

THE FREE YOU

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OUTSIDERS, OR A COMMUNITY?

**\$4000 MORE DONATED TO COMMUNITY CENTER BUILDING;
BUT THE OWNER WANTS SOMETHING MORE - LIKE WHAT?**

by bob cullenbine

Six months ago, the Free University began negotiations through Mrs. Joan Wood of Fox and Carskadon, Menlo Park, for the building at the northeast corner of Hamilton and Emerson in downtown Pa'lo Alto. The owner, Warren Thoits, expressed an active interest through Mrs. Wood in leasing us the building. It has been vacant for over three years. Mr. Thoits indicated that to secure our three year lease he would be willing to make necessary repairs to bring it up to code for our use. Three months ago our \$200 deposit for "right of first refusal" was accepted. Since then we have received bi-weekly telephone calls from his agent asking for our re-assurance that we were still interested. Two weeks ago we were finally in a position to make firm offers to Mr. Thoits to lease the building - including an offer to do code work ourselves.

For ten days daily telephone inquiries from me generated no response. Finally last Friday we were informed that Thoits was not interested in leasing us the building at all, and we received a refund check of \$200. The reason given was that our operation would cause "parking problems" in the area. I didn't believe that then and I don't now. Feeling that Mr. Thoits must be getting some very poor information somewhere, I called his office (Thoits and Thoits- Attorneys - Palo Alto) to ask for a meeting between Free U. representatives and him. I was informed that he is out of town until August 6. So here we are with literally hundreds of people ready to work to create this community project. They are ready to work now, during the summer. Many artists and craftsmen have put off important studio moves in order to be in this center. Thousands of hours of planning, organizing, and fund raising have been spent. Friday was a day of great disillusionment, anger, and profound feelings of impatience for me.

What could we do? Wait until August 6 and then hope for a change of consciousness in Warren Thoits? Possibly the best choice. When he sees what are plans are and he understands our vision and our energy - he will change his mind -- won't he? Possibly he will even reduce the rent as a contribution. But what if he doesn't change? Then we will have lost more valuable time. So I asked Mrs. Wood (the real estate agent) to find out about another two buildings - one (4800 square feet) across the street and another (2000 square feet) around the corner. While not what our vision and planning called for, these might work out. We would have to put the press and some craftsmen in the smaller building which would divide and lessen our marketing appeal - but it was a way.

Yesterday we went and saw the two alternate buildings and our enthusiasm was rekindled. We offered to lease the larger. But oh, NO! NO! NO! I am called and told that Warren Thoits is the owner of this building, too. He'll be back August 6.

Please help if you can. Do you know Warren Thoits? Do you do business with him? Is he a personal friend? Do you want to help us talk to him when he returns from vacation? Do you have any other ideas, any other buildings? Help! There is a crying need in our community for an open, non-stereotyped, co-operative and creative center. I think our proposed project can help fill this need. Help us find the building. Help shape the dream. Help create something beautiful and positive in Palo Alto.

(THINGS NEEDED)

Please don't be discouraged by the rantings of the frustrated building finder above. His appeal to you is a cry for help. Some of you in our community will no doubt be able to help and we'll get a building - soon I hope. As important as the building are the hardware and fixtures needed to go in it. If you have or know where we can get any of the following items please let us know: money, conduit, outlets, water pipes, sewer pipes, gas pipe, triple sink, commercial refrigerator, hot plates, restaurant coffee maker, 12 foot delicatessen-style display refrigerator. Crystal chandeliers? Old style wood coffee house chairs. 20 sheets 3/4" 4x8 plywood for tables. Coffee mugs or cups and saucers, water glasses, salt and pepper shakers. Old time cash register, Hobart electric meat slicer. Large soup kettles, large hot water heater, desk, file cabinet, fireproof drapery material, flatware, bus trays and stands, soup

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COMMUNITY CENTER

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bowls, kitchen utensils, garbage cans, butcher's workbench. Hood, floor polisher, mops, buckets, brooms, etc. Please call DA6-8104 or DA8-4941.

(CENTER COMMITTEE)

The CCC meets at 5:00 P.M. Thursdays on the grass in front of Tressider Union on the Stanford campus. All interested persons are invited and as in most Free U. committees everyone attending is a member of the committee. For more information call 326-8104 or 328-4941.

(DESIGN CONCEPT)

As soon as we have a definite building (we thought we had one) members are encouraged to submit design ideas to CCC. From these one design will be chosen, and we will follow it as much as possible. The idea here is to get creative people to spend time and effort on the design - knowing that if their design is chosen it will be seen through to completion and not changed by whoever happens in during construction. Call 326-8104 and we'll let you know when we have a firm building.

(PEOPLE)

Buildings, and materials, and designs are all quite meaningless without involvement at a personal level by many of our community. To those of you who have already volunteered, some I know have been waiting 6 months, please be patient. To everyone else interested, the more people who help build this center, the more it will truly become a center for our total community and provide meaningful experiences in our lives. We will need every person, skilled or not skilled to help. Call DA6-8104 or DA8-4941 to help.

(BARN RAISING)

After our lease is signed, design accepted, permits acquired, and materials donated or bought, we will issue the call for the great barn raising. Gathering together on a Saturday morning under the direction of the designer and many technically qualified volunteers (contractors, electricians, plumbers, etc.) we will marathon - build the whole project. Most of the painting must necessarily follow during the week prior to the Saturday opening to the public. Our goal is a huge housewarming party to begin fall registration.

WHAT IT CAN BE

(The following letter, sent to a prospective contributor, most eloquently explains what the center can be. F.N.)

Sometimes it is very difficult to pin down exactly what we are doing or where we are going with the Free U. The summer 1968 catalog probably best shows where we are. What it doesn't say too well, and this is my fault, is where we are going in this community and why we must move here in the Midpeninsula.

Palo Alto with all of its grand parks and fine stores has no place where young people, older people, black and white people, students and teachers can get together -- together to share our experiences and our views and to get to know each other. The result of this lack is a widening gap between us all and a feeling of alienation, particularly among our young people. Two days ago, Nancy Christiansen, a 16-year-old Palo Alto High junior, died from an overdose of cocaine. She died because she and a group of friends had no more creative, exciting, and important thing to do than gather together and experiment with narcotics. There are literally hundreds of young people like her in our community. Three of them are charged with her murder. I feel that if we had our Community Center in operation many of these young people could use their energies to create, to serve, and to explore themselves and us too, in a dialog to create understanding, awareness, and meaning in a fragmented world. But if young people are going to include themselves in this work, they must be listened to, consulted, and valued as equal participants in the work. They must have the power to take part in making the decisions which affect their lives. We all must.

What is the Free University Community Center Project? Specifically, we are negotiating a lease for an 8,000 square foot downtown Palo Alto building. The street-level floor will house a coffee shop and multimedia creative center. During the day we will serve a moderately priced, very tasty lunch intended to attract businessmen, shoppers, students, teachers, and drop-outs. In the evening, we will have all types of music, poetry readings, informal discussions, experimental movies, dance and theater. We will not serve beer -- so our doors will be open to young people. Volunteers will do all the work when possible. The 4,000 square foot basement will house a creative arts and crafts center. Some of the area's most talented craftsmen are now committed to working and selling in the Center. They will also help and instruct those who wish to learn.

The Free University is now financed entirely by \$10 adult and \$2 High School membership fees per quarter. This brings in approximately \$10,000 per quarter which goes to pay the expenses of running a university of over a thousand members. Teachers receive no pay. We must turn to the larger community and to Free U. members for contributions to support projects such as the Community Center. To date, we have raised \$9,000 for the project. To open the doors we will need at least \$2,000 more. Our goal at the end of one year is an investment of \$20,000 or more. Hopefully, revenues from the coffee house and space rental from the craftsmen will carry the project and possibly generate funds for other community services later. We now have over 150 persons who want to help with their time and energy specifically on this vision. I have never seen so many people ready and able to devote time to a community project. My hope is that this may serve as a model for similar activities in many communities across our shattered nation.

Enough of this! Our job is to create here and now -- where we can see it, feel it, and grow. Can you help us? Please call me if there is more you want to know.

Love,

Bob Cullenbine

F*RE*E*D*O*M

A scene in which the State can't tell you what to say or what to believe, only who to kill.

"There is a difference between good sound reasons and reasons that sound good."