

Seniors get a ride out of the Tenderloin from tech volunteers



Photo: Gabrielle Lurie, Special To The Chronicle

Image 5 of 6

(l-r) Teresita Lahiff and Diane Evans touch the interior of a tricycle rickshaw that was donated to the Curry Senior Center by Zendesk, in San Francisco, California, on Friday, May 6, 2016.

The last city Diane Evans called home was decimated by one of the deadliest hurricanes the nation has ever seen.

She fled the Katrina-ravaged, flooded streets of New Orleans for the foggy hills of San Francisco in 2005. It gave her hope, she said, finding her way in a new city so full of life. Before long, though, she felt a new storm brewing: a tech boom that brought with it young workers who, by and large, Evans said, didn't seem to care about the people who had come before them.

"People move into a place and take advantage of the city and the communities that were built by people of my generation, but then they look at us old folks and say, 'Move along down the road, you don't matter anymore,'" said Evans, 70. "If you come here, you should do something to give back to the community, to leave it better than you found it. No one could make a quarter in this city if it weren't for what these old people built and left behind."

On Friday, Evans was one of the first seniors to get a ride on the [Curry Senior Center](#)'s new "trishaws" — three-wheeled rickshaws pedaled by [volunteers from local tech firms](#) that, officials hope, will help entice seniors from the Tenderloin to get out and explore other parts of the city that may ordinarily be beyond their reach.

Watching volunteers from [Zendesk](#), which donated the pedicab-like vehicles to the senior center, ride up Turk Street on bikes of their own to escort the first group of seniors on the trishaws' inaugural ride, Evans grinned. Twitter employees wove past them, wearing neon orange vests and picking up trash off the ground.



Photo: Gabrielle Lurie, Special To The Chronicle

Seniors Diane Evans (front, left) and Garrett Swing (front, right), laugh as they get a ride from Zendesk CEO Mikkel Svanel (back, center) in a tricycle rickshaw, in San Francisco, California, on Friday, May 6, 2016.

Too often, Evans said, seniors watching the city change around them can feel helpless, lost and overlooked. Taking the time to make a senior feel seen and appreciated, she added, goes a long way.

“Back in my day, the young people used to take care of the old people; that doesn’t happen anymore,” said Evans, who was homeless for several months in her late 60s before finding her way to an apartment in the Tenderloin. “All these offices are literally walking distance from here, and still we have seniors who are isolated and homeless and feel like no one is looking out for them.”

About 14.5 percent of of San Franciscans are 65 and older, according to the most recent census data. Many, like Evans, live in single rooms in residential hotels.

Todd Thorpe, the director of development at the Curry Senior Center, said the biggest misconception he encounters from young San Franciscans is the feeling that seniors can no longer contribute to the community. It’s what allows them to be so easily cast aside and overlooked, he said.



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A sticker can be seen on a tricycle rickshaw, which was donated to the Curry Senior Center by Zendesk in a partnership with Cycling Without Age, in San Francisco, California, on Friday, May 6, 2016.

Roughly 15,000 seniors in San Francisco live in low-income housing or are homeless, Thorpe said, and of those about [10 percent live on the streets](#). Many come to the senior center for services.

Every week, workers from tech firms — including Dolby, Salesforce, Twitter and Zendesk — who volunteer at the senior center engage with these low-income and homeless seniors.

Twitter and Zendesk, both recipients of the [tax break that allowed companies to forgo \\$34 million](#) in city payroll taxes last year, [have signed community-engagement agreements](#) that include a stipulated amount of volunteer time.

More by Marissa Lang

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Image 1 of 6

(l-r) Teresita Lahiff and Diane Evans take a look at tricycle rickshaws that were donated to the Curry Senior Center by Zendesk, in San Francisco, California, on Friday, May 6, 2016.

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