

# Milk memorial project needs money, volunteers

by Zak Szymanski

The campaign to raise funds for the Harvey Milk memorial sculpture is newly invigorated, according to organizers, thanks in large part to a \$25,000 challenge grant announced by the Bob Ross Foundation and recent visibility at last weekend's LGBT Pride festival.

The challenge grant announcement was made in an editorial in last week's *Bay Area Reporter*. Ross was the paper's founder and publisher until his death in December 2003. The Bob Ross Foundation works to carry out the charitable work that Ross was involved in for decades. Thomas E. Horn oversees the foundation; he is also publisher of the *B.A.R.*

"It is the foundation's desire to see this project completed, and to appropriately memorialize Milk in City Hall, where he belongs," the editorial stated.

About \$665 was raised at the Milk memorial booth during Pride festivities, according to Dan Nicoletta, a longtime friend of Milk's and one of the core organizers of the project, known as the Milk City Hall Memorial Committee. Under the terms of the challenge grant, every dollar donated by the public will be matched, up to \$25,000, an incentive that will appeal to donors as the project embarks on a direct mail and e-mail fundraising campaign, said Nicoletta. It is hoped that money from the challenge grant, along with the matching community contributions, will be enough to fund the project, in addition to the roughly \$12,000 that has already been



Volunteers staff the booth for the Harvey Milk memorial bust at the LGBT Pride festival last weekend.

raised. The projected date of installation and unveiling at City Hall is May 22, 2006, what would have been Milk's 76th birthday.

Donations to the memorial are tax-deductible thanks to the fiscal sponsorship of the San Francisco LGBT Pride Celebration Committee Inc., which is acting as the nonprofit umbrella for the project. All donations will go toward the memorial; the money will not be used for Pride-related events. The memorial project is working closely with the San Francisco Arts Commission, which serves in an advisory capacity and will have the final word on design and specific location of the sculpture.

Milk was a visionary and an inspiration to many in San Francisco and beyond, organizing against homophobia and building bridges between gays and other communities. His camera store on Castro Street acted as a political organizing space, and in

1977 he became California's first openly gay man to win elected office when he secured a seat on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. Eleven months later, he and Mayor George Moscone were gunned down in their City Hall offices by former Supervisor Dan White.

"I personally have a great metaphysical debt to Harvey and Scott [Smith, Milk's partner] as they were my first gay mentors in town," said Nicoletta on his role in the memorial project. "Back then my self-esteem was pretty fragile, but they fixed that pretty early on. The rest is herstory."

The Milk memorial has been in the works for quite some time, with the Board of Supervisors in October 2001 unanimously passing a resolution urging the appropriate city bodies to begin the process. The fundraising campaign for the Milk memorial was first announced in January 2003 by then-Supervisor Matt

Gonzalez who directed donations to a fund set up at the city controller's office. About \$3,000 was donated through that fund, and that money has since been transferred and centralized under one group, according to Nicoletta, whose group raised an additional \$9,000 over the last couple of years. After promotional and event expenses, about \$6,000 remains in the war chest, he said. In order for progress to continue, more donations – as well as volunteers – are needed.

"We have a core group of about 10 people working on this, and at any given time there could be an additional 20-30 volunteers," said Nicoletta. "But we need more. We would like to start thinking strategically, which is not always possible when you've been licking stamps all day."

Nicoletta said part of the reason that the donations have been coming in at "a slow trickle" is that many people are unaware of Milk or his legacy, a detail that became clear when interacting with people at the Pride festival. The project plans on adding some public education to its outreach campaign, he said, and will focus on a more national and international scope soon.

Community members are invited to help "memorialize the former San Francisco supervisor who united the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community in life and transformed it with his death and galvanized the progressive movement for years to come" at a Web site set up for the project. The site includes information about Milk and the proposed memorial sculpture, as well as a secure page for donations. For more information, visit [www.milkmemorial.org](http://www.milkmemorial.org). ▼