

San Francisco

BUSINESS TIMES

Where Bay Area Business Comes First.

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 26-DECEMBER 2, 1993

OPINION

Helping hands don't have to grease palms

About a year ago, a bunch of known losers had nothing but a cold drafty place to stay. They were being run out of town by a decade of benign neglect created by an atmosphere of hopelessness in which the feeling of helplessness thrives.

Our city-that-knows-how sometimes takes a while to figure it out. In this case, local policy makers and opinion shapers eventually realized what the average citizen already knew: that concerted effort defeats desperate circumstance every time. The result was a success story in which everybody simply did what they do best. Politicians campaigned, newspapers editorialized, the wealthy invested and the masses rallied.

Through a prime example of civic leadership initiative, the Giants remained San Francisco's baseball team. But we didn't just keep the Giants; we also regained a sense of community that only the exhilaration of common purpose can provide.

The postscript to this story came in last month's close pennant race, providing the reminder that "losers" can become "winners" within a year when the local community combines community-wide involvement tactics within a solution-oriented investment strategy.

This successful campaign formula could also be applied to what every opinion survey identifies as San Franciscans' No. 1 concern: homelessness. The same victorious result requires the same orchestrated effort. The motto of the campaign: Let no one do nothing.

Local business people can be the catalysts in this action strategy without raising taxes, getting involved in politics or even leaving the office. In addition to their employees' volunteerism and their corporation's

charitable contributions, companies can use the office expense account to help homeless people who are helping themselves.

A number of community-based agencies have launched business-serving enterprises as a way of creating work experience and job opportunities for their program participants as well as generating revenue for their community work. Perhaps the best known nonprofit business enterprise is Delancey Street Foundation (415-512-5179), which among other things provides an excellent



GUEST OPINION

ROBERT TOBIN

place along the Embarcadero to go for a business lunch. To send out for sandwiches, the catering services offered by Conard House (415-255-7961) offer a way to do good while eating well.

Companies have also found a way to do good and get help by examining their office's utilization of temporary workers. The graphics department at AT&T recently used the job placement program at a local homeless shelter to hire laborers for a materials assembly project. Miller Freeman Publications consolidated several recurring work projects to create a single clerical position for a formerly homeless person. Agencies providing such services in San Francisco can be reached through the JobFinders Network (415-772-4455).

The Stanford Court Hotel, the law firm of

Lillick & Charles, First Republic Bank and many other companies have found a way to brighten the holidays for business associates and strangers alike by buying Christmas or Hanukkah greeting cards made by the homeless and/or low-income artists from Hospitality House (415-749-2180). The Hospitality House Store in donated space at Crocker Galleria provides other gift ideas in both framed and ceramic artwork. In addition to the jobs created in both retail and production operations, the commission on card and artwork sales put over \$50,000 in participating artists' pockets last year.

Too often we take a "tin cup" approach to issues of poverty and are surprised to get results as poor as those we try to help. Creating opportunities to develop skills and earn income represents the long-term solution to the problems of many homeless people. Investments by the Roberts Foundation and others have supported these enterprises in their start-up phase. You can help these businesses succeed in developing a niche in the marketplace — and in developing jobs for homeless people — by directing your company's purchasing toward their products.

Instead of reducing the giving spirit to one-time token gestures, why not concentrate all available resources into an investment strategy that lasts throughout the year? Let's do it quickly, before hand-wringing joins bell-ringing as our predominant civic response to homelessness during the holiday season.

Tobin is the executive director of Hospitality House, the community center for San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood. ■