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## Sunday Streets garners support from neighborhoods

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Max Shilston, 5, Jennifer Loudermilk, Charlie Loudermilk, 3, Suzanne Shilston, 4, and Jack Shilston, 5, from left, ride their scooters down The Embarcadero during the first Sunday Streets event. Cindy Chew/The Examiner

SAN FRANCISCO - When The City announced last August that it would shut down The Embarcadero to automobile traffic on a Sunday to open it up for bikers and pedestrians, Pier 39 CEO Bob Macintosh was the voice of opposition representing business owners angered by the decision.

Flash forward seven months later - Macintosh, like many other area merchants, is welcoming the Sunday Streets program with open arms.

Pending permit approval, The Embarcadero will be closed from AT&T Park to Aquatic Park on April 26, the first of six Sunday Streets events scheduled this year.

Macintosh opposed the idea last year because he feared the street closures would

drive away much-needed customers, but he's changed his tune as the Sunday Streets plan has been tweaked.

Unlike the inaugural Sunday Streets offering, which took place during the height of tourism season on Fisherman's Wharf and came with little warning, this year's spring date and the early time - from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. - is ideal for merchants on the pier, Macintosh said.

"At Pier 39, we're very much in favor of this," Macintosh said. "We totally did not want it last August, but after some very productive meetings with the Mayor's office, we're looking forward to the event and to the people it will bring here."

Modeled after a successful program in Bogota, Colombia, the Sunday Streets program will shut down major arteries in San Francisco to allow people to run, bike, rollerblade and dance on them. Along with The Embarcadero, other areas in The City that will see closures are the Bayview, Mission and Ocean Beach neighborhoods.

Buffy Maguire, owner of the Java Beach coffeehouse near Ocean Beach, said many merchants in the area are looking forward to the Sunday Streets event this summer, although she conceded that they won't know the true impact of the street closure until it happens.

"I think it's an exciting idea," Maguire said. "We're hoping it gets people out here so they can discover what friendly environment we have out here at Ocean Beach."

Phil Lesser of the Mission Merchants Association said his group doesn't know a whole lot of details about the planned street closures in the neighborhood, but he said that based on past similar experiences such as the Carnaval celebration, any event that brings in foot traffic to the area is good.

The Sunday Streets program has always been supported by bicycle and pedestrian advocates, but having the business and neighborhood groups on board is extremely important, said Leah Shahum of the San Francisco Bike Coalition.

"Sunday Streets really proved itself," Shahum said. "I think we're seeing the benefit of bringing more people out to the streets to enjoy car-free space."

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