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She hopes that these and other East Palo Alto kids will grow up with the same kind of "multi-media, multi-faceted" arts center that kids across the freeway have.

"I am determined to see a cultural arts center built in this community in the next few months," McNair says. "That's what this benefit is for. These kids, we keep complaining about the kind of ways they act out on street, and yet there are very few things for them to do.

"There's an enormous pool of talented people in East Palo Alto. Many of them have put their art away to raise a family. We want to bring them back out of the background."

DETAILS

"DIRTY LAUNDRY"

When and where

8 p.m. today and Saturday at the Manhattan Playhouse, Manhattan Avenue and W. Bayshore Road, East Palo Alto

Tickets

\$10; (415)321-6611

BOB ANDRES / PENINSULA TIMES TRIBUNE

H. Tierrah McNair is versatile enough to portray seven different characters in her one-woman show, "Dirty Laundry." It's a benefit performance for a vision she hopes to help build — the East Palo Alto Cultural Arts Center.

Airing her laundry

East Palo Alto actress gives one-woman benefit for her dream

Tom Scanlon
PENINSULA TIMES TRIBUNE

Remember when East Palo Alto used to be a nice place to live?

H. Tierrah McNair does, and she and others who have lived here long enough to remember that time are trying to bring it back.

McNair is an actress with a reputation that is growing with her one-woman show, "Dirty Laundry." She is also a 26-year resident of East Palo Alto, and is staging a benefit performance of "Dirty Laundry" tonight and Saturday night at the Manhattan Playhouse.

Admission is \$10 (a "minimum donation") for the show, which is a benefit for the East Palo Alto Cultural Arts Center — a center now just a vision. McNair recalls when East Palo Alto did have a cultural center, in the old Nairobi Shopping Center on Bay Road. "This place used to be a mecca," McNair says.

She's hoping to help bring a central art scene back to East Palo Alto.

"The East Palo Alto Cultural Arts Center committee has the same vision I have — it's a *now* pro-



Oh, that "Dirty Laundry"! McNair wonders if the work will never end.

cess," McNair says. "By next week, we hope to be in some space — we can't wait for a building to take care of the business we need to be taking care of. It's summer, the kids are out of school ... I look out from the front yard in my block and I see a dozen 12- to 14-year-old kids who have absolutely nothing to do. If we don't do something, they may

go the way a number of older kids in the community have gone. We can't afford to wait for sites or funds."

McNair, a Bay Area stage veteran who played Spider Woman in the Magic Theater's "Coyote Cycle" and Mama in "The Colored Museum," received rave reviews for the San Francisco run of "Dirty Laundry." According to Callboard the Bay Area theater monthly, "McNair has a wonderful feel for the essential moments or gestures or words that define character ... a funny, moving and politically astute piece of work."

The one-woman musical is set in an East Palo Alto Laundromat. McNair plays seven characters, from boastful MC Honey to soulful Big Mama ("the soul of the play") to honor student Bearle to crack addict Yezddid (as in, *Yes-he-did*).

This is an ode to what the crumbling urban communities in America once were, and specifically to East Palo Alto, where McNair's heart lies. She is writing and directing the Summer Youth Theatre Project's "Flying High," which will be performed by the 5-to-14-year-old kids next Saturday at the Ravenswood High School. "The cutest bunch of *brilliant* kids," McNair boasts.

Please see **LAUNDRY, B-2**