On the evening of October 1st, more than 145 guests gathered in the spacious ground floor of the David Brower Center on Allston Way to pay tribute to Berkeley Food & Housing Project (BFHP) on the occasion of its 45th anniversary. The group included community leaders like Vice-Mayor Linda Maio, Council Members Susan Wengraf, Jesse Arreguin, Kris Worthington, and many others who – along with BFHP board, staff, donors and friends – came to celebrate long-time Berkeley resident and activist Dorothy Walker, who was being honored that evening for her work on behalf of the agency.

As guests mingled and enjoyed hors d’oeuvres and wine provided by ACT Catering and Cassave Taqueria, they had a chance to learn about the work of the agency from the many large story boards positioned around the lobby featuring color photographs by noted local Berkeley photographer Jessica Eve Rattner.

At about 6:15 p.m., BFHP board chair Dr. Larry Rosenthal took the podium to greet everyone and announce the agency’s intention to build a new multi-purpose service center for the homeless in downtown Berkeley. Said Rosenthal, “The city in its wisdom, and with the great help of Dorothy Walker, have imagined a world where there will be affordable, special purpose housing for the disadvantaged and for the workforce, right here in downtown Berkeley, and we are very happy to be part of that solution.”

The mixed-use project, now in its early planning stages, continued on page 2
will be the product of a three-way collaboration between BFHP, BRIDGE Housing, and Leddy Maytum Stacy architects that will result in an architecturally unified complex of buildings that will include a new facility for BFHP as well as more than 100 units of new housing to be developed by BRIDGE, accompanied by replacement public parking. The site under consideration is currently a city-owned surface parking lot on Berkeley Way that was designated for affordable housing in the 2012 Downtown Area Plan.

Berkeley Vice-Mayor Linda Maio paid tribute to this visionary project and said, “We need a lot more affordable housing in this city and I’m looking forward to the ground breaking on this Berkeley Way project.” Maio also took the occasion to announce that the city has “chosen Berkeley Food & Housing Project to become the centralized hub for all city-funded homeless services.”

“We are really creating a new model” said Maio, “for how the city can provide services for the homeless, serve more people, and do it more efficiently.” She went on to say “BFHP is highly respected and a tremendous partner to the City of Berkeley, particularly in the hands of Terrie Light, Executive Director”.

Terrie Light began her remarks by thanking Linda Maio for her tribute and thanking everyone for coming to help honor Dorothy Walker.

“Dorothy thinks boldly,” said Light, “and embraces boldly. She embraced our whole concept of a downtown area that included housing for the homeless, services, and affordable housing.”

Since 2007, Dorothy Walker has served as an advisor to the agency, as well as a member of the Capital Campaign Task Force and the Capital Campaign Committee.

“It was Dorothy who, as a member of the Downtown Planning and Advisory Commission, made sure that language was included in the Downtown Area Plan that designated the site on Berkeley Way for future affordable housing. Were it not for that, I doubt we would be where we are tonight, able to present our bold vision for the redevelopment of downtown Berkeley.”

As Terrie invited Dorothy to join her at the podium, the guests broke into long and sustained applause.

Visibly moved, Dorothy Walker said, “I am almost speechless. All I can say is thank you. I am very touched and very honored. Please continue to support this wonderful organization and its great leader Terrie Light.”

As part of the tribute to Dorothy Walker, the agency will name a courtyard in the new building in her honor. Bearing a plaque with her name in perpetuity, the interior courtyard will be a place of respite and peace for those members of our community who work so hard to rebuild their lives – with the help of Berkeley Food & Housing Project – in order to move from a place of homelessness and despair to a place of stability, hope, and a brighter future.
Following two years active service in the U.S. Navy, “Alex” was put on unpaid inactive duty in 1996. Over the next fifteen years, he coped with severe depression, unemployment, and periodic homelessness. The cycle was not really broken until 2013 when he finally called BFHP, seeking help.

The person on the phone asked him if he was a vet, a question that would turn out to be the lifeline he needed. Alex was eligible to be enrolled in a program run by BFHP which provides transitional housing for homeless veterans. For Alex, the program allowed him to rebuild his life, reclaim his dignity and, says Alex, “to be human again.”

In his first week at BFHP Alex met Marianna Sempari, the agency’s interfaith chaplain. Sempari recognized Alex’s innate gifts and soon became his mentor. Before long, Alex was volunteering as part of a street outreach team that traveled out to homeless encampments looking for veterans and making them aware of the services BFHP provides.

Alex found his calling and it is outreach. He said “when we went into our first encampment, we ended up getting three vets into housing immediately.” Alex felt elated by the experience. “I thought, wow, I can do this.”

Today, Alex is stable and permanently housed. “Alex is a big one for paying it forward” says Sempari. Today Alex is employed by BFHP as a part-time outreach worker who is highly motivated to help move homeless veterans into permanent housing. His story is just one among the hundreds of homeless veterans BFHP has been able to help.

Every year, clients and former clients, BFHP staff members, political dignitaries, and community members gather to celebrate the success of our clients who have moved into permanent housing and maintained their housing for a year or more. This year, Tracy Cascio, Homeless Program Manager, U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs, was the guest speaker at our Seventh Annual Client Success Event on September 9th, and our focus was on veterans.

The program included a powerful performance that brought together personal stories, poems, movement, and music from some of our veteran clients. The performance was a collaboration between our clients who are military veterans in transitional housing, artist-in-resident Krista DeNio, and BFHP’s Chaplain, Marianna Sempari. Said DeNio, “Power to the hands of these veterans, who then and now are most compelled to continue serving their community.”

Said Executive Director, Terrie Light, “I was overwhelmed by a myriad of emotions. It is always both moving and elevating to hear about the struggles and successes of our clients. The hard work they do to move their lives forward is what keeps us motivated.”

Performance at BFHP’s Seventh Annual Client Success Event.

The performance was made possible through a collaboration between California Shakespeare Theater’s Triangle Lab and Berkeley Food & Housing Project.

“I was so moved by the whole event and so grateful to have been part of the day,” said Rebecca Novick, Triangle Lab Director at California Shakespeare Theater.
Berkeley Food & Housing Project wishes to thank Subaru of America, Inc. for its help raising funds and awareness for our veterans' program during Subaru's “Share the Love” event. During the event, Subaru of America, Inc. donates $250 for every new vehicle purchased or leased to the customer’s choice of participating charities, including BFHP’s veterans’ program.

Last year, through the work of the team at Fairfield Subaru, 2525 Martin Road in Fairfield, CA, Subaru Inc. donated $12,078 to support the services that Berkeley Food & Housing Project provides to the homeless veterans of our community. Wahid Khugiani, Executive General Manager at Fairfield Subaru is respectful of, and passionate about serving our nation’s heroes. “We appreciate the work our veterans do for us.”

BFHP is extremely grateful to be back in their “Share the Love” program for another year and wishes to thank Subaru for their ongoing partnership.

Thank you, Subaru!

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Help your community—donate to support BFHP!
We can’t do it without you.

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