



# Legacy Business Registry Staff Report

Hearing Date: December 11, 2023

## FIREFLY RESTAURANT

*Application No.:* LBR-2023-24-018  
*Business Name:* Firefly Restaurant  
*Business Address:* 4288 24th St.  
*District:* District 8  
*Applicant:* Bradley Levy, President/Owner  
*Nomination Date:* November 6, 2023  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Rafael Mandelman  
*Staff Contact:* Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds  
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

### BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

Firefly Restaurant is a neighborhood restaurant in Noe Valley, opened by Brad Levy and Veva Edelson at 4288 24<sup>th</sup> Street in 1993. For the past 30 years, Firefly has been serving new Californian cuisine. As an early example of the farm to table movement in restaurant dining, Firefly prepares vegetarian, vegan, and gluten free offerings that are seasonal depending on the availability of local produce. It is also a favorite among the Bay Area Jewish community for its authentic Jewish cuisine offered during Jewish holidays.

Firefly operated for 12 years under the original ownership of Bradley Levy and Veva Edelson before Veva Edelson left in 2005. Between 2005 and 2023, Bradley ran the business by himself for 18 years until another partner, Haley Sausner, joined the leadership team in 2023. The restaurant only has closed for six months during that 30-year period, as mandated by the City and County of San Francisco during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Firefly has also earned many commendations for its service and food, including "Best new restaurant" in 1995 by the San Francisco Bay Guardian, "Best Restaurant at Which to Take Your Relationship to the Next Level" from SF Weekly in 1999, "Award of Distinction" from a Zagat Survey in 2001, and "Certificate of Honor" from the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 2014. Firefly has also been featured in several local publications including San Francisco Eater, The Infatuation, Thrillist, SFGATE, The Jewish News of Northern California, The San Francisco Chronicle, and SF Station. The Firefly hosted a special dinner on its 20th anniversary where guests wrote hundreds of letters to the restaurant about how it has impacted their lives.

### CRITERION 1

**Has the applicant operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years?**

Yes, Firefly Restaurant has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years:

4288 24th St. from 1993 to Present (30 years)

### CRITERION 2

**Has the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community?**

Yes, Firefly Restaurant has contributed to the history and identity of the Noe Valley neighborhood and San Francisco.

#### Legacy Business Program

Office of Small Business  
City Hall Room 140  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
(415) 554-6680  
legacybusiness@sfgov.org  
[www.legacybusiness.org](http://www.legacybusiness.org)





The Historic Preservation Commission recommended the applicant as qualifying, noting the following ways the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community:

- The business is associated with new Californian cuisine, the farm-to-table movement in cuisine, and Jewish culinary culture.
- The property is in an active SF Survey area and will be formally evaluated in 2024.
- Firefly was described as “Best new restaurant” in 1995 by the San Francisco Bay Guardian, “Best Restaurant at Which to Take Your Relationship to the Next Level” from SF Weekly in 1999, “Award of Distinction” from a Zagat Survey in 2001, and “Certificate of Honor” from the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 2014.
- Firefly has been featured in several local publications including San Francisco Eater, The Infatuation, Thrillist, SFGATE, The Jewish News of Northern California, The San Francisco Chronicle, and SF Station.
- Firefly Restaurant has been co-owned by two separate women during its 30-year history. It is one of the few restaurants in the city that serves Jewish cuisine during Jewish holidays. Pre-pandemic, Firefly Restaurant donated 20 percent of the proceeds during January each year to the public school system in San Francisco.

### **CRITERION 3**

**Is the applicant committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms?**

Yes, Firefly Restaurant is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the business.

### **HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION**

The Historic Preservation Commission recommends that Firefly Restaurant qualifies for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) and recommends safeguarding of the below listed physical features and traditions.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Flashing Firefly sculpture.
- Feeding the people and their souls with good food and kind service.
- New California cuisine with vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free options.
- Identity as a restaurant.

### **CORE PHYSICAL FEATURE OR TRADITION THAT DEFINES THE BUSINESS**

Following is the core physical feature or tradition that defines the business that would be required for maintenance of the business on the Legacy Business Registry.

- Restaurant.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the San Francisco Small Business Commission include Firefly Restaurant currently located at 4288 24th St. in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds  
Legacy Business Program

#### **Legacy Business Program**

Office of Small Business  
City Hall Room 140  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
(415) 554-6680  
legacybusiness@sfgov.org  
[www.legacybusiness.org](http://www.legacybusiness.org)





# Small Business Commission

Resolution No. \_\_\_\_\_

December 11, 2023

## FIREFLY RESTAURANT

*Application No.:* LBR-2023-24-018  
*Business Name:* Firefly Restaurant  
*Business Address:* 4288 24th St.  
*District:* District 8  
*Applicant:* Bradley Levy, President/Owner  
*Nomination Date:* November 6, 2023  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Rafael Mandelman  
*Staff Contact:* Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds  
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

### **Adopting findings approving the Legacy Business Registry application for Firefly Restaurant, currently located at 4288 24th St.**

**WHEREAS**, in accordance with Administrative Code Section 2A.242, the Office of Small Business maintains a registry of Legacy Businesses in San Francisco (the "Registry") to recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the City and to be a tool for providing educational and promotional assistance to Legacy Businesses to encourage their continued viability and success; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years; or

**WHEREAS**, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for more than 20 years but less than 30 years, has had no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years, has significantly contributed to the history or identity of a particular neighborhood or community and, if not included on the Registry, faces a significant risk of displacement; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business has contributed to the neighborhood's history and identity; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the business; and

**WHEREAS**, at a duly noticed public hearing held on December 11, 2023, the San Francisco Small Business Commission reviewed documents and correspondence, and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry application; therefore

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Small Business Commission hereby includes Firefly Restaurant in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Small Business Commission recommends safeguarding the below listed physical features and traditions at Firefly Restaurant.

**Legacy Business Program**  
Office of Small Business  
City Hall Room 140  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
(415) 554-6680  
legacybusiness@sfgov.org  
[www.legacybusiness.org](http://www.legacybusiness.org)





Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Flashing Firefly sculpture.
- Feeding the people and their souls with good food and kind service.
- New California cuisine with vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free options.
- Identity as a restaurant.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Small Business Commission requires maintenance of the below listed core physical feature or tradition to maintain Firefly Restaurant on the Legacy Business Registry:

- Restaurant.

---

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED by the Small Business Commission on December 11, 2023.

---

Katy Tang  
Director

RESOLUTION NO. \_\_\_\_\_

- Ayes –  
Nays –  
Abstained –  
Absent –

**Legacy Business Program**  
Office of Small Business  
City Hall Room 140  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
(415) 554-6680  
legacybusiness@sfgov.org  
[www.legacybusiness.org](http://www.legacybusiness.org)





# Legacy Business Registry

# Application Review Sheet

*Application No.:* LBR-2023-24-018  
*Business Name:* Firefly Restaurant  
*Business Address:* 4288 24th St.  
*District:* District 8  
*Applicant:* Bradley Levy, President/Owner  
*Nomination Date:* November 6, 2023  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Rafael Mandelman

**CRITERION 1:** Has the applicant has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years?

Yes  No

4288 24th St. from 1993 to Present (30 years)

**CRITERION 2:** Has the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community?

Yes  No

**CRITERION 3:** Is the applicant committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms?

Yes  No

**NOTES:** NA

**DELIVERY DATE TO HPC:** November 8, 2023

Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds  
Legacy Business Program

## Legacy Business Program

Office of Small Business  
City Hall Room 140  
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
(415) 554-6680  
legacybusiness@sfgov.org  
[www.legacybusiness.org](http://www.legacybusiness.org)



Member, Board of Supervisors  
District 8



City and County of San Francisco

**RAFAEL MANDELMAN**

November 6, 2023

Re: Nomination of Firefly Restaurant to the Legacy Business Registry

Dear Director Tang,

I am writing this letter to enthusiastically recommend Firefly Restaurant for inclusion in the Legacy Businesses Registry.

Since Chef Brad Levy and Line Cook Veva Edleson opened its doors in 1993, Firefly Restaurant has been driven by family and connection. Brad and Veva's care and energy have enabled them to cultivate a hotspot for classic contemporary American cuisine, with a wide selection of comfort food to satisfy their many guests.

Its rich history and homey atmosphere are reflected in the art pieces painted by co-founder Veva as well as the diverse and delicious flavors brought to the table. Firefly Restaurant is an example of resilience, as it was able to weather the pandemic through their participation in the City's parklet program and a legion of loyal patrons.

Over the years, Firefly's menu has evolved to include gluten-free as part of founder Brad's efforts to make his restaurant more accessible to people with dietary restrictions — having two children with celiac disease drove the change. The diverse meals with elements from Japanese and southern soul food elevate the Firefly Restaurant as a unique experience for its diners.

Firefly Restaurant is a beloved and esteemed fixture of San Francisco's restaurant scene and I am happy to support their application as a Legacy Business.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "RJM".

Rafael Mandelman  
Member, San Francisco Board of Supervisors



# Legacy Business Registry Application



## Business Information

**Business name:** Firefly Restaurant

**Business owner name(s):** Bradley Levy, Haley Sausner (in progress)

*Identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business*

**Current business address:** 4288 24th St. San Francisco CA 94114

**Telephone:** (415 ) 821 – 7652      **Email:** info@fireflysf.com

**Mailing address (if different than above):**

**Website:** fireflysf.com

**Facebook:** facebook.com/fireflyrestaurntsf      **Twitter:** twitter.com/fireflysf

**7-digit San Francisco Business Account Number (BAN):** 0 9 2 2 7 4 8

**Do any of these describe your business?** (select all that apply)

*Requires at least 51% of the business be owned, operated, and controlled by the business designation below.*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Immigrant-Owned Business | <input type="checkbox"/> Owned by Person with a Disability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> LGBTQ+-Owned Business    | <input type="checkbox"/> Veteran-Owned Business            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Minority-Owned Business* | <input type="checkbox"/> Woman-Owned Business              |

*\*Minority is defined as one or more of the following racial or ethnic groups: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Hispanic or Latino; Middle Eastern or North African; Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander*

## Contact Person Information

**Contact person name:** Bradley Levy

**Contact person title:** President/Owner

**Contact telephone:** ( ) –      **Contact email:**

## Business Location(s)

List the business address of the original San Francisco location, the start date of business, and the dates of operation at the original location. Check the box indicating whether the original location of the business in San Francisco is the founding location of the business.

If the business moved from its original location and has had additional addresses in San Francisco, identify all other addresses and the dates of operation at each address.

**Original San Francisco address:**  **Zip Code:**

**Is this location the founding location of the business? (Y/N):**

**Dates at this location:** **From:**  **To:**

---

**Other address (if applicable):**  **Zip Code:**

**Dates at this location:** **From:**  **To:**

---

**Other address (if applicable):**  **Zip Code:**

**Dates at this location:** **From:**  **To:**

---

**Other address (if applicable):**  **Zip Code:**

**Dates at this location:** **From:**  **To:**

---

**Other Address (if applicable):**  **Zip Code:**

**Dates at this location:** **From:**  **To:**

---

**Other address (if applicable):**  **Zip Code:**

**Dates at this location:** **From:**  **To:**

---



## Applicant Disclosures

### San Francisco Taxes, Business Registration, Licenses, Labor Laws and Public Information Release.

This section is verification that all San Francisco taxes, business registration, and licenses are current and complete, and there are no current violations of San Francisco labor laws. This information will be verified. A business deemed not current with all San Francisco taxes, business registration, and licenses, or has current violations of San Francisco labor laws, will not be eligible to apply for grants through the Legacy Business Program.

In addition, we are required to inform you that all information provided in the application will become subject to disclosure under the California Public Records Act.

Please read the following statements and check each to indicate that you agree with the statement. Then sign below in the space provided.

- I am authorized to submit this application on behalf of the business.
- I attest that the business is current on all of its San Francisco tax obligations.
- I attest that the business's business registration and any applicable regulatory license(s) are current.
- I attest that the Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement (OLSE) has not determined that the business is currently in violation of any of the City's labor laws, and that the business does not owe any outstanding penalties or payments ordered by the OLSE.
- I understand that documents submitted with this application may be made available to the public for inspection and copying pursuant to the California Public Records Act and San Francisco Sunshine Ordinance.
- I hereby acknowledge and authorize that all photographs and images submitted as part of the application may be used by the City without compensation.
- I understand that the Small Business Commission may revoke the placement of the business on the Registry if it finds that the business no longer qualifies, and that placement on the Registry does not entitle the business to a grant of City funds.

Name: Bradley Levy

Signature: *Bradley Levy*

Date: 07.21.2024

# **FIREFLY RESTAURANT**

## **Written Historical Narrative**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **a. Describe the business. What does it sell or provide?**

Firefly is a neighborhood restaurant in Noe Valley that nourishes its community by cooking seasonal homestyle goodness, with sustainability of body and planet in mind. It's always been a struggle to describe "Firefly's cuisine." They serve food that, more often than not, accesses that part of their deepest soul where genuine expression can flow forth. Firefly has always tried to give their food and service their best selves, as honest and vulnerable as they can muster. They strive to be a place where you might actually have a real connection; maybe with your server, maybe with your food, or maybe with your gracious host who is ACTUALLY glad you're there. Oh, you wanted a restaurant description? Sorry. Can't really help you there. They're not so big on labels. The food at Firefly is hard to nail down as they are constantly evolving and entirely seasonal and personal. They've used "Food you eat" as a tagline on occasion, and that remains accurate. One could also describe the cuisine as "Food you really want you to eat."

#### **b. Describe whom the business serves.**

Firefly has always strived to serve a broad sector of the San Francisco population; long time locals, the LGBTQ community, tourists, and most notably those with dietary preferences or restrictions (vegan, gluten free, carnivores, etc.). It is also a favorite among the Bay Area Jewish community for its authentic Jewish cuisine offered during the holidays.

#### **c. In about 2-5 words (15-30 characters), describe what the business is known for.**

"Great food, weird staff." (This was an actual review that Firefly got on Yelp that they have since turned into their tagline).

### **CRITERION 1: The business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years**

#### **a. Provide a short history of the business, including locations and owners.**

Firefly has been an independent restaurant located at 4288 24th Street in Noe Valley since it opened on November 3, 1993. The restaurant was founded by Bradley Levy and Veva Edelson.

In 1993, Brad Levy and Veva Edelson were working at San Francisco's groundbreaking American brasserie Embarko Restaurant. Brad was a frustrated chef, and Veva was an artist and

frustrated line cook. Both shared the dream of owning a restaurant where the food was great, the service attentive, and the atmosphere magical; a place where the employees were interesting and kind people who were encouraged to be themselves and offer a genuinely great dining experience. They dreamed of a restaurant where the customers felt like they were at a friend's house for dinner, and that friend just happened to be a great cook. Brad and Veva were indeed dreamers, but more importantly, they were inexperienced and naïve enough to believe they could actually pull it off.

They began searching for a place with a stove and room for some tables and chairs. What else could you need? They already had a name. After weeks of constant brainstorming and countless bad restaurant names, Brad called Veva one night and said "Firefly?" and both immediately knew that it was perfect.

They walked into the restaurant known as La Roca, which in its prime was a bustling, immensely popular Latin seafood restaurant. But under different ownership, it was nearly empty every night. Both Brad and Veva really liked the setting at 24th and Douglass streets in the far-reaching outskirts of the business district, away from what most people perceive as commercial Noe Valley. After looking around for about two minutes, Brad was ready to walk out. This was one ugly restaurant! Veva took out her sketchpad and began making some little scribble drawings. Brad said, "Let's go." Veva said, "It could work." Besides, it was the only place they had seen that they could afford to buy.

With a few dollars left over and a couple of talented friends, they began the work of creating a dream out of a nightmare. With Veva's resourceful vision, the dining room became a land of comfort and whimsy. With Brad's dogged determination, the layers of caked-on grease were stripped off and the ancient cooking equipment was resuscitated.

On November 3, 1993, Firefly invited their friends and family for a soft opening. They ran out of most of the food by eight o'clock. Though there were a few SNAFUs on opening night, and some growing pains in Firefly's adolescent years, Brad and Veva eventually began to see how beautiful their restaurant was. They felt appreciated by those they served, and they had created a family. That made it all worthwhile.

Veva left Firefly in 2005 to follow her passions for creating beautiful things and living a life dedicated to stewardship of land and community. She founded, operates, and continues to thrive at Piano Farm in Bloomfield, California.

Haley Sausner joined Firefly in 2013 as a line cook and grew into a culinary powerhouse. Haley became chef in the summer of 2014. The joy and dedication she brings to her craft has energized the entire restaurant. There is no one in the universe who cares more about whether you enjoy your meal at Firefly, including the patrons. In 2023, Haley became a co-owner of the restaurant with Brad Levy.

Today, Brad Levy is still hands-on with all aspects of the operation of the restaurant, which is a fancy way of describing Haley's errand boy.

**b. Provide the ownership history of the business in a consolidated year-to-year format.**

1993 to 2005: Bradley Levy; Veva Edelson  
2005 to 2023: Bradley Levy  
2023 to Present: Bradley Levy; Haley Sausner

**c. Describe any circumstances that required the business to cease operations in San Francisco for any significant length of time.**

Firefly had to close for six months during the COVID pandemic in 2020 due to mandated shutdowns by the City and County of San Francisco. The restaurant then served take-out food only for a few months, during which time they built their parklet. Then there were a few months of solely outdoor dining before beginning to inch back into indoor dining.

**CRITERION 2: The business has contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community**

**a. Describe the business' contribution to the history and/or identity of the neighborhood, community, business sector, or San Francisco as a whole.**

Firefly was arguably the first restaurant to bring the sensibilities of new California dining to Noe Valley. Having been the chef of San Francisco's groundbreaking Embarcadero brasserie, Embarko, Brad Levy saw the opportunity to bring the fun and excitement of big city dining to the intimate setting of Noe Valley's blustery outskirts. Firefly's novel approach to putting as much energy into its vegetarian and vegan offerings as its meat and seafood offerings made it a destination for diners across the region. Its commitment to unpretentious, yet detail oriented service was icing on the preverbal cake.

**b. Is the business associated with significant people or events, either now or in the past?**

Brad's mother would certainly say he was significant. Otherwise, Firefly was founded and run by run-of-the-mill, normal people who wanted a place to hang out with like-minded people who were cool and fun.

**c. How does the business demonstrate its commitment to the community?**

Firefly has always been a fierce advocate of public education. Brad's kids both went through the San Francisco public school system, so the restaurant is incredibly aware of the challenges facing these schools, their teachers, and the parents. Pre-COVID pandemic, Firefly would

annually donate 20 percent of their January sales to the public school of their diners' choice. Firefly would like to get back to that as soon as they don't have to worry about surviving each week.

**d. Has the business ever been referenced in the media, business trade publication, and/or historical documents?**

Firefly has been referenced in the media too many times to mention. They have boxes of reviews from the San Francisco Chronicle, San Francisco Examiner, and many other publications that are no longer in existence. Brad Levy was a San Francisco Chronicle rising star back in 1994, and Firefly Restaurant was on restaurant critic Michael Bauer's top 100 list for well over a decade.

Following are some notable recent media mentions:

- *The 14 Restaurants in San Francisco Changing the Narrative for Gluten-Free Diners*  
Eater San Francisco  
September 28, 2023  
<https://sf.eater.com/maps/best-gluten-free-restaurants-food-san-francisco>
- *Where To Eat & Drink In Noe Valley*  
The Infatuation  
August 24, 2023  
<https://www.theinfatuation.com/san-francisco/guides/noe-valley-restaurants>
- *13 Phenomenal Vegan Restaurants in San Francisco*  
Eater San Francisco  
June 26, 2023  
<https://sf.eater.com/maps/best-vegan-restaurants-in-san-francisco>
- *The Most Romantic Restaurants in San Francisco for a Magical Date Night*  
Thrillist  
February 8, 2023  
<https://www.thrillist.com/eat/san-francisco/most-romantic-restaurants-san-francisco>
- *Why you should spend the day in San Francisco's Noe Valley*  
SFGATE  
February 7, 2023  
<https://www.sfgate.com/local/article/noe-valley-17759968.php>
- *The Ultimate Guide to Celebrating Hanukkah in the Bay Area in 2022*  
Eater San Francisco  
November 15, 2022  
<https://sf.eater.com/2022/11/15/23460277/hanukkah-san-francisco-bay-area-2022>

- *Firefly chef Brad Levy's family food tales — and his 2019 Passover menu*  
J. (The Jewish News of Northern California)  
April 16, 2019  
<https://jweekly.com/2019/04/16/firefly-chef-brad-levys-family-food-tales-and-his-2019-passover-menu/>
- *The glories and challenges of a middle-aged restaurant in the Bay Area*  
San Francisco Chronicle  
January 23, 2019  
<https://www.sfchronicle.com/food/article/The-glories-and-challenges-of-a-middle-aged-13555913.php>
- *Noe Valley's Firefly Celebrates 20th Anniversary*  
SF Station  
October 16, 2013  
<https://www.sfstation.com/2013/10/16/noe-valleys-firefly-celebrates-20th-anniversary/>

**e. Has the business ever received any awards, recognition, or political commendations?**

Firefly Restaurant has received the following awards, recognition, and political commendations:

- Commendation from former California State Senator Quentin Kopp, year unknown.
- “Best new restaurant” from The San Francisco Bay Guardian, July 1995.
- “Best Restaurant at Which to Take Your Relationship to the Next Level” from SF Weekly, 1999.
- “Award of Distinction” from Zagat Survey, 2001
- “Certificate of Honor” from the City and County of San Francisco Board of Supervisors, October 2014.

**f. How would the community be diminished if the business were to be sold, relocated, shut down, etc.?**

At the restaurant's 20th anniversary in 2013, Firefly decided to host a special dinner of Firefly favorites. To score a reservation, diners needed to write stories of how Firefly was important in their lives. They received hundreds of applications describing the numerous ways the businesses impacted peoples' lives in a significant way. These stories have been the highlight of the restaurant's 30 years in business. The treasured customers that wrote the stories, and likely a few more, would be sad if the business were to close. The dogs of Noe Valley would also be sad, as they wouldn't get their house-made pumpkin-peanut butter treats anymore.

### **CRITERION 3: The business is committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business**

**a. Is the business associated with a culturally significant building, structure, object, signage, mural, architectural detail, neon sign, or any other special physical feature that defines the business?**

The flashing firefly sculpture above the front door, which was Firefly's only signage for many years, was crafted by local sculptor William Wareham (1941-2023). "Wareham was a recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts in 1974 and the Eisner Prize for sculpture at UC Berkeley in 1968 and 1969. He has exhibited widely throughout California, including solo exhibits at the Oakland Museum Sculpture Court and the Pacific Heritage Museum in San Francisco, and in Nevada, Hawaii, Illinois, and New Jersey. Whether creating massive works for corporate or estate collections or human-scale sculpture, unique tables, benches, and chairs, or even pedestal-size often kinetic pieces, Wareham remain(ed) true to his inner drive to capture the viewer's consciousness through his powerful abstract sculpture."<sup>1</sup>

The building that houses Firefly was constructed in the late 19th century and home to 18 residential units. It is rumored to be culturally significant in that it was once a bohemian artist enclave in the style of Tales of the City.

**b. In a few words, describe the main business activity you commit to maintaining.**

Firefly is committed to feeding the people and their souls with good food and kind service.

**c. What is the plan to keep the business open in the long term beyond the current ownership?**

Firefly is committed to keeping its doors open as long as possible. It is a home away from home for many, and even just plain home for some. They've always stayed attuned to the evolution of the neighborhood to be sure they are of continuing value to their clientele. They also encourage every employee, new and old, to contribute their talent to the advancement of their mission. One of the primary reasons for making Chef Haley Sausner a co-owner, aside from her having become the heart and soul of the restaurant, is to ensure that Firefly continues to grow and thrive in the future.

**d. What challenges is the business facing today?**

It is nearly impossible for Firefly to maintain its standards of quality, sustainable ingredients, and standards of taking good care of its employees while still being financially viable. The business has never made any significant profit, but the owners were happy to make enough to survive to the next year. In the past decade, the cost of labor has doubled and the cost of

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.williamwareham.com/>

ingredients has more than doubled. There is no way people would tolerate the necessary price increases (they complain about the prices as it is), so the business is forced to be creative in order to just survive.

---

**Legacy Business Program staff will add the following details:**

**a. Features or traditions that define the business and should be maintained for the business to remain on the Legacy Business Registry.**

Restaurant.

**b. Other special features of the business location, such as if the property associated with the business is listed on a local, state, or federal historic resources registry.**

The Planning Department Historic Resource Status of the building at 4288-4298 24th Street is "B - Unknown / Age Eligible."

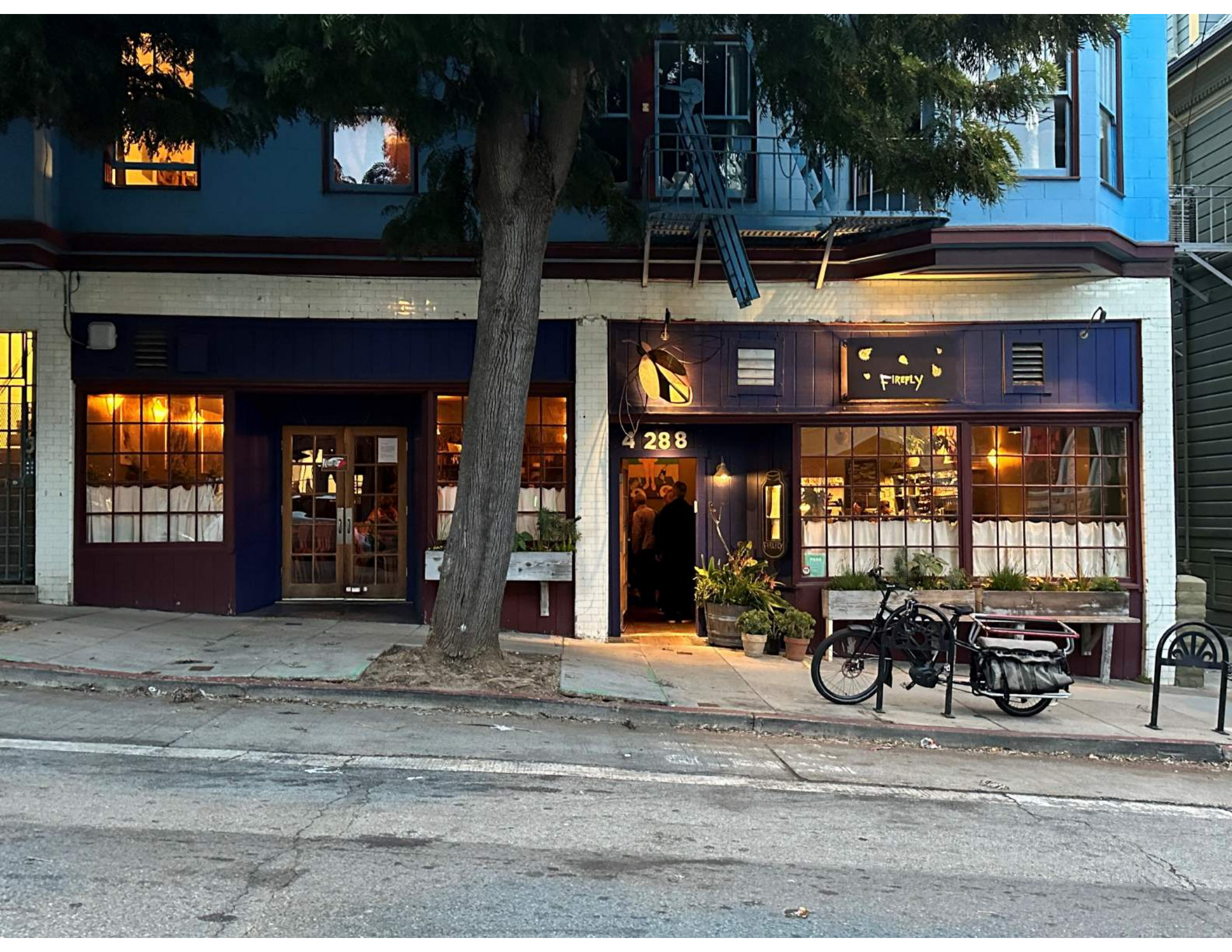




71

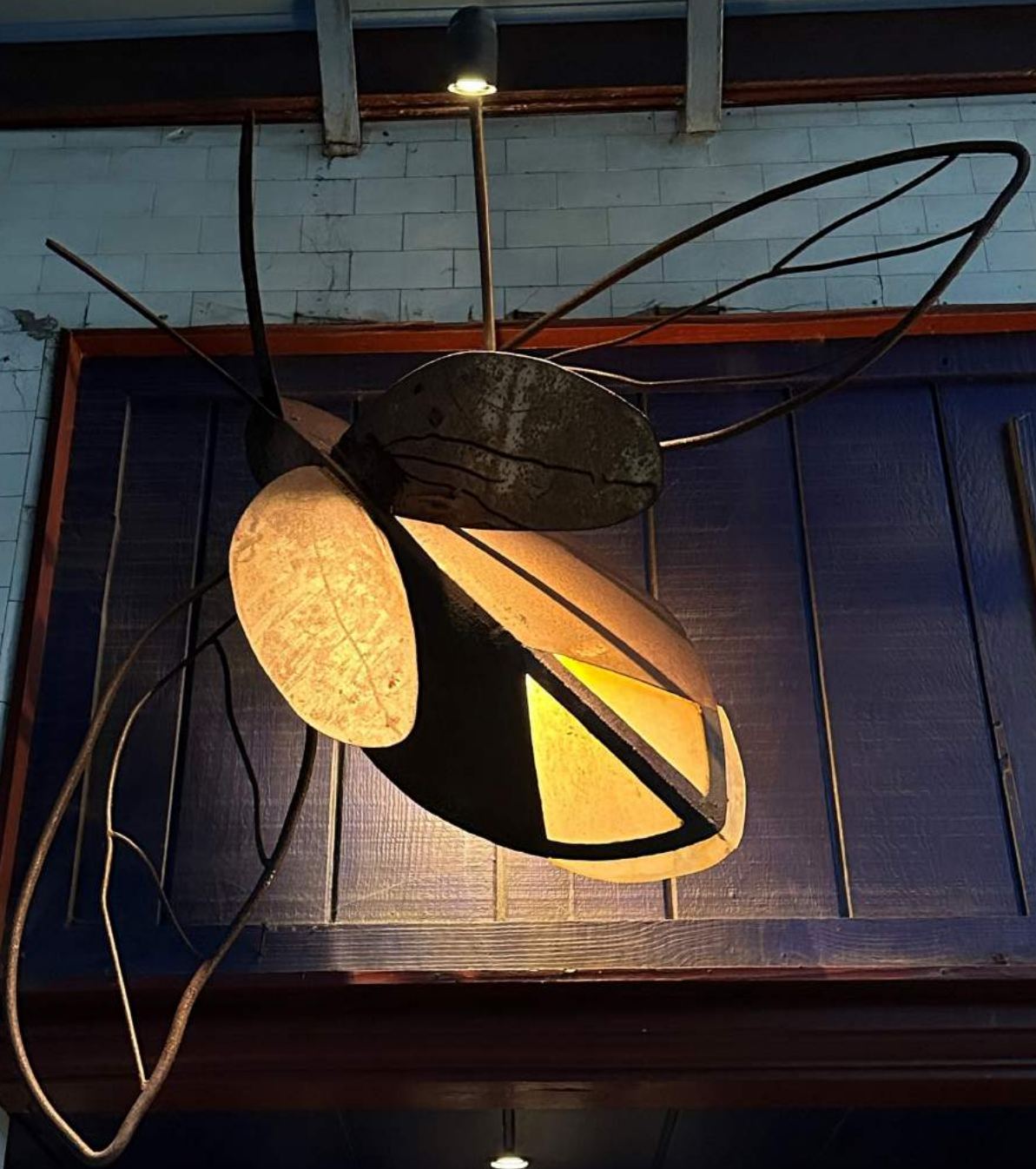
STOP

71



4288

FIREFLY



4 288



















SFSTATION

FOOD & DRINK

## Noe Valley's Firefly Celebrates 20th Anniversary

BY KEITH MIZUGUCHI | OCTOBER 16, 2013



These days, when a restaurant stays open for 1-2 years in the Bay Area, it is often a significant achievement. But for 20 years – that's a true milestone.

That is the case with Firefly Restaurant, one of the true definitions of a neighborhood spot in San Francisco. “When Veva and I opened in 1993, we just wanted to get open and start up the restaurant. We were young, idealistic and confident. We maxed out our savings and credit cards and just went for it,” said chef and owner Brad Levy. “In the beginning, we made things up as we went along. But we never compromised on the vision for Firefly.”



Levy said he and co-founder Veva Edelson never really thought about the future when they first opened the restaurant on 24th Street. After looking at several different neighborhoods, areas such as Bernal Heights and Glen Park, they settled on Noe Valley, at the site of what had been a very successful restaurant, La Roca. Although the chef there was doing some creative food, he was not the best businessman and the space had several things to overcome, from a lack of foot traffic to a small kitchen space. But despite some rough times early on in the process, Levy said he persevered. “I had one of the biggest turning points in my life. It was the day after our opening and I truly felt I had made the biggest mistake in my life,” he said. “I was consumed by what went wrong and had thoughts of just giving up. But I turned that negative energy around and figured I had to learn how to fix things, rather than ponder what went wrong. I found my passion in the kitchen and when I look back, I’m so happy that I’ve devoted 20 years of my life to this place.”

To hear Levy describe Firefly and to walk in the doors to sit down for dinner, it truly is as he says, a “very personal restaurant.” There is a feeling of comfort and being at home, from the understated ambience to the food, with different influences from around the globe. Levy said the restaurant is constantly evolving and although they remain current, they have stayed true to their concept. “There is a real personal expression of caring and nurturing about it. And I think those personal sensibilities are understood by the people who came in,” said Levy. “We have not been about chasing trends, which is I think the case of a lot of restaurants these days. They are run by business people more than chefs and because of that business plan, and constantly changing the identity of the restaurant, they are not meant for the long run. That’s part of the reason Firefly is such an anomaly nowadays.”



Part of the evolution for the restaurant has had Levy taking a bit of a step back from the daily operations, meaning he's spending more time with his family. He is not in the kitchen as much and said he has a great staff right now, and allows them to cook what they want to cook. "I would never force them to cook my food. I've always felt that chefs need to have a passion for what they are cooking. I think we've always wanted to cook food that is good, food that we cook for our families and truly, food that is not like other restaurants here."

He said he is at the point where he knows his staff can "run the restaurant by themselves," and said he loves where the restaurant is, in terms of staff, the team in the kitchen and the food and service they are providing to guests. But that wasn't always the case. "Back in the late 90's, I opened a second restaurant in Potrero Hill, that served breakfast and lunch and dinner on a nightly basis. I thought it could be a second great version of Firefly, simple foods with great ingredients," Levy said. "But I could never get the right chef in place to run the kitchen, so I ended up running back and forth between both spaces. There were days I would do breakfast and lunch service at North Star, than head over to Firefly for dinner service. I just began to lose touch with Firefly and saw that restaurant, that had such a personal feel to it, was quickly losing its identity without me there constantly. It just became too much to run both places, so we closed and I put my focus back on Firefly."



Levy was honest and forthright and said that if he was trying to start a restaurant today, he most likely would have failed. But his passion for what he has established still burns bright, just like the Firefly on the exterior of the restaurant. It is still a restaurant that is a personal expression of nurturing and caring, that is a collaborative effort and not about “making a profit,” but rather providing a spot for good food, good company and service with a smile.

To show his appreciation for all the people that have walked through the door over the last 20 years, Firefly is holding a weeklong celebration of being in business for 20 years. The menu will feature some of the classic dishes cooked over the years. Levy is also asking longtime patrons to email stories about what Firefly has meant to them, with reservations being made through those stories for the actual 20th birthday dinner on November 3. That night will feature a greatest hits menu, with all the items at their original prices. The celebration takes place from Wednesday, October 30 through Tuesday, November 5, with plenty of familiar faces throughout the week. It's hard to find places that one can call home, but that's exactly the niche Firefly and Brad Levy have carved out on a quiet corner of Noe Valley in San Francisco. Firefly is located at 4288 24th Street in San Francisco.

*Photo Credit: Firefly, via Facebook*

THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY

FREE

# GUARDIAN



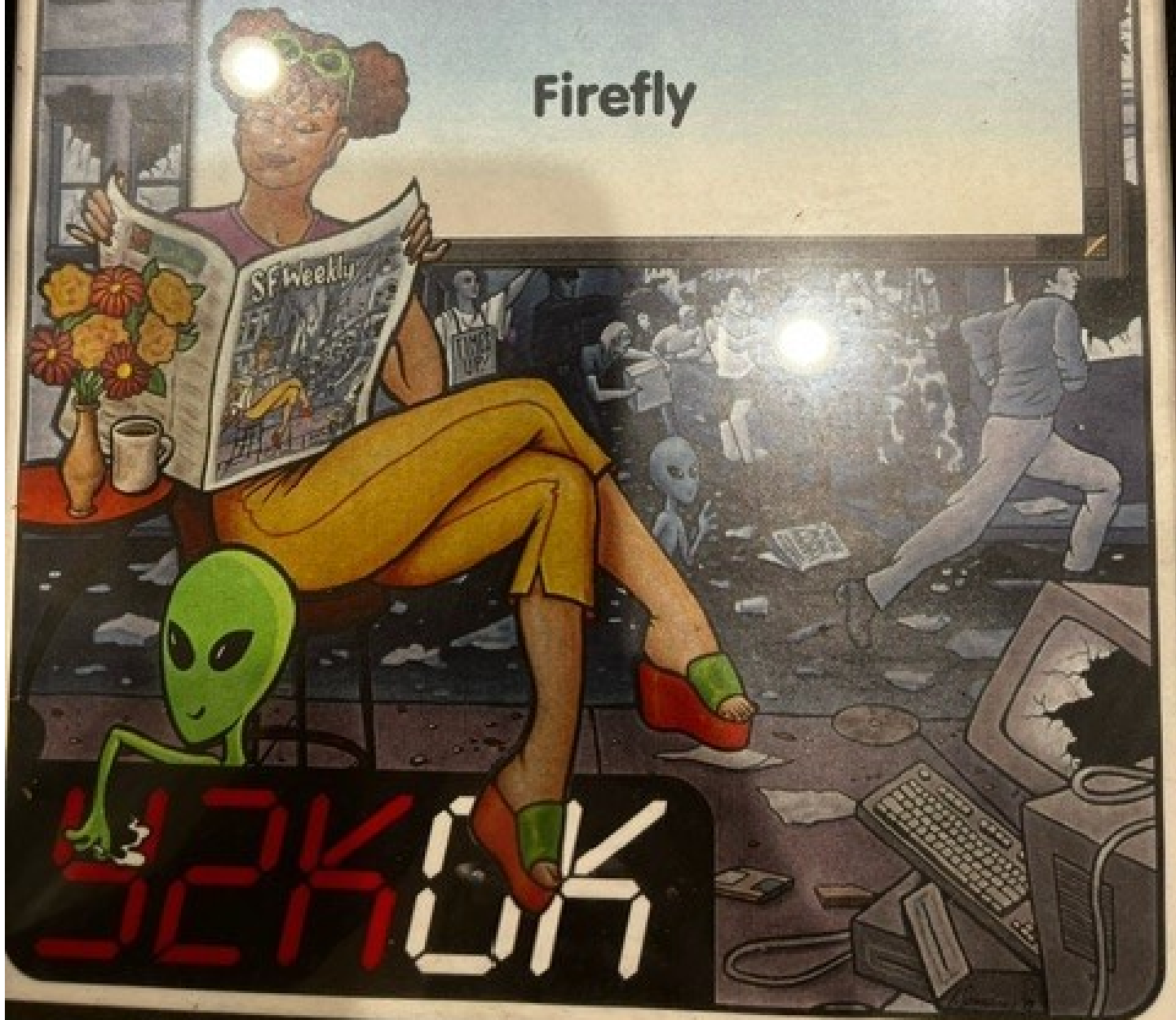
Best new restaurant: Firefly

Nation's Original  
**Best of the Bay**

Featured in the 21st Annual "Best Of" Edition, July 26, 1995

Best Restaurant at Which  
to Take Your Relationship  
to the Next Level

Firefly





# ZAGAT SURVEY

AWARD OF  
DISTINCTION

Firefly

2001 San Francisco Restaurants

[zagat.com](http://zagat.com)

# Certificate of Honor

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
City and County of San Francisco

*The Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco hereby issues, and authorizes the execution of, this Certificate of Honor in appreciative public recognition of distinction and merit for outstanding service to a significant portion of the people of the City and County of San Francisco by:*

## FIREFLY RESTAURANT

Since opening in 1993, Firefly Restaurant has been serving delicious food at its intimate Noe Valley location as well as graciously contributing to the community. As part of Restaurant Appreciation Month and in recognition of this neighborhood favorite, the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco extends to Firefly its highest honor.

*Scott Wiener*

Scott Wiener  
Supervisor, District 8  
October 21, 2014

*Mark Ye*  
*R. J. Z.*  
*Made's Fine*  
*Chen Glad*  
*Matei Chen*  
*John*  
*John*  
*John*



# LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**HEARING DATE: December 6, 2023**

*Filing Date:* November 8, 2023  
*Case No.:* **2023-010589LBR**  
*Business Name:* Firefly Restaurant  
*Business Address:* 4288 24<sup>th</sup> Street  
*Zoning:* NC-1 (NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL, CLUSTER) Zoning District  
 40-X Height and Bulk District  
*Cultural District:* Not applicable  
*Block/Lot:* 2830/025  
*Applicant:* Bradley Levy  
 4288 24<sup>th</sup> Street  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Rafael Mandelman  
*Located In:* District 8  
*Staff Contact:* Will McCallum – 628-652-7338  
 Will.Mccallum@sfgov.org

**Recommendation:** Adopt a Resolution to Recommend Approval

## Business Description

Firefly Restaurant is a neighborhood restaurant in Noe Valley, opened by Brad Levy and Veva Edelson at 4288 24<sup>th</sup> Street in 1993. For the past 30 years, Firefly has been serving new Californian cuisine. As an early example of the farm to table movement in restaurant dining, Firefly prepares vegetarian, vegan, and gluten free offerings that are seasonal depending on the availability of local produce. It is also a favorite among the Bay Area Jewish community for its authentic Jewish cuisine offered during Jewish holidays.

Firefly operated for twelve years under the original ownership of Bradley Levy and Veva Edelson, before Veva Edelson left in 2005. Between 2005 and 2023, Bradley ran the business by himself for 18 years, until another partner, Haley Sausner, joined the leadership team in 2023. The restaurant only has closed for six months during that thirty-year period, as mandated by the City and County of San Francisco during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Firefly has also earned many commendations for its service and food, including “Best new restaurant” in 1995 by the San Francisco Bay Guardian, “Best Restaurant at Which to Take Your Relationship to the Next Level” from SF Weekly in 1999, “Award of Distinction” from a Zagat Survey in 2001, and “Certificate of Honor” from the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 2014. Firefly has also been featured in several local publications including San Francisco Eater, The Infatuation, Thrillist, SFGATE, The Jewish News of Northern California, The San Francisco Chronicle, and SF Station. The Firefly hosted a special dinner on its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary where guests wrote hundreds of letters to the restaurant about how it has impacted their lives.

The Firefly Restaurant’s location at 4288 24<sup>th</sup> St is a Category B (Unknown/Age Eligible) structure on the northeast corner of 24th Street and Douglass Street in the Noe Valley neighborhood. It is within a NC-1 Neighborhood Commercial Cluster District, and a 40-X Height and Bulk District. It also within a Central Neighborhoods Large Residence special use district and was flagged as insignificant under Criterion C/3 (Architecture/Design) by the Neighborhood Commercial Corridors Survey in 2015; however, this survey was not adopted, and thus, no formal determination has been made.

## Staff Analysis

### Review Criteria

**1. *When was the business founded?***

The business was founded in 1993.

**2. *Does the business qualify for listing on the Legacy Business Registry? If so, how?***

Yes. Firefly Restaurant qualifies for listing on the Legacy Business Registry because it meets all of the eligibility Criteria:

- a. Firefly Restaurant has operated continuously in San Francisco for 30 years.
- b. Firefly Restaurant has contributed to the history and identity of the Noe Valley neighborhood and San Francisco.
- c. Firefly Restaurant is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the organization.

**3. *Is the business associated with a culturally significant art / craft / cuisine / tradition?***

Yes. The business is associated with new Californian cuisine, the farm-to-table movement in cuisine, and Jewish culinary culture.

**4. *Is the business or its building associated with significant events, persons, and / or architecture?***

No.

**5. *Is the property associated with the business listed on a local, state, or federal historic resource registry?***

No. In 2015, the building was flagged as ineligible under Criterion C/3 (Architecture/Design) in the Neighborhood Commercial Corridors Survey, however, no formal determination was made. The property is in an active SF Survey area and will be formally evaluated in 2024.

**6. Is the business mentioned in a local historic context statement?**

No, not as of the date of this Executive Summary.

**7. Has the business been cited in published literature, newspapers, journals, etc.?**

Yes. Firefly was described as “Best new restaurant” in 1995 by the San Francisco Bay Guardian, “Best Restaurant at Which to Take Your Relationship to the Next Level” from SF Weekly in 1999, “Award of Distinction” from a Zagat Survey in 2001, and “Certificate of Honor” from the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 2014. Firefly has also been featured in several local publications including San Francisco Eater, The Infatuation, Thrillist, SFGATE, The Jewish News of Northern California, The San Francisco Chronicle, and SF Station.

**Racial and Social Equity Analysis**

On July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020 the San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission adopted [Resolution No. 1127](#) centering Preservation Planning on racial and social equity. Understanding the benefits, burdens, and opportunities to advance racial and social equity that proposed Preservation Planning documents provide is part of the Department’s Racial and Social Equity Initiative. This is also consistent with the Mayor’s Citywide Strategic Initiatives for equity and accountability and with the Office of Racial Equity, which required all Departments to conduct this analysis.

The Legacy Business Program is deeply intertwined with these goals. One of the primary purposes of the Legacy Business Program is to maintain San Francisco’s cultural fabric and to foster civic engagement and pride by assisting long-operating businesses remain in the city. The Legacy Business Registry was established to recognize longstanding, community-serving businesses that are valuable cultural assets of the city. These businesses, ranging from restaurants to art galleries to tire shops to community shelters, are key to sustaining the racial and social diversity in San Francisco and adding to the identity and character of our city and the many communities within it.

Firefly Restaurant has been co-owned by two separate women during its 30-year history. It is one of the few restaurants in the city that serves Jewish cuisine during Jewish holidays. Pre-pandemic, Firefly Restaurant donated 20 percent of the proceeds during January each year to the public school system in San Francisco.

**Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business**

**Location(s) associated with the business:**

Current Locations:

- 4288 24<sup>th</sup> Street (1993 – Present)

**Recommended by Applicant**

- Flashing Firefly sculpture
- Feeding the people and their souls with good food and kind service

- New California cuisine with vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free options
- Identity as a restaurant

## **Basis for Recommendation**

The Department recommends the Historic Preservation Commission adopt a resolution recommending the business listed above be adopted by the Small Business Commission to the Legacy Business Registry.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

Draft Resolution

Legacy Business Registry Application:

- Application Review Sheet
- Section 1 – Business / Applicant Information
- Section 2 – Business Location(s)
- Section 3 – Disclosure Statement
- Section 4 – Written Historical Narrative
  - Criterion 1 – History and Description of Business
  - Criterion 2 – Contribution to Local History
  - Criterion 3 – Business Characteristics
- Contextual Photographs and Background Documentation



# HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION DRAFT RESOLUTION NO. ###

**HEARING DATE: December 6, 2023**

*Case No.:* 2023-010589LBR  
*Business Name:* Firefly Restaurant  
*Business Address:* 4288 24TH ST  
*Zoning:* NC-1 (NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL, CLUSTER) Zoning District  
40-X Height and Bulk District  
*Block/Lot:* 2830/025  
*Applicant:* Bradley Levy  
4288 24th Street  
*Nominated By:* Supervisor Rafael Mandelman  
*Located In:* District 8  
*Staff Contact:* Will McCallum - 628-652-7338  
Will.Mccallum@sfgov.org

ADOPTING FINDINGS RECOMMENDING TO THE SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSION APPROVAL OF THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY NOMINATION FOR FIREFLY RESTAURANT CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 4288 24TH ST, BLOCK/LOT 2830/025.

**WHEREAS**, in accordance with Administrative Code Section 2A.242, the Office of Small Business maintains a registry of Legacy Businesses in San Francisco (the "Registry") to recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the City and to be a tool for providing educational and promotional assistance to Legacy Businesses to encourage their continued viability and success; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business has contributed to the City's history and identity; and

**WHEREAS**, the subject business is committed to maintaining the traditions that define the business; and

**WHEREAS**, at a duly noticed public hearing held on December 6, 2023, the Historic Preservation Commission reviewed documents, correspondence and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry nomination.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends that Firefly Restaurant qualifies for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) as it has operated for 30 or more years and has continued to contribute to the community.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends safeguarding of the below listed physical features and traditions for Firefly Restaurant.

*Location(s):*

Current Locations:

- 4288 24<sup>th</sup> Street (1993 – Present)

*Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:*

- Flashing Firefly sculpture
- Feeding the people and their souls with good food and kind service
- New California cuisine with vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free offerings
- Identity as a restaurant

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission's findings and recommendations are made solely for the purpose of evaluating the subject business's eligibility for the Legacy Business Registry, and the Historic Preservation Commission makes no finding that the subject property or any of its features constitutes a historical resource pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5(a).

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby directs its Commission Secretary to transmit this Resolution and other pertinent materials in the case file to the Office of Small Business December 6, 2023.

Jonas P. Ionin  
*Commission Secretary*

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

RECUSE:

ADOPTED: December 6, 2023