his errors, and his trainer wrote a detailed review that explicitly stated the recruit should not be "released" as a full-time dispatcher because he is incapable of doing the job.

That feedback was ignored, to the department's detriment, according to several veteran dispatchers. An inability to handle calls solo is a problem these dispatchers have noticed with a dozen other new hires, they said.

Perhaps the worst blow comes when a candidate enters SF's dispatch academy, receives training and full salary, and then leaves for other agencies around the Bay Area and beyond, said "Leslie," another dispatcher with decades on the job.

"Good talent is leaving because they're thinking, 'Hey, this is supposed to be a stable, good job.' But the only good thing is the pay. It's not even like the bad apples are washing out. It's all levels of talent, including high performers," Leslie said.

The dispatchers *Gazetteer* interviewed unanimously pointed to DEM leadership as the problem on this front, especially because of a lax environment where some mistakes, like showing up a few minutes late to the office, are written up for poor performance, while serious mistakes, like routing a critical call incorrectly, are glossed over. Some complain that supervisors and especially managers, the latter who report directly to Carroll and Smuts, often have less experience taking calls than rank-and-file dispatchers yet hold significantly more power to make decisions on training and accountability.

Leslie summed it up: "They're trying to hurry and get people in and keep them. It's quantity, not quality."

Worsening everything is a general lack of proper equipment and communication, which erodes the ability to respond swiftly and effectively to emergencies, dispatchers say. Norah, Jamie, and others claimed that the office runs on extremely poor, outdated technology and equipment that is actively failing. One dispatcher noted that the phones and "Computer Aided Dispatch" system are so dodgy that sometimes they "cannot hear police radio calls," which could have fatal consequences.

"It's absolutely mind-boggling. This is San Francisco. We have the biggest tech companies in the world. And somehow we're on pen and paper for schedules. And they tell me we have no software that can do it right," Roger said.

And when new technology does get introduced into the dispatch system, it's often senior dispatchers who are left flying in the dark, trying to figure out how to use it. Two dispatchers specifically noted that the staff was left in the dark about new license-plate-reading technology to track a criminal incident. Norah said it took "six or seven months" from initial implementation for dispatchers to receive documentation on how to handle calls that use digital technology like Flock's LPR cameras and Elon Musk's Starlink satellites.

"Nobody warned us about using it. We don't communicate properly with the police department. The supervisors don't know what's going on half the time," Norah said.

Her impression is that, in the last few years, the people who are most qualified and capable have been forced to contend with a toxic work environment that encourages bad habits. Those who speak up get a target on their back, Norah claimed — a sentiment also held by others interviewed for this story. They noted that a number of senior dispatchers are planning to leave in coming years.

"With a lot of OG dispatchers retiring or leaving from burnout, you're going to see officer and firefighter and residents' lives in danger if we don't change how dispatch runs," Jamie said.

The dispatchers interviewed by *Gazetteer* unanimously agreed that DEM director Carroll and deputy director Smuts have been repeatedly informed of these concerns. They also believe the duo has failed to address them.

Cliqueish behavior, a lack of accountability, and varying levels of effort — especially from managers — have worn morale to a new low, said "Paul," a veteran dispatcher who has trained new hires in the past. Paul believes that many "supervisors do not do their jobs" other than to make the employee schedule, and he observed a growing culture of "quiet quitting" from fellow employees — and himself.

"I'm not proud to say this, but I have to purposefully work slower. I'm not happy to do it. I do it because... well, why am I answering four phone calls while my coworker is doing just one? Why isn't anyone addressing that?"



Brewster Kahle stands in the Great Room at Internet Archive headquarters on Funston Avenue in San Francisco.
INTERNET ARCHIVE

Memory Palace

In a time when the powerful want to erase the past, the Internet Archive refuses to forget

By Sofi Cisneros

On a cool October evening, Brewster Kahle was dancing in the streets.

Eyes closed, arms flailing about, Kahle stomped and twirled to a Traveling Wilburys cover band as hundreds of people danced, mingled, and snagged free ice cream bars outside the Parthenonic building that houses the Internet Archive, the digital library Kahle founded in 1996. A banner hung above the party, trumpeting an astonishing feat that was probably out of date by the time it was printed: "Web Pages Archived: 1,000,000,000,000."

One trillion. It's a number that boggles the mind, but then, so does the Internet Archive itself. With its lofty goal of collecting the world's digital information, it could not be more essential or more out of sync with a moment in which history is being actively erased. Everything is in the Archive, from long-out-of-print books to TV specials ripped from old VHS tapes to more Grateful Dead concert recordings than any one person could listen to. And all of it is offered for free: another way in which Kahle's site seems to be an artifact of a different time and a different internet.

"We've given people the opportunity to make their voices heard, to write things down, to go and share them to the globe," Kahle told the audience sitting in old church pews during the party. "There was this dream of an internet that was made for us, by us, to be able to make us better people."

But not everyone has shared that dream.

In September, the Internet Archive finally put an end to a high-profile legal battle that threatened its very existence. In 2020, publishers Hachette, HarperCollins, Wiley, and Penguin Random House sued the Internet Archive, alleging the site had violated copyright laws that protected the printed books the site had been digitally sharing during the pandemic.

On Aug. 11, 2023, a US district court ruled in favor of the publishers, finding that the Internet Archive's digital library violated US copyright law. The case was finalized in 2024, resulting in the removal of over 500,000 books from the site.

Following the 2023 ruling, the same lawyers sued the Internet Archive once more, this time on behalf of Universal Music Group, over the site's initiative to digitize over 400,000 fragile 78 rpm records from the early 20th century. Both parties in *UMG Recordings, Inc. v. Internet Archive* reached a settlement in San Francisco federal court in 2025.

"These aren't mom-and-pop publishers. These are massive, multinational media conglomerates," Kahle told *Gazetteer SF* over Zoom after the event. "These licensing things from publishers are dreadful. They're in the process of structurally destroying the library system. It's happening now."

These lawsuits came at a time when public access to information feels increasingly threatened, whether by government agencies cutting public media funding, calls by (sometimes astroturfed) parents' organizations for schools and libraries to censor books, or tech companies putting their thumbs on the scale to decide what news and information ought to be widely consumed. There's never been a more important time for the Internet Archive and its digitized library of one trillion-plus archived webpages to serve as a bulwark against censorship and a seed bank for the world's information.

"There's a long tradition of libraries being shut down and destroyed by the powerful. It used to be king and church; now it's corporations and governments," Kahle said. "The good news is, we're still here."

The Internet Archive celebrated another milestone last year: becoming a federal depository library, as designated by California Senator Alex Padilla in July. The designation established a partnership with the US Government Publishing Office, allowing the public free access to published government files and significantly expanding the Archive's "Democracy's Library" compendium of documents and research from domestic and foreign governments.

This includes tens of thousands of federal webpages either taken down or heavily modified after President Donald Trump took office for his second term. While webpages detailing critical information on gender identity, climate change, diversity, and historical information about slavery are no longer accessible on government websites, their old URLs can easily be located on the Internet Archive. While the administration would like us to forget, the Internet Archive remembers.

> **"There's a long tradition of libraries being shut down and destroyed by the powerful. It used to be king and church; now it's corporations and governments."**
>
> BREWSTER KAHLE

Meanwhile, as the Trump administration attempts to bulldoze history's digital footprint, physical libraries are being hollowed out. In March 2025, the administration issued an executive order to eliminate the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the federal agency that funds state libraries and museums. Legal challenges have stalled the dismantling process, but litigation is ongoing. Libraries across the country wait with bated breath as the attack on public knowledge still looms large.

Yet even as Washington tightens its grip, librarians, archivists and technologists continue to partner with the Internet Archive through Archive-It, a program that helps more than 1,300 libraries, archives, and museums across 40 countries protect their digital memory.

Through Archive-It and its Community Webs program, the Internet Archive has partnered with the San Francisco Public Library since 2007, safeguarding the city's history with scans of everything from activist Barbara M. Cameron's 1980 Gay Freedom Day speech to mid-20th-century Chinese-English publication ***East/West*** to dozens of issues of the defunct SF newspaper ***The Argonaut*** from the late 1800s and early 1900s.

"The partnership with Internet Archive has greatly enhanced access to archival collections and historical photographs that would not otherwise be available for the community," SFPL city librarian Michael Lambert told me. "I'm glad that San Francisco can be a beacon and a model for everybody else in the industry."

Against all odds — hundreds of millions of dollars in lawsuits, a 2024 data breach, and a federal government that has declared war on history — the Internet Archive's preservation of history is its greatest act of resistance. A singular webpage from Democracy's Library, for example, can arm generations to come with critical information about the Jan. 6 capitol attack or the end of each presidential term since 2008. The ability to access memory is a natural defense against the forces determined to forget.

"Archives in general have a foundational role in creating a past for society, so they have a vital political role today," said Lisa Gitelman, a media and culture professor at New York University and the author of *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture*. "One of the great things about Archive.org is that it has this ethos of public access which is egalitarian down to its bones. So for them to create the Wayback Machine was just phenomenal, revolutionary."

Back at the Archive's one-trillion party, attendees were greeted by hundreds of three-foot terracotta statues around the headquarter's Great Room, each representing an employee who had worked there for at least three years. A soft buzz hummed from a wall of servers in the back. Blue dots rapidly flickered on its surface, signaling that someone was either downloading or uploading media onto the site.

One by one, guest speakers including State Sen. Scott Wiener, NPR CEO and president Katherine Maher, and representatives from Wikipedia, BBC News, and Stanford took to the stage or spoke via video. Each congratulated the Internet Archive on its milestone or shared their experiences using the digital library.

At one point, the audience erupted in laughter as Annie Rauwerda, owner of the popular Depths of Wikipedia Instagram account, gave an energetic presentation on all her strange findings on the internet over the years. "I think bread should be photographed using radial motion blur more often!" she exclaimed into the microphone while stock images of bread loaves with the effect flew across the screen.

Others spoke to the site's importance during a moment when public media is being slashed and burned. "These tools are so critical. They help us journalists fact-check claims, see how companies and governments may have selectively edited online materials, or even deleted statements or social media posts that they'd rather the public didn't see," said BBC News reporter Lily Jamali. "For a job that involves so much research, these tools are absolutely fundamental."

Eventually, the party spilled out onto Clement Street again for more dancing. "I mean, why did we come to San Francisco originally if not to dance in the streets?" Kahle asked me later. "We have so many people showing really what human nature is good for. I think that's great."

SAURON WORE KHAKIS

No one will explain why Sam Altman's crypto company installed a biometric data-collection device inside the Marina Gap store

By Cydney Hayes

When the Gap's outpost in the Marina reopened after renovations last November, Mayor Daniel Lurie did what Mayor Daniel Lurie does best: He christened the San Francisco-based apparel retailer his favorite label — "back" — and posted a perfunctory, upbeat interview with Richard Dickson, the CEO of Gap Inc., who raved about the store's "new look and new feel and new energy."

Local news outlets offered a bit of insight: ***The San Francisco Chronicle*** lauded the store's revamped "minimalist, modern design" and new section dedicated to vinyl records; ***7x7*** called the update "very 'future is now.'"

In all the press surrounding this Gap reopening, one thing went entirely unmentioned. Mounted on a divider between the shelves of fleece hoodies and the ramp to the children's section is a lone white globe.

About the size of a bowling ball, it's installed on a vertical track in the wall and features a glowing orange eye.

It is an Orb, the biometric data-collection tool created by World, Sam Altman's ominously named cryptocurrency and "human verification" company.

On its website, World calls itself "the real human network" and insists that its suite of tools — a cryptocurrency called Worldcoin, a digital WorldID, and a profile on World App — will allow humans to be authenticated as, well, humans.

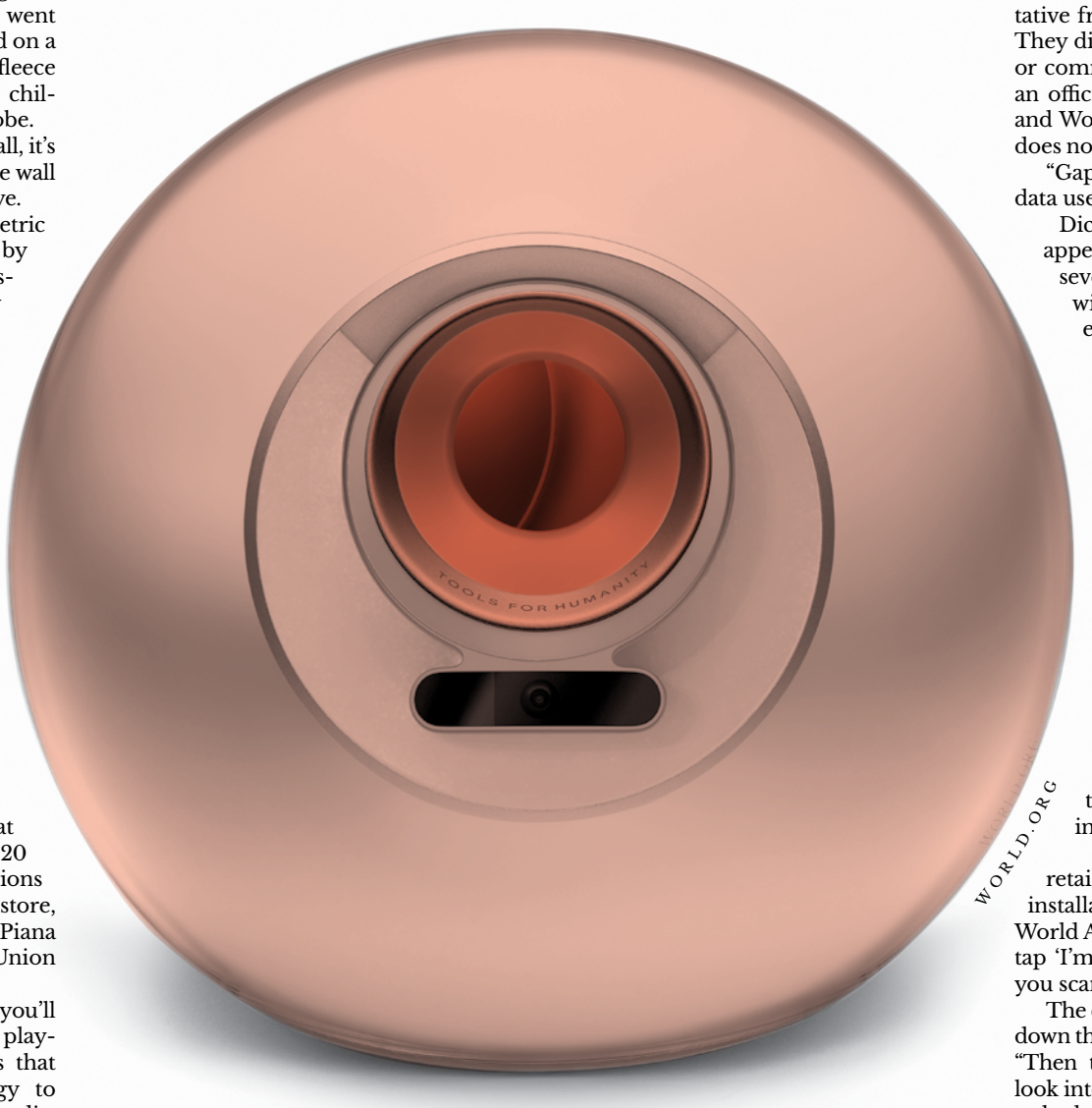
To enter the World Network, all one must do is find an Orb in the physical world and let its camera-eye snap a photo of one's eyes and face.

According to World's website, Orbs are stationed in at least 1,500 locations in at least 20 countries. One of those locations is the San Francisco flagship store, a spare space between Loro Piana and Macy's at 281 Geary St. in Union Square.

Should you choose to visit, you'll find two large televisions playing World promotional videos that explain World's grand strategy to facilitate e-commerce, social media, and voting. The main attraction of the room is a circular space that looks an awful lot like a cage, ambiently illuminated from within, with several Orbs attached to wooden slats.

When I visited, the two workers manning the store also told me they were not authorized to speak with the media and directed me to the World website for more information.

The two lone customers I saw enter the store that afternoon were both dressed shabbily, carrying several bags, and walking slightly slumped over. Assisted by the sales associates, they each entered the cage, stood in front of an Orb for a few moments, then left. Separately, they both told me they'd come in to collect the $50 crypto reward World offers to people who let the Orb photograph their face.





The biometric collection device, called an Orb, produced by Sam Altman's crypto project World, awaits customers inside the Marina District Gap store.

CYDNEY HAYES / GAZETTEER SF

Learning Gap was partnered with a Sam Altman-founded cryptocurrency project was strange: What does denim have to do with crypto? It became even stranger when I looked online to find that Gap does not seem to have acknowledged the partnership publicly. On their corporate news blog, the company has announced partnerships with other companies, including DoorDash, and previewed its AI styling tools, but nowhere is there a mention of World. World's corporate blog has also not mentioned the collaboration.

"The Orb is in our store to spark conversation and interest… The device is a nod to the city's central role in the AI industry," a representative from Gap told me over email. They did not want to use their name or comment on whether or not it is an official partnership between Gap and World but clarified that the Orb does not generate revenue from Gap.

"Gap does not have any access to data used by the Orb," I was told.

Dickson, the Gap Inc. CEO, appears to be a collaborator on several mysterious initiatives with other prominent tech executives and politicians in the city. Earlier in February, the ***San Francisco Standard*** named Dickson in the group of prominent tech executives working on Lurie's secretive SF branding project, codenamed "SF Identity." That group also includes former Apple designer Jony Ive, whose AI hardware startup formerly known as io was acquired by OpenAI last May.

Maybe that explains how an Orb came to be mounted in the Marina Gap. A visit to the store revealed a bit more information — but just barely.

"It's really easy," a World retail consultant sitting near the installation told me, opening the World App on their iPhone. "You just tap 'I'm with an Orb now,' and then you scan this QR on the Orb."

The consultant dragged the sphere down the track until it was at eye level. "Then the app will prompt you to look into the camera — and you want to look a little upwards, so your eyes are as wide as possible — and once it takes your picture, it turns it into code that verifies you as a human."

I tried several times to reword my question. Why was there an Orb in the Gap? Is there an incentive, like a discount on jeans? Why would a person interrupt their shopping experience to scan — sorry, photograph — their eyes?

"I think we're getting too far into the 'Gap' of it all," the consultant responded.

On my way out of the store, I asked the cheerful sales associate behind the counter in the children's section for their take on the Orb.

"People are super curious about it. They go up, do the scan. I've done it," he said.

"Why does Gap have a partnership with World?" I asked.

"That's a good question!" he said.

Food&Drink

A VERY GOOD EGG

By Omar Mamoon

George Dingle opened his modern British gastropub Dingles Public House with his life and business partner Anissa last November at 333 Fulton St. in the former location of Pläj in Hayes Valley. "We're just trying to do things that are classic British dishes but to the best of our ability," he says.

I recommend starting your meal with a Scotch Egg, the classic deep-fried sausage-wrapped hard-boiled egg snack which confusingly is not from Scotland and might even have Indian origins dating back to when British soldiers brought the dish home from their colonial misadventures.

For his Scotch egg, Dingle makes the sausage in house, grinding pork shoulder and bacon together and seasoning the mix with paprika, mace, garlic, thyme, and rosemary.

He then steams eggs for exactly seven minutes before shocking them in an ice bath to prevent overcooking. This also keeps the yolks nice and runny.

The eggs are then peeled, wrapped in sausage meat, breaded in panko, then deep fried until golden brown and crispy. They're finished in the oven so the meat cooks through properly.

Served split in half with a finish of flakey smoked Maldon sea salt, the eggs are plated over an aioli fortified with two types of mustards: whole grain, and (naturally) English.

Dingle sells 40 of the Scotch eggs per day. I think they pair well with Guinness, which Dingle has on draught, poured with a creamy layer of head that sticks to your lips after a sip.

The other classic I really love at Dingles are the fish and chips, made from whole ling cod that Dingle quickly brines before butchering into filets. The cuts are then coated in a beer batter (that happens to be gluten free) before being fried until golden brown and delicious.

It's his chips that get me, though: they're thrice cooked, creamy on the inside, and shatteringly crispy on the outside.

Dingle sources premium chipperbeck potatoes, peels, hand-cuts, and soaks them in water overnight to remove the starch and maintain their color. Then they're steamed, tossed together to get craggy edges, and chilled down. They're blanched to cook through, chilled down again, then deep-fried at a higher temperature to order and served with house made tartare and curry sauce.

In other words, they're proper.

"We're not trying to reinvent the wheel," Dingle says. "When something is this good, you don't need to."



A perfectly runny Scotch Egg from Dingles Public House dangles over a plate, just waiting to be consumed.

DINGLES PUBLIC HOUSE

Drinking Companion: Specs'

By Olivia Peluso

Specs' Twelve Adler Museum Cafe is, in every way except for the massive petrified walrus penis mounted to the wall, a normal bar. Much like the home of a granny whose decor favors personal history above haute, this nearly 60-year-old watering hole in North Beach is inviting, cozy, and a little musty. Specs' doesn't care what you think.

The walls of Specs' narrow room are lined with curio cabinets of trinkets, pro-union memorabilia, trophies of the sea, posters, pencil sketches made on cocktail napkins, and assorted *rara avises*. Hundreds of postcards mailed to Specs' over the years sit in scattered boxes, ready to spark conversation at the bar or in one of its tatty cushioned wooden booths.

Your options behind the bar are run-of-the-mill at best, but the prices are fair enough. Order a mixed drink if you please, but don't expect the bartender to shake it. You can see plenty of that on the other side of the wall at Garden of Eden.

Hungry drinkers are offered just two menu options: bottomless crackers and a slice of gouda from a wheel fit for an Escalade. Unlike at McSorley's Old Ale House in New York, there are no raw onions.

The bar, in its current form, was opened in 1968 by a thick-lensed sheet metal worker. Richard Simmons, aka Specs, had arrived in San Francisco as a merchant marine in 1951 by way of Massachusetts. His story is as North Beach as it gets: Simmons met his wife, Sonia, at Vesuvio just across Columbus Avenue, and settled in a flat above City Lights, where he'd live for the rest of his life. Simmons' employees were widely considered among the most loyal and long-standing bartenders in San Francisco thanks to Specs' above-average pay and attention to workers' rights. The staff has been unionized since day one, and they receive retirement and health benefits.

Known as no-nonsense and neighborly, Simmons famously hosted birthday and anniversary parties complete with free oyster-packed feasts, supplemented to, potluck style, by patrons. Anyone and everyone, even those 86'ed, were welcome.

He was also known for his humor. Business cards that sat in stacks on the bar were apparently gendered: The one for women said "Madam, the gentlemen prefer to sulk in silence," and the one for men read "Sir, the lady is not interested in your company."

Several paint jobs below its surface is a deeper history of 12 Adler Lane. It once served as a Prohibition speakeasy, then a social and political club for Alaska fishermen, and eventually, a servicemen's bar. After the second war, it became a bohemian hangout.

Then came Tommy's Place, the sawdust-coated club owned by SF's first lesbian bar owner, Tommy Vasu. With her bar, Vasu joined the wave of queer nightlife that thrived in North Beach in the 1940s and '50s. Vasu was known for her suits, her Sinatra-like swagger, and her blond girlfriends: *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist Herb Caen described her as a "gentleman among ladies."

Despite the tenuous acceptance of openly queer establishments in San Francisco, Vasu was targeted in a crackdown on queer bars amid the growing moral panic of the McCarthy era. The bar was eventually raided, and after authorities discovered heroin that many believe to be a police plant, they forced it to close.

A magnet for the bohemian, the traveled, the artistic, the blue-collar, the fringe, and most importantly, the friendly, Specs' attracts a consistently diverse and interesting crowd.

Simmons's daughter Elly runs the bar, keeping libations flowing and a busy calendar of live music, readings, and meetups for thinkers, feelers, and, of course, drinkers.



Specs' Twelve Adler Museum Cafe

GO IF YOU LIKE
John McPhee, rolled-up sleeves, labor rights

ASK FOR
A draft Modelo

LEAVE
Your mouth shut if you can't speak without saying AI, API, KPI, ROI, IPO, or SaaS

AVOID IF YOU WANT
To hear any song released this century

Slop.

It's what's for dinner.

By Cydney Hayes and Olivia Peluso

In the window of Simmer & Steamer on at 222 Battery St., there are images of rice bowls cartoonish enough for a Nintendo game. Sesame seeds sit evenly and sparsely atop a perfect white sphere that could, under a certain light, resemble an egg. Seaweed is shredded into orderly, textureless rectangular strips. Fried onion flakes look like tan Play-Doh pushed through an extruder.

Simmer & Steamer isn't the only restaurant in San Francisco whose menu tumbles into the uncanny valley. AI-generated photos are taking over delivery listings and appearing in printed menus across the city. These days, to scroll delivery apps or peruse IRL menus is to whet your appetite with a barrage of high-gloss gustatory simulacra. As these images spread, it raises the same question that accompanies almost every new application of AI: Who wants this?

"I think the dining public accepts some degree of dissonance between what they see in a photo and what they're going to get on their plate, you know?" said San Francisco food photographer Eric Wolfinger. "That's why I have a career, because I make food look really delicious."

But AI-generated images of food can also contain flaws: absent texture, blurring, illogical shadows and lighting, or simply nonexistent ingredients.

Leah Clapper, a marketing lead at AI "agent" startup Rox, thinks AI can produce higher quality photos on tight timelines. During Tech Week this past September, she was in charge of a smoothie and waffle truck pop-up Rox hosted on Market Street. The chef contracted to make the smoothies took photos for Rox to plaster on the side of the food truck, but Clapper felt they were subpar.

"I was like, AI can make this look better," Clapper told *Gazetteer*.

What looks "better" is subjective, but certainly, they looked like AI: Textureless, cartoonish, too-perfect. The images of the different smoothie flavors were identical, except for the color. The image of the waffle was flawlessly round and looked more like a pocked hockey puck than a warm Belgian waffle.

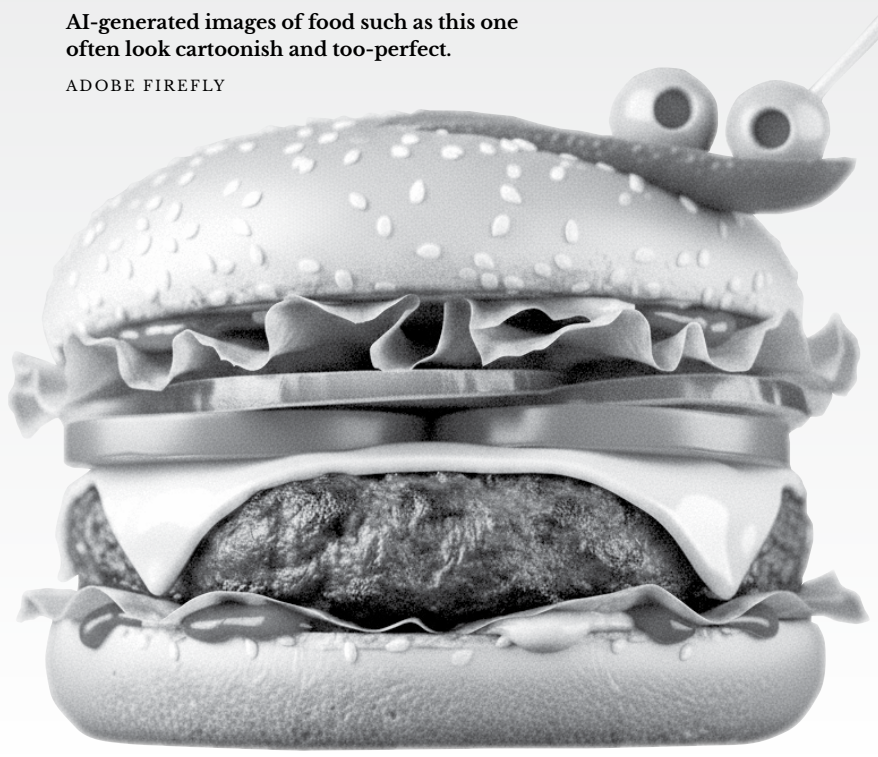
AI also helps restaurants skirt photographer fees. Given the tiny margins for most food businesses, saving money could mean the difference between operating and failing. A few services, including DoorDash, offer complimentary photoshoots for vendors. Others, such as Uber Eats, charge $125 for a quick shoot.

These platforms strive for easy scrolling and consistent experiences; visual homogeneity serves this purpose. "There is a sort of plug-and-play element to DoorDash-style photography anyway, whether it's AI-generated or generated by a human," said Nicola Parisi, a San Francisco-based food photographer whose clients include Flour + Water, Mister Jiu's, and Loló.

"I think you can really tell when a human who loves what they do is producing something versus, you know, just looking at an AI-generated image," said Parisi. "It's a lot more than just food on a plate at the end of the day."

AI-generated images of food such as this one often look cartoonish and too-perfect.

ADOBE FIREFLY



GAZETTEER EVENTS



Eamon Whalen, Johny Hong, Sawyer Hindmarsh, and Robin Sloan

One and not yet done



On Jan. 29, *Gazetteer* hosted an intimate launch party at The Valley Club for our first print issue.

Our team and their plus-ones were joined by some of the folks we've written about, including zinester Robin Sloan, VHS fanatics Luca Antonucci and Mitsu Okubo, and expert forager Bryan Jessop, along with a few media and business pals, and maybe one or two people who snuck in to partake in the open bar and pizza.

With its pleasingly retro, pink-accented interior, The Valley Club was the ideal place to celebrate our pleasingly retro, pink-accented newspaper. The martinis and *Gazetteer*-inspired special drinks were strong and the soundtrack — everything from electronica to the Dead — was as eclectic as the city we cover.

Photos by Gazetteer SF



Joshua Bote, Amanda Bartlett, Madeline Wells, Michaela Neville, and Eddie Kim



Nanxi Wang and Maya Shanmugam



Jeffrey Tang and Chelly Guzman



Byron Perry, Junji Harlow, and Brandon Cook

The Backstory



Despite, or perhaps because of, taking a hit of acid earlier in the day, Sylvester burned down the Opera House in a legendary sold-out show. PHIL BRAY

The disco diva's 1979 performance at the War Memorial Opera House brought out every self-respecting homosexual in the city

By Joshua Bote

Sylvester had manifested this.

"I want to play the San Francisco Opera House," the legendary disco diva told *The Advocate* in 1977. "And I'm saying this — I am going to play the Opera House!"

He laid out his intentions, one by one: He wanted a "fabulous show with a full orchestra, lots of costumes, lots of lighting, and lots of everything."

And there he was, on March 11, 1979, backstage at the San Francisco War Memorial Opera House. Sylvester was one of the first modern pop acts in the Opera House's history to perform there, and the first disco performer ever. He was resplendent in all red, save for the shimmery beaded regalia adorning his head, neck, and waist. Two Tons O' Fun — the San Francisco duo of Martha Wash and Izora Rhodes, who would later go on to become The Weather Girls — was on backup duty, while an orchestra was arranged right below the stage. The three-hour long show was split into three acts, not entirely dissimilar to an opera itself.

That a Black, queer disco diva made it into this hallowed venue was improbable. According to Sylvester biographer and University of San Francisco sociology professor Joshua Gamson, the one rule laid down by the Opera House was that they didn't want glitter strewn everywhere. No one in the crowd or on stage listened.

"People understood the Opera House to be a place of propriety and of a certain kind of held-back behavior," Gamson told *Gazetteer*. "And there's something extra pleasurable about occupying that kind of space with unapologetic, loud queer joy."

The show was sold out. Damn near every major San Francisco political player was in attendance: Willie Brown, Harry Britt, Dianne Feinstein. But the politicos in the room — capacity 3,500 — were secondary to everyone else. The queers and the dolls were the stars of the night. As Gamson put it, every self-respecting homosexual in San Francisco showed up and out for the event.

But this wasn't just a concert, or even a regular party: Here was Sylvester, coming in with glitter and pomp, a gay rebellion in the nation's gay capital at a time when right-wing backlash to the gay liberation movement was fomenting across the country. It was a celebration that served as catharsis for the entire city. On this night in San Francisco, Sylvester was the biggest star in the world.

The mood that evening was joyous, verging on total rapture, the kind of euphoria that can only come after enduring a loss together. Months earlier, Supervisor Harvey Milk — the defining gay politician of that generation — was shot and killed by fellow Supervisor Dan White.

Milk's political nascence coincided with Sylvester's own rise.

"People who were local, who were gay neighborhood people, knew that Sylvester and Harvey Milk were a kind of matched set," Gamson said.

They were the unofficial (platonic) Mayor and First Lady of the Castro. Together, they encapsulated the freedom and power in queerness. If Milk was a political force unto himself, Sylvester, in many ways, captured the culture. You couldn't have one without the other. They were two of the most visible out gay people in San Francisco, if not the country.

Milk's assassination and the paltry manslaughter charge that followed for White felt like a threat to gay San Franciscans just as they were growing in influence in the city. A right-wing movement had coalesced nationally, a puritanical Christian right that sought to preserve the institutions of whiteness and straightness.

Sylvester was anathema to those institutions, even in San Francisco's own gay spaces.

"I saw it happen in real time. Sylvester influenced a generation of gay men," Andrea Horne, a friend and collaborator of Sylvester's, said. "He would say, 'Oh, girl,' and they would say, 'You can call me girl?' And Sylvester would say 'Yes, bitch!' and they would be like, 'I can be a girl too?'"

Even when he got shit from the Castro clones — the masc, straight-passing Tom of Finland gays — Sylvester represented a new mode of living as a gay person, one less preoccupied with the trappings of masculinity and conformity.

> **"I saw it happen in real time. Sylvester influenced a generation of gay men."**
>
> ANDREA HORNE
> *a friend and collaborator of Sylvester's*

So, when Sylvester stepped out on stage at the Opera House, it was an act of defiance and of healing to everyone in the crowd. It didn't matter that he (and possibly many others in the performance, Horne said, and certainly many others in the crowd) had taken a hit of acid earlier that day. It didn't matter that Sylvester, just hours before, had a diva fit following some screwy rehearsals. Really, nothing else mattered. This was church, and Sylvester was its pastor.

"That's the energy that I feel when I hear people talking about it and even when they're not making the connection to Harvey Milk," Gamson said.

His voice, clear and flowing like a forest stream, takes on an operatic quality in songs like "You Are My Friend," an early Patti LaBelle hit that, in Sylvester's hands, was a love letter to everyone in attendance, especially his backup singers. He lists names of vintage venues like a travelog — the Stud, the Elephant Walk, and the Palms in the City, the Mahogany in Oakland — and recounts a story about staging auditions in the Sunset, on 6th Avenue and Judah Street, to be exact.

"We had our first rehearsal in a Volkswagen on our way to Marin County," Sylvester says mid-song, to applause, "and these girls have stuck with me all through everything, y'all, and they're here right now." Then, he sings the titular line once more with feeling.

But in the performance, there's one song that, apparently, resonated with Mayor Feinstein.

It was "Blackbird," the Beatles song. This evening, Sylvester and his band turned it into a gospel track with a groove. Where the original was perched, this rendition soared, propelled by a funk rhythm and the interplay of Sylvester and Two Tons O' Fun's voices. It's a departure from the original, sure, but it's no less emotive.

There's a moment on the chorus where Rhodes' deep alto rasps with feeling: "Into the light / Of a dark, black night." The crowd went wild. "You sure you got the message?" Sylvester asks the crowd. "You mean you know what we're really talking about?" They sing it — "Blackbird, fly" — again and again and again.

Horne was sitting not too far from Feinstein that night. "She was moved by the performance, she was really touched," Horne recalled.

Horne witnessed the Mayor whispering to Britt, Milk's successor. She didn't hear, exactly, what Feinstein said, but she remembered him bolting out of his seat.

Feinstein declared March 11 "Sylvester Day."

Sylvester's Live at the Opera House *is available on vinyl and CD from Craft Records.*

Commentary

Fatiguing fascism

The outrage over Greg Bovino's 'Nazi chic' outfit in Minnesota ignores the reality that in a society of the spectacle, we're all fighting for stage time



By Carlos Dengler



Gregory Bovino knew very well what he was doing when he donned the now infamous brass-festooned greatcoat.

OCTAVIO JONES / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

It's been a minute since we've seen the likes of one Greg Bovino. The now-re-assigned commander-at-large of the US Border Patrol catwalked into public awareness thanks to his personal style while overseeing ICE and Border Patrol agents on the streets of Minneapolis earlier this year.

Sporting an eye-catching olive green greatcoat that was just a little too close to Nazi chic for comfort, Bovino volunteered to serve as latest poster-/whipping-boy for the Trump administration's ongoing playlist of throwback hits that also includes Elon Musk's now classic "Roman salute."

Bovino's long military trench coat flapping in the Minneapolis breeze fueled all the predictable hysteria one expects from the liberal media during our era of theatrical #Resistance. Social media feeds were ablaze for a couple of days about yet another supposed recrudescence of fascism — even Germany got into the mix with their *Der Spiegel* hyperbolically accessorizing Bovino's fit with "Nazi" gloss.

You probably heard this story told with a different emphasis than the one I'm giving here: Since 2015, the Year of the Golden Escalator, liberal pundits, podcasters, and posters have holstered the words "fascism" and "Nazi" more accessibly than an itchy-fingered gunslinger in a spaghetti Western.

In this climate, Bovino's crypto-fascist turn as a supermodel sporting Nazi chic (never mind that the greatcoat in question dates back to the early 19th century and was widely deployed across the European continent, fascist and otherwise) is supposedly only the latest on-the-nose indicator that literal fascism is again on the rise, a specter haunting bottomless mimosa brunches from Cape Cod to Marin County.

But does the hypocrisy of the Chardonnay #Resistance really matter at the end of the day? After all, it would be a hard sell indeed to impute plausible deniability to Bovino's frisson of authoritarian drag.

I won't even try to make a case that our fashionable commander-at-large was blissfully ignorant that his brass-festooned greatcoat (to say nothing of the 1930s heritage haircut) wasn't communicating anything.

It's obvious to anyone who's been paying attention to the right's provocations these past ten years that Bovino didn't just accidentally put on a militaristic show with that coat. Yet, it's also obvious that he not only knew precisely what he was doing, but why. If there is one common denominator across the political spectrum, it's that everyone is awake to theater now. Nothing that hits our screens, not even the slaughter of our fellow Americans, hasn't been framed for maximum visual flair and shareability.

My personal experience with the question of "to Nazi or not to Nazi" gives me a more informed take than most on the Great Greatcoat Affair.

During the early days of my tenure with the alternative rock band Interpol in the 2000s, I myself dabbled — more than dabbled — in the "rich" rock tradition of Nazi drag. Unlike Keith Moon, who donned an entire SS uniform or Siouxie Sioux who accessorized her perfect punk look with an actual swastika armband, my own carefully crafted attempt



at Nazi chic was more suggestive — though, admittedly, with the ensemble featuring polished combat boots, a sleek, black leather holster, a plain armband, and a striking *Hitlerjugend* coiffure, the "suggestion" was communicated through a megaphone.

It would stretch credulity if I insisted that I had no idea that my onstage costume wasn't curated with the highest degree of attention to communicate something. The references I was making with this turn on that virtual catwalk were obvious. I even showcased much greater verisimilitude than Bovino.

As with Moon, facetiousness was meant as a clear sign that I and everyone else at the time knew what was really going on. I remember visiting my bespoke tailor one time and laughing after I'd come out of the dressing room decked out in one of his latest creations. "May I see your papers?" he inquired with a German accent delivered through a shit-eating grin.

Though our backgrounds, our politics and our job description are worlds apart, Bovino and I nonetheless have something in common: We both partook of the captivating allure of midcentury military chic knowing full well that a bunch of cameras were around the corner waiting to capture it all for posterity.

Of course, both of our fashion choices were already shopworn by the time we donned them, as "Fascinating Fascism," Susan Sontag's classic 1974 essay in *The New York Review of Books* reveals.

Yet, whereas Sontag's analysis of the appeal of fascism emphasized its shared visual vernacular with sexual sadomasochism (something my stage attire was intended to theatricalize), Bovino's seems less preoccupied with titillation than with provocation.

While it's easy to imagine Bovino — like so many of his fellow MAGA mascots — is an actual Nazi-admiring fascist, the truth is probably less terrifying or even interesting. As with so many other politically motivated public figures (and, honestly, so many of us), he knows that spectacle, not actual politics, drives clicks. Those clicks are pre-political; and, sadly, they dominate our lives at the moment.

In our latter-day Debordian Society of the Spectacle, everyone is competing with everyone else for attention. Bovino's display of muscular militarism can not be taken at face value. It should be seen for what it is (and was for Moon, Sioux, and me): a gimmick and a gambit.

In *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, the English sociologist Dick Hebdige wrote about mods, rockers, Teddy Boys, Rastas, and other British music scenes of the 1970s. Hebdige's exegesis of London punks has stuck with me the most, particularly his analysis of their deployment of the swastika. At one point, Hebdige quotes a "punk on the street" speaking with the kind of terse, uncomplicated logic one expects from a disaffected working class Brit: "Punks just like to be hated."

I look back to my dalliance with Nazi chic as being of a very specific time and place, a context far removed from the present. It'd be in bad taste, and probably insensitive, for me to do today what I did back then.

The 2000s were a different time: no omnipresent cameras, no social media, no hashtags. In the intervening two decades, consciousness has been raised among the liberal class; similarly, the impulse to create a capital-S Spectacle has risen among the illiberal one.

Would that the consciousness of so-called progressives continued to higher spheres, we might be spared their obnoxious sermons; would that people like Bovino not bait them so expertly, we might be able to think about other things for a change.

The Fun Page

Do it with your very own

Flat Lurie



Here's how:

1 Color in the Flat Lurie colorform. Make him tie-dye for Dead shows! Give him rainbows for Pride! Create a well-tailored blue suit and handsome tie just for walking around! He's ever so versatile!

2 Cut out Flat Lurie along the dotted line. Ask your parents for help.

3 Take Flat Lurie EVERYWHERE and snap his picture. Flat Lurie at a drag show! Flat Lurie getting empanadas at the Ferry Building! Flat Lurie addressing an AI conference!

4 Text your pic to 415-787-6570 with the location and the words "SF IS BACK."

TOMÁS CORTÉS

Gazetteer's
Believe it or not!



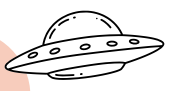
Tickets for The Beatles' final concert at Candlestick Park on Aug. 29, 1966, cost between $4.50 and $6.50. The show lasted 30 minutes.



In 2013, Mark Zuckerberg bought a house near Dolores Park for $9.999 million, about three times its estimated value. A decade later, he sold it for 3 times as much.



Hunter S. Thompson spent so much time at the Mitchell Brothers' O'Farrell Theatre in the 1980s that he called himself the strip club's Night Manager. He even had his own business cards.



In 1896, an unknown flying ship "shot across the skies in the northwest, then turned quickly and disappeared in the direction of Hayward," per *The San Francisco Call and Post*. The term UFO wouldn't be coined until 1947.

The *Offline* QUARTERLY

Get off your phone: What to see, hear, and do over the next three months

Compiled by Joshua Bote

LURKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE

Chronically Online

The Commons at KQED
March 5

PowerPoint parties are a tough sell; let's just say that some niche interests should stay niche. But **Morgan Sung**, the host of KQED's internet culture podcast *Close All Tabs*, is tremendously good at surfacing the right bits of internet flotsam and jetsam and explaining it for normies. Sung will be joined by researcher **Aidan Walker** and *Slate*'s **Candice Lim**.

Tickets: kqed.org

SHOW THE TOWN SOME LOVE

Kamaiyah

The Fox
March 14

Kamaiyah's *A Good Night in the Ghetto* remains one of contemporary Oakland rap's crowning achievements, built for bumping inside a top-down low-rider with extra-plush sheepskin seat covers. (Or, for those on a fixed budget, out of tinny AirPods as you commute under the Bay.) After a decade, hearing "How Does It Feel" at any Bay Area function is sure to set off any party — especially a homecoming.

Tickets: thefoxoakland.com

ALPHAPUSSY GALORE

Gina Gershon

City Arts
April 3

Gina Gerson is really something, huh? I finally watched the **Wachowski siblings**' *Bound* (1996) for the first time a few months ago and her Corky is just breathtaking. Such bravado, such love in her eyes for **Jennifer Tilly**'s Violet, such passionate love scenes thanks to technical (read: lesbian) consulting by San Francisco's own **Susie Bright**. Gershon will be all over SF in April, appearing at City Arts to discuss her excellently titled book *AlphaPussy* and for a 30th anniversary screening of *Showgirls* with **Peaches Christ** at the Castro on April 2.

Ticket: cityarts.net; thecastro.com

ONE FOR THE FANS

NMIXX

Paramount Theater
April 7

The K-pop event of the season, naturally, is BTS's long, long-awaited (by me) comeback tour stop at Stanford. Real heads, though, know that the six-member girl group Nmixx is quietly one of the best active K-pop groups around, riffing on the trappings of K-pop to make it weirder and even a bit proggier. Last year, the group reached a commercial pinnacle in South Korea with a song called "Blue Valentine" that I heard in just about every neighborhood I visited during a recent trip to Seoul. They're big and on the precipice of *huge*. It's astonishing that they're playing a venue as intimate as the Paramount.

Tickets: paramountoakland.org

IN THE PAINT

Flex

San Francisco Playhouse
through May 2

Set in Arkansas circa 1998, a year after the formation of the WNBA, **Candrice Jones**' *Flex*, fresh off a hit off-Broadway run, is a high school drama about a girls' basketball team on the brink of greatness. It has the energy of classic '90s teen-tertainment, befitting the era it depicts, told with grace and empathy of a playwright who has dedicated her career to writing stories about women in the South. Perfect timing, too — its run ends just a week before the Valkyries return to Chase Center.

Tickets: sfplayhouse.org

A SHOW TO WRITE HOME ABOUT

Snail Mail

Warfield
May 4

Lindsey Jordan, the guitarist and singer-songwriter performing as Snail Mail, *rips* live. Her IRL guitar work is among the sickest I've witnessed in person; the songs she makes are contemplative vessels for her guitarwork and vox that burrow deep and never quite leave your consciousness. To see her live now, after a half-decade break and a vocal injury that threatened to derail her career, feels like a minor miracle, a young prodigy getting older and wiser in real time.

Tickets: thewarfieldtheatre.com

DON'T SAY A WORD

San Francisco Silent Film Festival

The Castro Theatre
May 6 to 10

The San Francisco Silent Film Festival is the biggest of its kind in the United States, a fixture of the pre-renovation Castro Theatre, an institution inside an institution. We are lucky that, even in this new, glitzy era of the Castro, where A-list pop stars can host residencies and drag icons and indie rock titans alike take the stage, this slice of the vintage neighborhood can still exist.

Tickets: thecastro.com

CATCH THE DYNAMIC DUO

Water from Your Eyes

Bottom of the Hill
May 8

Your coolest friend's coolest friend will likely be at this post-post-post-punk outfit's show at Bottom of the Hill. The Brooklyn duo of **Nate Amos** and **Rachel Brown** has slowly amassed a devoted fanbase off their rubber band-tight musicianship and Brown's cool deadpan. Plus, you really should go to as many shows at Bottom of the Hill as you can before the end of the year.

Tickets: bottomofthehill.com

FASHION FORWARD

Creative Growth's Beyond Trend

Ciel Creative Space
May 30

Beyond Trend is the Oakland-based nonprofit progressive arts studio Creative Growth's longstanding runway show, where its artists show off maximalist handmade fashions. The show is a lively mix of music, style, and performance with a few famous friends thrown in: past walkers have included **David Byrne**.

Tickets: creativegrowth.org

THE RIGHT MIX

AAPI Cocktail Week

Various
Starting May 24

Pacific Cocktail Haven co-owner **Kevin Diedrich** started the city's AAPI Cocktail Week as a Covid-era celebration of Asian culture and identity during a period of anxiety around both in San Francisco. The weeklong event brings together some of the finest Asian and Pacific Islander cocktail makers to the city for pop-ups and industry events. And now, as Asian culture and travel become bona fide cultural phenomena stateside (see: everyone is going to Japan, "the very Chinese time in my life" meme), this celebration feels as timely as it's ever been.

Tickets: sfaapicocktailweek.com

BREAK THE FOURTH WALL

Compton's Cafeteria Riot

Tenderloin Museum
multiple dates

You're served a humble plate of eggs and sausage inside a replica of a '60s diner before witnessing a tableau of pivotal San Francisco history; the Tenderloin Museum's acclaimed immersive production about the 1966 uprising against police harassment of trans women and drag queens is perhaps one of the finest local theatrical experiences on offer. The production continues its acclaimed 2025 run through the end of March (with one bonus performance at the beginning of Pride Month).

Tickets: tenderloinmuseum.org

TIES THAT BIND

Chiharu Shiota's *Two Home Countries*

Asian Art Museum
through July 20

The Berlin-based contemporary artist **Chiharu Shiota** brings her first exhibition in San Francisco to the Asian Art Museum. She specializes in large-scale installations made of thread, both delicate and overwhelming in its expansiveness. The centerpiece, "Diary," gently weaves in entries from World War II soldiers.

Tickets: asianart.org


A new newspaper.
In this economy?
Subscribe for home delivery
Gazetteer
San Francisco
Psst: Use the discount code issue2 to get a whopping 50% off your first year of an annual Print subscription.
Offer ends April 3.