

Ed and Julie, Besties

Mayor Ed Lee is spending an awful lot of time with Supervisor Julie Christensen.

By Joe Fitzgerald Rodriguez

Together they played ping-pong

in the park, gawked at lion dancers, hid under desks with schoolkids, and posed with the twirling beauties of North Beach's Festa Coloniale Italiana.

Such is the montage of joint public appearances by Mayor Ed Lee and Supervisor Julie Christensen over the past few months. Christensen, a mayoral appointee, faces an election challenge next month from former Supervisor Aaron Peskin.

And Lee is using every opportunity to remind the public of his choice for the office.

A review of Lee's official city schedule shows at least 11 mayoral events in Chinatown and North Beach with Christensen since April.

By contrast, the other 10 members of the Board of Supervisors may have forgotten what Lee looks like. The mayor has had five events with Board President London Breed, one with Malia Cohen, one with Scott Wiener — and no announcements of exclusive events with the other seven supervisors.

Winning Chinatown is key for Christensen, who has potentially alienated voters there through several verbal gaffes (calling tenants there “lower-class” instead of “low-income”; referring to the Stockton Street tunnel as a “wormhole”). This may be why Lee, hugely popular in the Chinese community, appears attached to Christensen's hip.

Christensen is also receiving plenty of free social media exposure on city

time. Lee chronicled her cameo at his annual ping-pong tournament via his official Twitter feed.

“Playing a friendly match with @SupChristensen at #ChinatownPingPong tournament. I can tell she's been practicing!” Lee (or his press people) tweeted.

Meanwhile, a ribbon-cutting ceremony at Joe DiMaggio Playground netted Christensen posts on the Twitter and Facebook accounts of the Recreation and Park Department, the Department of Public Works, and the SF Public Library.

That's a lot of free face-time.

Political campaigning is forbidden on city time and on the city dime, but it's entirely legal to make public appearances and meet with constituents.

But while Lee's public relationship campaign with Christensen may not violate the letter of ethics laws, it sure does look odd.

“There seems to be a lot of various ribbon cuttings, program launches, and that sort of thing in the last couple months in Chinatown, especially with the mayor,” said Jim Ross, a campaign consultant who is working for a labor-backed independent expenditure

committee that supports Peskin.

“It's not them campaigning,” Ross said, but “it's ‘doing things’ with an official city veneer.”

In a statement, a Lee spokeswoman said Christensen's exemplary record justified such attention. Christensen herself says that a close relationship with the mayor is to be expected.

“If I lose, a candidate who vowed to make a mayor's life a living hell [may win], and you're surprised he'd spend time with his appointee?” Christensen told us. “The fact of the matter is, I try to use that perk judiciously. But there are times when the weight of the mayor's help is valuable.”

Especially



Fred Noland

Mo' Money, Mo' Witnesses?

The city hopes bigger payouts will entice murder witnesses to come forward.

Supervisor London Breed is haunted by the quadruple homicide that rocked her district in January, when four young men riding in a stolen car were gunned down in a drive-by at Page and Laguna streets. Police chalked up the murders to turf warfare between rival gangs, but without surveillance footage or witnesses, the investigative trail has gone cold.

Breed hopes money can speed justice along. She wants the city to reward witnesses whose tips lead to an arrest and conviction of an unsolved homicide that's at least a year old with up to \$250,000.

“So many black boys and men I know have been killed, their children have been killed,” Breed says. The reward idea “grew out of my frustration, and out of the mothers of victims who want justice.”

Although Breed says it's unlikely the city will dip into the fund often, it sends a message that rewards aren't ad hoc, and that “everyone deserves justice.”

Over the past six years, the city has averaged about 50 homicides per year. According to FBI data, police made arrests in 60 percent of those cases.

As to whether a big payday will entice witnesses in the remaining 40 percent of cases, Breed says, “These are poor communities, and I know there's a culture of non-snitching. Anyone who comes forward has to be prepared to start a new life somewhere else.”

That's a tall order, but “if this legislation takes killers off the street, then that's what we'll do,” Breed says. **JL**

Street Seen

Frustrated by the city's 311 “snitch app,” a formerly homeless man created an alternative.

San Franciscans have a new

option for helping the homeless. This month, the mobile app for 311, the city services clearinghouse, introduced a feature that lets citizens report homeless people who need non-emergency medical treatment or who require intervention because of aggressive behavior. As a bonus, users can upload photos of the homeless person in question.

“Walking past someone suffering on the streets does not reflect our

San Francisco values,” said Mayor Ed Lee, who has vowed to remove the city's 6,800 homeless from the street before the Super Bowl. “Our residents want to help, and we are providing easy ways for them to do that.”

Darcel Jackson, a formerly homeless ironworker who this year spent six months in a shelter, calls 311's new feature “a snitch app” and the latest tool in City Hall's campaign to crack down on the homeless.

“311 started out as a way to report potholes and graffiti, then somebody got the bright idea to tell on people,” Jackson says. “The city's homeless policies are ineffective because they don't include the homeless.”

The City Administrator's office

confirmed that homeless people weren't consulted during the planning of the new 311 feature, although representatives from the Department of Public Health, the Department of Human Services, the Homeless Outreach Team, and the mayor's office spoke on their behalf.

Jackson sees this as another example of the bureaucratic groupthink that has bloated San Francisco's annual homeless services budget to \$167 million, but made little headway in solving chronic homelessness.

That's why Jackson has developed an alternative app, See | Me, which connects homeless people to information about shelters, soup kitchens, legal and medical services, and job counseling.

“I had homeless people give me feedback about everything,” Jackson says, including where to place download stations where technicians will help users install and navigate the app.

Jackson spent \$200 out of pocket to launch the free app — hefty capital for a man who earns \$62 per month. He raised another \$1,000 at the app's Oct. 13 unveiling at The Hall on Market Street but says he's “starting to worry that we won't be able to raise the money to keep this going after all the work we put into it.”

So far, tech companies haven't shown much interest in partnering with Jackson. Neither have city supervisors, none of whom attended the app's unveiling.

“For just a fraction of the city's homeless budget, this app could be funded every year,” Jackson says.

Despite the cold shoulder from techies and politicians, Jackson is persevering. He hopes to get support from Sam Dodge, the city's new homeless czar. (Jackson says he tried for four months to schedule an appointment with Bevan Dufty, Dodge's recently resigned predecessor, but never got a response.) And he plans to launch an Oakland version of See | Me in February.

“I want this to pop up in cities across the country,” Jackson says. “If we can make it work here, we can make it work anywhere in the world.”

Jeremy Lybarger