Toast of the TENDERLOIN

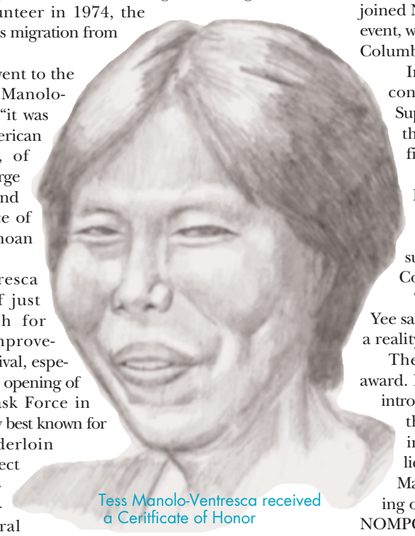
by Stan Hutton

NOMPC honors two dozen of TL's finest

Tess Manolo-Ventresca has seen the Tenderloin go through its most dramatic changes. She started working in the neighborhood as a community volunteer in 1974, the year before the mass migration from Southeast Asia.

"When I first went to the neighborhood, " Manolo-Ventresca recalls, "it was mostly African American and white. Now, of course, there is a large Asian community and a growing presence of Hispanic and Somoan residents as well."

Manolo-Ventresca has been part of just about every push for neighborhood improvement since her arrival, especially for the SFPD's opening of its Tenderloin Task Force in 1991. She's probably best known for starting the Tenderloin Improvement Project in 1984 while a volunteer youth worker at the Central YMCA, where she worked right up until her recent retirement. TIP puts Tenderloin kids, ages 11 to 14, to work removing graffiti, gardening on rooftops and cleaning the streets.



Tess Manolo-Ventresca received a Certificate of Honor

Five years ago, Manolo-Ventresca helped organize the Seguero Tenderloin Games, named after Kenny Seguero, a late Tenderloin Task Force police officer who died of a heart attack in 1998. The games are a mini-Olympics competition for neighborhood youth. Manolo-Venstresca is preparing "Flavors of the Tenderloin," a recipe book that will be sold to raise money for the games.

"Change in the Tenderloin must come from the people who live and work there," Manolo-Ventresca says. "We've been lucky to have a lot of people working to make things better."

Manolo-Ventresca and 23 other Tenderloin stalwarts and organizations were honored April 1 at NOMPC's 2nd Annual Roast and Recognition Dinner at Boeddeker Park. More than 50 people joined NOMPC President Garrett Jenkins for the Saturday evening event, which benefited both NOMPC and the Tenderloin Unit of the Columbia Park Boys and Girls Club.

Individuals and agencies were honored by NOMPC for their contributions to the Tenderloin during 1999. In addition, Supervisor Leland Yee presented two Certificates of Honor from the Board of Supervisors. Manolo-Ventresca received the first.

"I've been part of the Tenderloin for a long time," Manolo-Ventresca says. "Even though I won't be working here every day, I do plan to keep coming back."

Community volunteer Dorinda Ottey was next. The supervisors honored her for helping to establish the Northeast Community Federal Credit Union on Taylor Street.

"No one thought a credit union had a chance in the Tenderloin," Yee said. "But with the persistence of Dorinda and others, it's now a reality."

Then it was Yee's turn to get an award. NOMPC honored him for introducing the ordinance that prohibits issuing off-sale liquor licenses North of Market, thus meeting one objective of NOMPC's Tenderloin 2000 Survey and Plan. There are currently 45 off-sale liquor licenses in the Tenderloin.

City Attorney Louise Renne arrived to accept a Public Safety Award on behalf of Deputy City Attorney Anthony Bedwell-Coll, honored by NOMPC for enforcing city business codes that forced the Mini-Adult hard-core movie theater to close because of alleged drug dealing there. The building at the corner of Jones and Golden Gate will become a Tenderloin Columbia Boys and Girls Club clubhouse, Jenkins said.

City Attorney Louise Renne accepted an Award for Anthony Bedwell-Coll

"This is just like the Academy Awards, only better," Renne said as she accepted the certificate.

Other honorees:

Public Safety

Tenderloin Task Force For making more arrests with fewer officers than any other San Francisco police district, and for breaking ground for a new permanent Tenderloin Police Station across the street from Boedekker Park.

Adopt-A-Block For spearheading a successful lawsuit against Doba Cafe and Deli that led to a significant decrease in illegal drug activities at Eddy and Leavenworth.

Kali Grosberg For preparing the Tenderloin for possible Y2K problems.

Housing

Tenderloin Housing Clinic For developing the Jefferson Hotel into clean, safe and secure affordable housing for low-income people.

John Stewart Co. For developing the Windsor Hotel into affordable housing.

Housing Rights Committee For helping tenants of the Warfield office building to organize a meeting that resulted in several tenants who faced eviction receiving relocation funds.

Economic Development

Melvin Carriere, Former co-chairman of the Lower Eddy/Leavenworth Task Force, for leading the North of Market Pavilion development efforts.

Northeast Community Federal Credit Union For opening a branch in the Tenderloin, giving residents an alternative to check-cashing outlets and an opportunity to invest in their own community.

Metropolis Hotel For improving the economic vitality of the Turk-Mason-Market area by renovating a tourist hotel and hof brau and creating a mural that highlights an entry point to the Tenderloin.

Physical Environment

Adopt-A-Street and Slug For launching programs that provide more frequent street and sidewalk cleaning in the Tenderloin.

Community Resources Action Project For advocating for improved sidewalk maintenance, repairs and construction throughout the Tenderloin.

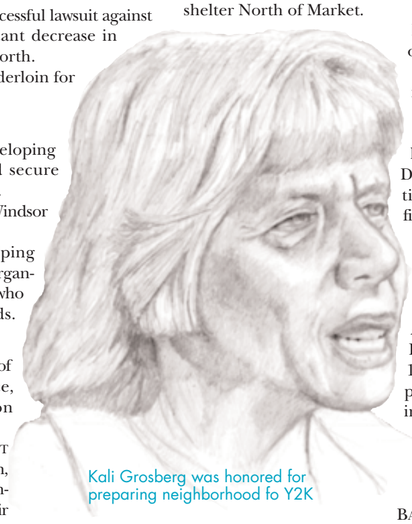
Market Street Association For installing high-intensity, "old Tenderloin"-style sidewalk lampposts on Golden Gate Avenue.

Human Services

Larkin Street Youth Center For developing a homeless youth shelter North of Market.

Hamilton Family Center For developing a shelter at the old firehouse on Golden Gate to serve homeless families.

Roscoe Hawkins For his perseverance in advocating for the homeless family shelter in the old Fire Department headquarters and station at 260 Golden Gate, despite fierce opposition from the community.



Kali Grosberg was honored for preparing neighborhood fo Y2K

Community Facilities

Algernon Dedmon, San Francisco Neighborhood Safety Partnership, and Gwendolyn Brooks, Adopt-A-Block, For spearheading Save Boeddeker Park Week in January 1999. The event marked the turning point in restoring the park to its original intended use.

Susan Phillips For developing the 209 Jones Street Computer Center to serve Tenderloin residents.

Bay Area Women's and Children's Center For leading the effort to rehabilitate and reopen Sergeant John McCauley Park for Tenderloin kids.

Vietnamese Community Center For serving the Tenderloin Vietnamese community.

'I just kept yelling, help, help, help us'

FATAL FIRE

by Adrian D. Varnedoe

The fire at 225 Taylor St. that killed one Caroloina San Felipe, put her brother, Luis Rodriguez, in the hospital and left 63 people without a home, is being investigated by the SFPD homicide division because Fire Department investigators believe the blaze was intentionally set.

The two-alarm fire, reported about 2:20 a.m. on July 15, took firefighters an hour to douse. The blaze badly damaged six of the 24 units in the apartment building. The Red Cross set up temporary housing at the Hamilton Recreation Center for the displaced tenants.

Most of the residents, including Christina Middleton and her boyfriend, Leonardo Alondo Jr., were asleep when the fire started. Middleton told *The Extra* that she awoke to the sound of breaking glass and Alondo yelling at her to get up. "I just kept yelling, 'Help, help, help us. There's a fire'... The next reaction was for us to help ourselves."

She said that after Alondo broke a window and pushed off a screen, they both jumped onto a platform next to their window and from there they tried to get down. But, before reaching the ground, she said, "We saw our neighbor next door, the guy that's in the hospital, jump through [the window] head first." Middleton and Alondo returned to the building to see what if anything could be saved, but most of their belongings were destroyed. "We could only salvage video tapes... and a little box of [Pokémon cards] and some of my pictures," Middleton said.

She said that they plan to move back into the building — which they called home for six months — when the damage is repaired, an estimated four to six months.

Hector and Eva Cestigador and their five-year-old daughter plan to move back into the building. But, for the time being, they're at the Victorian Hotel on a seven-day voucher. They don't know where they're going to end up after that. They hope it will be in the Tenderloin, which Hector has called home for 15 years, and Eva seven, all in the same building.

Investigators believe the fire started on the second floor and spread to the other floors. Most of the building suffered from fire damage; other parts were damaged by water.

Residency roulette

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established residency. Evicting a resident can take up to three months, so managers save time and money by kicking the tenants out earlier, according to Windsor Hotel manager Jerry Martin. The Windsor Hotel does not evict tenants prematurely, housing-rights advocates say.

"These managers don't want to go through that process," Martin said. "That's costing them more money."

Maybe the managers have a point

Craig Powell is a case in point. Powell got an eviction notice from the Jones Street Marlton Manor on Jan. 11. He was told to leave the hotel, but he didn't. His last day was supposed to be April 22, but he didn't leave then, either.

Powell was being evicted for lease violations for being drunk and disorderly in the hotel. He said he has 14 citations against him.

Where do tenants go after being pushed out prematurely?

"Some go to [homeless] shelters, some go to friends' houses, and some stay on the streets," said Windsor manager Martin.

Roxanne Trade said that some tenants secure a room at another hotel before their 28 days is up, so that they don't end up sleeping on the street when they get kicked out.

"Some of them know they gotta go, so they try to get another place before their time is up," Trade said.

Not many options

Nicholas Rosenberg from Adopt-A-Block said that six months ago a family of two women and two children – victims of the "musical rooms" practice – came up to him on the street, asking where they could go.

"[One of the women] was going off about how it sucks," Rosenberg said. "They had just come from the [Tenderloin Housing Clinic] and must have been dissatisfied."

Debbie Raucher said he turns away 10 to 15 people per day

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Task Force commander now San Mateo's top cop

THE CAPTAIN becomes a CHIEF

by Adrian D. Varnedoe

Tenderloin community leaders, residents, family and friends came out to a barbecue luncheon at St. Boniface on April 27 to honor and say good bye to longtime Task Force cop Capt. Susan Manheimer, before she became police chief of San Mateo, replacing John Stangl who retired after 30 years.

Manheimer's emotional day began at the monthly Tenderloin Task Force meeting where she said bye and thanks to the organizations and residents she had worked with over the years to make the Tenderloin a better place to live.

"As I drove down the streets today, I was still glaring at the bad guys standing on the corner," she said at the meeting, "letting them know that they don't belong here."

The Salvation Army Turk Street Corps. gave Manheimer a plaque, as did Adopt-A-Block. Citizens on Patrol gave her a photo album with photos dating from when she was a lieutenant at the Task Force. Market Street Association presented her with a brick from a building with a plaque mounted on it honoring her for her work.

Supervisor Leslie Katz was to present a plaque from Mayor Brown, declaring April 27, 2000, as Susan E. Manheimer Day in the Tenderloin. But the supervisor didn't show up so an aide made the presentation.

Manheimer, 46, was an SFPD cop for 16 years. Chief Fred Lau promoted her to captain in 1997. Manheimer worked as the nighttime shift captain. Then, in 1998, she was promoted to captain of the Tenderloin Task Force, becoming the third highest ranking woman in the department.

At the barbecue Manheimer and her mother, Sheila, were each given a bouquet of flowers. Manheimer told the crowd how much she's would miss working with them and gave credit to the beat officers for their work. "Managers take credit for home runs hit by others," she said.

Sheila Manheimer told *The Extra* how proud the whole family was of her daughter, saying that public service runs in the family. Susan's father was a New York City councilman. "She's always been an outstanding woman," Sheila said about her daughter, "And it gives us great, great pleasure to see that she's going to be able to continue the good work she's always done."

A young man came up to Sheila and praised her daughter's qualities. "She has always amazed me," said Jason Lini, a 28-year-old law student. "It's very rare in law enforcement to find someone who is a good administrator, a good person, and can still be a good cop.

"She has it all," he said.

Some of the officers at the barbecue said that Manheimer's leaving was a loss for the Tenderloin. "I think she'll be good for San Mateo," said Officer Harry Woo. "Everyone here is going to miss her."

"She listens to everyone in the community, and I think that is the most important part," he continued.

"It's a gain for San Mateo, and a loss for us," said Sgt. Joe Garrity.

Manheimer was officially installed as police chief of San Mateo on May 1. She is the fourth woman police chief in California, but she'll head the biggest department among the four chiefs, with 83 men and women officers and a yearly budget of $16 million.

"The new captain has some big shoes to fill," said Lena Feeney of the Department of Parking and Traffic.

And that is new Capt. Steven Tacchini, a 23-year veteran of the SFPD. Before coming to the Task Force he headed the Muni police unit. He has worked at the Mission station, Southern station, the Permit Department, and the SFPD Tactical Unit. Tacchini was at the barbecue so residents got to meet him. But this day was for Manheimer, and she milked it, hugging and kissing the friends that will miss her.

"We're very happy for Capt. Manheimer, Chief Manheimer now," said Lin Valente of the Market Street Association. "But we're sad to see her leave the community because she's been a wonderful help with getting everybody together to make improvements in the area."

Task Force Capt. Susan Manheimer poses with her mother, Sheila, during her day of fun and roses.

PHOTO BY ADRIAN D. VARNEDOE

"My heart is heavy. I think the Tenderloin is special," Manheimer said. "The need is great for all the resources, all the caring and the commitment. Everyone here is dedicated to providing a better quality of life. The wonderful thing about the Tenderloin is that the job is never done here. But I feel so confident that I left the Tenderloin in good hands."

Residency roulette

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because there's no housing for them, and there are many other illegally evicted tenants who don't go to the THC.

Raucher said the practice is demoralizing. Tenants don't see any point in trying to improve hotel conditions, she said, which "destabilizes" the hotels. "They don't have any incentive to make things better, or to have community (with other tenants)," she said.

Shaw said that the tenants' rights are "virtually the same as living in an apartment," and any tenant can complain about the conditions in a hotel or request that certain requirements be met. However, he said, the managers can use their leverage on these tenants, and kick them out if they complain about the condition of a hotel.

"If they ask you to leave after two weeks, you're out of luck," Shaw said.

A (not very) civil offense

Although playing "musical rooms" is illegal, it's not a criminal offense but rather a civil one, so police can't go after the hotel owners and managers, Officer Chan of the Tenderloin Task Force said. "It's a civil matter [and] not really a police matter," said Chan, who declined to give his first name.

That leaves the responsibility for enforcing tenants' rights to the city attorney's office.

"We're hopeful," Raucher said. "It's great that the city attorney is prosecuting these owners."

The lawsuits, which include charges against the Edgeworth Hotel on O'Farrell Street, the Hotel West and the Drake Hotel, are ongoing. Palma said the trial date will most likely be May 2001, unless a settlement is reached between the city and the hotel owners.

"The city attorney has had a positive impact," Shaw said.