

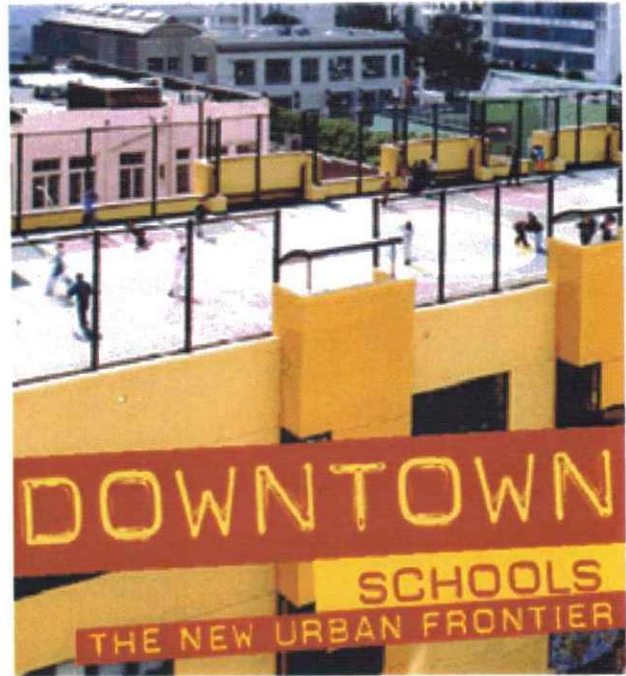
SAN FRANCISCO - TENDERLOIN COMMUNITY SCHOOL - URBAN MELTING POT

In recent years, downtown districts have been experiencing a comeback hardly imagined a generation ago. Cities of various sizes are scrapping downtown agendas dating from the days when the only attainable goals were adding parking decks, resuscitating ailing department stores and constructing corporate office towers. A bevy of diverse functions are being implemented—specialty shops and galleries, farmers' markets, civic buildings, streetscape enhancements, even mass transit and housing, are coming to life again.

One such function is the downtown public school, once a casualty of the wrecking ball in the days of urban renewal. This new generation of public schools is dubbed by a host of enthusiastic observers as a "new-building type", characterized by an integrated, even global mix of students, creative and discerning architectural forms, updated curricula, and partnerships with community institutions and services. What follows are capsule descriptions of three successful ventures: San Fran-



by Martin Zimmerman



cisco, Minneapolis and Raleigh, North Carolina. Each school project demonstrates how creativity, vision and long-term commitment can overcome the status quo.

In the fall of 1990, a meeting was held between the **Bay Area Women's and Children's Center (BAWCC)** and Superintendent Cortines of the San Francisco Unified School district, to discuss the results of an exhaustive two-year resident survey of Tenderloin, the name given to a downtown district, long reputed to be one of the toughest sections of San Francisco. Tenderloin, so-named in the days when cops and graft coexisted and prime steak was a job benefit, encompasses 56 high-density blocks just north of San Francisco's City Hall and civic center. Their findings confirmed a radical shift in the demographic makeup of Tenderloin. Numerous rooming houses, formerly a safe haven for the disenfranchised, were now bursting at the seams with families from China, Laos, Cambodia and the South Pacific islands. As many as 200 children lived in tight quarters on some blocks, and the swelling population was inching upwards towards the 30,000 mark.

Armed to the teeth with data, and with the backing of businesses and nonprofits, BAWCC made its



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case, but failed to garner the school district's support. There was no choice except to embark on a citywide campaign to win favor from those who held the purse. It took another eight years before the goal of final build-out could be achieved. At last in the fall of 1998 the K-5 Tenderloin Community School officially opened its doors to serve a global student population mixing the newcomers with Latino/Hispanics, African-Americans and Caucasians.

The respected Bay Area architectural firm EHHD adapted the complex program requirements to a tight 1.3 acre site along Turk Street. These requirements placed high priority on incorporating badly needed community resources within the school. For parents and students, there is a library with books in many languages, a multipurpose room available for rental, ESL classes and even a rooftop community garden. There are three playgrounds, two at ground level for preschool and grades 1-2 and one rooftop for grades 3-6. Located below grade is the Esherick Center, named after deceased architect Joe Esherick of EHHD, which includes the Computer Center, Health Center with dental and mental health service areas and the Adult Education Center. According to Midge Wilson, director of BAWCC and a key player from the outset, there is even a handbook available in three languages explaining the various services available at Tenderloin Community School for students and families.



The design, both inside and out, shines as a bright sunburst of reds and yellows, and signals the school's presence as a refuge amidst a hustle, bustle district thought to be second only to Chinatown in density. The front façade and interiors are adorned with murals composed of 5,000 glazed tiles, a collaborative effort between school children and artist Martha Heavenston. Now in its seventh year of operation, Tenderloin Community School (TCS) has also solidified a base of downtown affiliations to augment its curriculum. These range from the Philip Burton Federal building to the San Francisco Ballet. With characteristic modesty, Ms. Wilson can now say that, "TCS has achieved its mission of educating, supporting and celebrating the entire community in all of its diversity."