

Lopez: beating the odds**Council candidate celebrates neighborhood**

By Christine Dinsmore

The District 2 Democratic candidate flashed a smile, extended her hand to passersby, and said, "Hi, my name is Margarita Lopez and I'm running for City Council."

A man dressed in a blue business suit called to her, "I voted for you in the primary."

"Well, good," she said. "I need your vote on Election Day."

The 47-year-old Lopez, like many of the city's candidates, greets commuters during the morning and evening rush hours. She is working to fill the council seat held by Antonio Pagan, who is also gay and who chose not to run for city council.

District 2 includes the Lower East Side, the East Village, Gramercy, Rosehill, Kips Bay, and the southern part of Murray Hill.

Lopez, a long-time activist, knows this neighborhood, Kips Bay, well. As she campaigned in front of PS 116 on E. 33rd Street on a brisk Monday morning, she explained to the *Blade* that people walking west from 2nd Avenue are residents and those, walking east from the 6 train, work in the district.

Lopez beat the odds in the primary in September, defeating Judy Rapfogel, whom Lopez referred to as "the machine candidate." Rapfogel is chief of staff to State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver. Endorsed by the party bigwigs, including Ruth Messinger, Rapfogel was considered a shoo-in.

Since the primary win, Messinger has endorsed Lopez, as have a host of other people and organizations, including the Empire State Pride Agenda, Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, Gay and Lesbian Independent Democrats, and the local chapter of the National Organization for Women.

Working for affordable housing, improved education, full employment, and an end to police brutality is Lopez's platform. She supports Tom Duane's domestic partner bill and an increase in AIDS funding.

"Housing is my passion," she said. "A society that doesn't make accommodations to house its people is a society in danger." Giuliani is more concerned about finding a Manhattan home for the Yankees, she added, then finding affordable housing for New Yorkers.

Her constituents have made little notice of her sexual orientation with the exception of one supporter, she said. Although the woman still works on the Lopez campaign, she asked the candidate why she has to be so public about her 15-year relationship with Francisca Rivera.

"If I didn't tell, I'd be lying," Lopez said she told the woman. "And you want an honest official sitting on the council, don't you?"

Although Lopez is a lesbian, not all gays are supporting her candidacy. Michael Aronowitz, the president of the Log Cabin Republicans of New York City, is actively supporting her opponent, Betty Lugo.

Lopez supports the old welfare system, said Aronowitz, which he finds appalling. He is also against her stance on housing.

"Lopez is deceiving her electorate by trying to be perceived as moderate," said Aronowitz, "when she is actually a leftist liberal – a borderline Communist."

The Stonewall Democratic Club also does not support Lopez. Although not actively opposing her candidacy, the club believes that her history of activism is more to the left than the organization, said its president, Sterling Zinsmeyer.

But Lopez's opponent in next week's election is more adamant in her charges of Lopez's politics.

"She speaks for only one group," said Lugo, "people who rely heavily on social service programs." Lopez's history shows she works against the working and middle class, she added.

Lopez refutes that charge. She said that she grasps the reality that her district is made up of many communities – gay, straight, Latino, white, black, Jewish, and a large disabled population.

In fact, the story of her candidacy in the local tabloids focused only on her race and sexual orientation, she said.

The headlines read, 'Latino lesbian to challenge the chief of staff of the speaker,'" she said. "Latino, lesbian, not my name."

"I'm Margarita Lopez," she said. "You must call me by my name."