

'Making' matters to our cities

By **Kate Sofis**

From President Obama's Make It In America initiative, which offers grant funding to help businesses create manufacturing jobs, to Maker Faires planned in ever more locations, "local" and "making" seem to be on the collective American mind. But what does this maker movement really mean for a city like San Francisco?

This past weekend, I took a short walk with my two young daughters to a 100-year-old industrial building in the heart of our Mission District neighborhood. We went to see the enormous kilns being prepared to fire the first San Francisco-made tile in more than 50 years at Heath Ceramics. I am reminded of how the soul-gratifying work of making a physical product contributes not only to the well-being of the maker but

also to the sense of pride in the region where it is made. Increasingly, consumers want to know the story of the products they buy — who made them, where they are from.

As executive director of SFMade, an organization founded at the height of the recession in 2010 with a mission to support and rebuild San Francisco's manufacturing sector, I think seeing the ceramics factory come to fruition is a reflection of our community's collective work. From helping Heath find the vacant former commercial laundry building that would become its home, to navigating planning and permitting, to assisting with the hiring of new employees, SFMade has collaborated with Heath and a wide array of private- and public-sector entities to realize what is now a model for other local manufacturers and other neighborhoods.

Heath Ceramics' decision to build a factory in San Francisco (the original Sausalito factory is still operating) represents a homecoming: Edith Heath founded the company on Clay Street.

Across San Francisco, local manufacturing is taking its rightful place, with active support from Mayor Ed Lee. From our humble beginnings with 12 founding manufacturers, SFMade membership has swelled to more than 400 companies. These include Anchor Brewing, bag maker Timbuk2, and up-and-comers such as apparel maker Taylor Stitch and mobile-device-case maker DodoCase. These local manufacturers are powered by personal connections among their neighbors, by ideas generated and shared with other enterprising companies and investors, and by the creativity and craft of the close to 4,000



Heath Ceramics

Heath Ceramics opened a Mission District factory.

Meet the Makers

SFMade will host San Francisco's third annual citywide SFMade Week, May 6-12.

Go to www.sfmade.org.

people who work for them.

Most of all, our manufacturers are fueled by their pride of place. Local manufacturers, in turn, give back to our neighborhoods by creating jobs, adding vibrancy and driving economic opportunity. When Heath's new facility is at full-scale production, it will provide 30 to 40 jobs in one of San Francisco's most ethnically diverse

inner-city neighborhoods.

When I heard my 5-year-old daughter exclaim, as she handled a piece of Heath-craft, "I want to *make these* when I am older!" I was struck by the opportunity that lies before us to create new pathways for youth into manufacturing careers, to reimagine what "making" can be. Cities have a powerful role to play by linking young people to apprenticeships at manufacturers just a bus ride from home and by offering youth access to the growing number of urban maker/hacker facilities, where they can learn to design and make things themselves, such as Tech Shop, and by reincorporating skills-based curriculum into our schools.

Perhaps above all, the power of reviving local manufacturing lies in the simple possibility of exposing even our youngest makers to the wonders of a small blue tile, made in a massive orange kiln, just a two-block walk from home.

Kate Sofis is the founding executive director of SFMade.