

Census courts ethnic communities in Tenderloin

➤ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

The Tenderloin Latino population is growing fast, she says, estimating it at from 5,000 to 7,000. The cost of living is forcing families out of the Mission and into the cheaper Tenderloin, she says.

But some Latinos just aren't paying the census any attention.

"I've had seven or eight calls from people I know in the last few days asking me if they should throw away the forms," Lopez says. "They ask why is this necessary."

Lack of outreach caused the Vietnamese in San Francisco to be undercounted in 2000, according to Philip Nguyen, executive director of the Southeast Asian Community Center on O'Farrell Street. They numbered about 10,000, with up to 70% in the Tenderloin, but that total today could be 15,000, Nguyen says.

Nguyen said that 10 years ago, many immigrants simply didn't know the importance of the census or that they were supposed to participate — or that the form was confidential. They were intimidated by the length of it, too. And some Chinese Vietnamese immigrants declared as Chinese.

Because no legal consequence resulted from noncompliance, no one was the wiser until the 2010 Vietnamese outreach began. In December, Nguyen began asking the 200 Vietnamese families that come to his center every Friday for food distributions to listen first to a census pitch. Next to voting, it is Nguyen's favorite topic.

"They don't understand it, especially the new ones," he says. "But I explain they must — by law — declare themselves for us to get federal money. If not, we will lose money."

Nguyen has four different flyers that he has distributed in recent weeks explaining the census and exploding the myths and misunderstandings.

"Many do not speak English very well and they're reluctant to come to anything unless it is (spoken) Vietnamese and they can ask questions," Nguyen says. "So we designed our own brochures and flyers in both English and Vietnamese."



PHOTO BY LENNY LIMJOCO

Tenderloin census supporters gathered Feb. 9 in front of the mural on Leavenworth at Golden Gate Avenue for a poster shot (see page 11) taken by photographer Stephanie Heald.

Jan. 30, during a month Nguyen distributed 5,000 flyers, SEACC manned a popular census booth at the Health Fair at 201 Turk. At the big Tet Festival on Larkin Street, the census booth again was swamped.

"Everybody wants to win something," Nguyen says. "So we have raffles. Lucky winners. People love it. But the items are practical things — census calendars, noodles, vegetable oil — things they wouldn't have to buy."

Feb. 26, prompted by a flyer, 147 Vietnamese attended a census community forum at SEACC headquarters.

"Lots and lots of questions," Nguyen said. "They didn't understand. But they will believe it in Vietnamese. And they went back home to tell their children about it."

Nguyen doesn't expect the Vietnamese count to be as high as once envisioned. Many who could afford to have left the city for a home elsewhere to raise a family. Vietnamese immigrants who came from pre-1975 families typically had four children and grandparents, too, living with mom and dad. But here in expensive San Francisco smaller families were more "practical for apartment life."

"In a home, they can do what they want and

can have more children," Nguyen says. "It's the Vietnamese dream, the culture, and much like Latino families.

"We expected the population to rise in the city but I think it has leveled off."

Nabila Mango, the point person for Arab outreach, thinks the TL's Arab population could be 5,000 — "nobody knows," — and for them she created handsome green, red and black posters and postcards, and held forums to promote the census. Her pet phrases are "It's good for the neighborhood," "participation helps your identity," and "it's part of the Constitution."

It's still a hard sell.

"After 9/11 there was such distrust and fear over what the government does with information," she says. "They were hesitant to fill out anything and even to go into public places. Kids get called names in school and some get beat up."

"Their fears are multiplied by lack of education. We have a large number of illiterate people in the Tenderloin, young and old," Mango says.

"They don't know their rights."

Knocking on their doors can be problematic. "They need to know that people who knock are appropriate. Otherwise, they think it's the FBI. And depending on who's home," she says of the male-dominated culture, "nobody may answer the door."

She has hosted a couple of meetings with Arab women in the TL to explain the census and its importance. She offers "incentives" like chocolate or food that no one would pass up. She has found no resistance, just ignorance about what the census is. After she explains, she asks them to explain it back to her.

Sunday, May 2, the nonresponse follow-up begins, and going door to door, Census workers will try to sit down with those who didn't stand up. ■

Got business in the Central City?

Get the word out in The Extra

Serving 16,000 readers who live and work in the Tenderloin and West SoMa



Call **626-1650** for rate information, including neighborhood discounts

Census block party at Boeddeker

TNDC is throwing a block party April 17 at Boeddeker Park to lure neighbors who haven't filled out census forms to an education booth where the 10-question forms are available.

The 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. bash will be like TNDC's 2008 voter registration party at the park, and 1,100 people are expected. Everyone gets a "Yes We Count!" T-shirt. A raft of kids' activities, live entertainment and food will be available — fried chicken donated by Glide and other fare from TNDC.

For every 100 people who go uncounted in a neighborhood, an estimated \$1.2 million is lost over 10 years, TNDC said in a news release.

Two years ago, at TNDC's voter registration bash, the lure of 600 hot dogs and hamburgers, T-shirts and games drew a crowd of 1,400, and 136 people got registered to vote. ■

—TOM CARTER

Ground Zero Poetry Reading

at 21 Club, Taylor & Turk

8 p.m., Wed. April 14 Ed Bowers, emcee