

SAN FRANCISCO NEIGHBORHOOD BUSINESS AWARDS

Entrepreneurial exemplars honored

San Francisco-based Urban Solutions is a nonprofit organization that helps small businesses obtain loans, create business plans and perform other tasks necessary for their survival. The group annually honors small, nonformula retail businesses that make a difference in their neighborhoods. Stories by Examiner Staff Writer Kate Williamson.

FIRST PLACE

Hwa Rang Kwan Martial Arts Center 371 Fifth St.

When Steve Rapport purchased a Korean martial-arts school from tae kwon do master Dong Kie Shin in 2001, he dreamed of turning it into a center of learning that embraced different teachers and created a community. Today, the nonprofit group Urban Solutions will honor Rapport as a pillar of his South of Market neighborhood, with first prize in its San Francisco Neighborhood Business Awards.

"These awards honor people who are neighborhood heroes in their little corner of The City ... whether it is opening their doors for community groups, cleaning up the neighborhood or helping kids in the area," Urban Solutions representative Maureen Futtner said.

The organization received 125 nominations for some 80 businesses to receive awards this year, Futtner said.

Nominators hailed Rapport's Hwa Rang Kwan Martial Arts Center as a place where the neighborhood's teenagers hang out and learn discipline. In addition to its own adult and youth classes, the studio rents and donates space to outside schools and to two youth-serving nonprofit groups.

Rapport also donates proceeds from various tournaments to charity.

"I work six days a week here ... so getting some recognition is hugely gratifying," Rapport, 51, said.

Rapport, a 4th dan master of tae kwon do, came to studio ownership unconventionally. A rock 'n' roll photographer, his work will be featured this month in an exhibition of Bruce Springsteen pictures in London's Proud Galleries. He moved to the United States from the United Kingdom in 1992, and worked for several technology startups before buying the school from his teacher.

The school dates back to 1965.



SECOND PLACE

Marcus Books 1712 Fillmore St.

Dr. Raye Richardson's Marcus Books has been an important cultural icon for nearly 50 years because of its focus on titles about black people in America and around the world, according to state Assemblymember Mark Leno, its nominator.

"There is a kind of pride in the black community that we exist," Richardson said.

Richardson and her late husband, Julian Richardson, founded the shop around 1960, Richardson said, because it was too expensive to order rare volumes and lend them to "well-meaning friends" who never returned them. The shop had to move frequently because of redevelopment projects in the Western

Addition, she added. The business is still run by the couple's daughters and granddaughters.

In addition to supporting important black writing, the shop was a meeting place for African-American organizations.



THIRD PLACE

Marlena's 488 Hayes St.

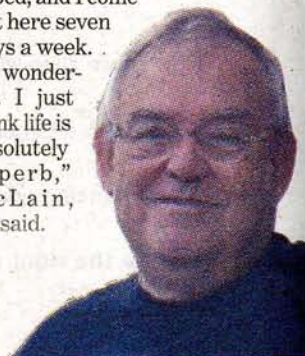
Garry McLain, co-owner of the nightspot Marlena's, credits the Imperial Court with introducing him to the joy of good works. The court, a gay organization that elected him 25th Emperor one year, does extensive fundraising and charity work. And in the midst of that world, so does McLain.

"His work goes without fanfare or hoopla — he just does it!" nominator Michael Patton said.

The eclectic nightclub, with its drag queens and "Star Wars" memorabilia, has had many names in the past: the Valley Club, David's House, the Overpass. For McLain, a retired Carnation supervisor who worked at The Mint and Kimo's, it

was a chance to go into business for himself.

"I could retire tomorrow ... but we have a reason to get out of bed, and I come out here seven days a week. It's wonderful. I just think life is absolutely superb," McLain, 67, said.



— All: Courtesy photos

HONORABLE MENTION

Hotel des Arts 447 Bush St.



Singer

The Hotel des Arts pays artists to create long-term full-room murals in its rooms, giving them a unique form of exposure. "It's more of a budget hip, cool hotel," said Richard Singer, president of the hotel's owner, Prize Hotels. The nominator lauded it for helping artists through the hotel and the Web site, www.sfhoteldesarts.com.

Original Joe's 144 Taylor St.



Burns

Some businesses survive so long that they help define a neighborhood. In San Francisco's Tenderloin, 70-year-old Original Joe's serves that function, according to its nominator. Recently damaged by a fire, the eatery — run by General Manager Dan Burns — provides needed commercial activity in a tough neighborhood.

Drewes Bros. Meats 1706 Church St.



Josh Epple

An institution dating back to 1889 in a rapidly developing gourmet gulch on Church Street, under its new owners Drewes Bros. Meats is a traditional butcher shop that serves in-demand naturally-raised meats. Brothers Josh and Isaac Epple and a partner own the shop, which keeps a refrigerator used by the sisters of St. Paul's Church for food donations.