

It's time to thank the neighborhood business

By Jenny McNulty

San Francisco is a city known internationally for its ultra-unique character. In this age of big-box retail and cookie-cutter cafés, to what can San Francisco attribute its perpetually distinct identity? A huge part of what shapes our City and contributes so deeply to our quality of life is undoubtedly the neighborhood business.

The neighborhood business — the mom-and-pop shop down the block that sells fresh produce; the dance studio that teaches kids hip-hop; the café on the corner where local artists exhibit their work and musicians meet to play bluegrass.

What can we do to tell these businesses we value their presence in our neighborhood? Certainly we can patronize local business. And maybe you'll drop the change from your coffee into the tip jar. If you're truly loyal, perhaps you'll hand the proprietor a card at the holidays, but really what can we do to say to that business, "You are special and we appreciate you. Thank you.?"

Last year Urban Solutions, an economic development nonprofit in San Francisco, created a forum in which to recognize and celebrate those local businesses that enrich our City. In 2005, Urban Solutions inaugurated the San Francisco Neighborhood Business Awards. A call for nominations elicited a flurry of passionate replies about neighborhood businesses. It seemed the people of San Francisco were eager to find an outlet for their deep gratitude to the small business owner next door.

As a nonprofit whose mission is to help entrepreneurs secure financing, start or grow their businesses and create jobs, Urban Solutions is pleased to once again present the City with a concrete way to thank the many local business owners who are so committed to their communities.

Urban Solutions is now accepting nominations for the 2006 San Francisco Neighborhood Business

Awards for businesses throughout San Francisco.

Neighborhood businesses do more than create jobs and generate tax revenue. They foster the well-known spirit of openness and community for which San Francisco is famous. Whether it's a family-owned breakfast spot or a cluttered hardware store, the neighborhood business is as much a part of The City's charm as summer fog and old Victorians.

Last year's top three Neighborhood Business Awards went to Green Apple Books, Waldeck's Office Supplies and Rasselas Jazz Club. With criteria including social, cultural and economic contributions, the judges found they had a wealth of options — so many businesses were well qualified in all of those categories. The result was a place for six Honorable Mentions — Casa Lopez Produce; Harvest Urban Market; Momi Toby's Café; Residents Apparel Gallery; Bissap Baobab and Benkyodo Co.

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Pete Mulvihill, Co-Owner of Green Apple Books and Music, tells the story of first learning about Waldeck's Office Supply store at the 2005 awards. "I suddenly asked myself, 'why am I buying my supplies from a national chain?'" Pete continues, "I've been contracting with Waldeck's ever since that night."

Urban Solutions welcomes anyone to submit a nomination describing, in 200 words or less, how a neighborhood business has contributed to the betterment of the community. This year's SFNBA will take place from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Oct. 19 at 111 Minna Gallery in a gala ceremony. The deadline to submit nominations is Aug. 25.

So next time you're strolling in your community please take note of that unique shop that helps make your neighborhood a place you call home, and tell us about them.

Jenny McNulty is the executive director of Urban Solutions. Nomination forms can be downloaded from Urban Solutions' Web site, www.urbansolutionsSF.org/ nominate, or dial (415) 346-0199 to have a form mailed to you.



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