

# CITY STATE

## Reigning on the Parade

### Giuliani's 'El Macho' Campaign

BY ED MORALES

**T**he Puerto Rican Day Parade is many things to many people. For the parade organizers, it's simply an opportunity for the community to manifest "cultural self-esteem." For the average card-carrying Boricua, this Sunday will be a big party with lots of dancing and booze. But for political candidates courting Latino votes, it's the unofficial start of the campaign season.

Now that Ferrer has become New York's latest ex-Great Hispanic Hope, the throngs of Puerto Ricans that will be shimmying and shouting to tropical beats are up for grabs. "It's a very long parade," said Ralph Morales, executive director of the parade, "and we've invited everybody."

Ferrer's unexpected departure has signaled a huge reversal of fortune, favoring Mayor Giuliani. In the past, Giuliani has had to settle for marching alongside the increasingly compromised Herman Badillo and the no-profile deputy mayor Ninfa Segarra. Last year, he endured a major flap over comments made by Housing Commissioner Rubén Franco, who in responding to taunts from the crowd directed at Giuliani said, "Those people don't vote." This year, the mayor will march with the support of at least four Latino Democrats: Antonio Pagán, Efraín González, Vito Lopez, and Olga Mendez.

This sudden mambo rush across party lines was presaged in a televised debate of Manhattan borough presidential candidates, when Antonio Pagán declared his support for Giuliani if his first choice, Ferrer, didn't win the Democratic primary. He was only stating openly what others had decided privately. The rest of the "Gang of Four" announced their support of the mayor within days of Ferrer's withdrawal. So far, Democratic front-runner Ruth Messinger can only count on the support of Ferrer and City Councilman Guillermo Linares. José Serrano and Nydia Velázquez still haven't announced a preference. Messinger will march with Ferrer for at least part of the parade, although press secretary Lee Jones doesn't know quite where. "The mayor's people will do their best to try to push us further back," said Jones. "They try to throw muscle around at parades—throw in demands, get huffy, make threats."

Al Sharpton enjoys support from the left-wing Latino anti-police brutality activists, as well as grassroots organizers and Washington Heights activists like Angelica Aquino, who is running for Stanley Michael's city council seat. Sal Albanese will surely be there, although his Latino support is sketchy.

Giuliani will be busy all week with

a proclamation on the steps of City Hall and a Gracie Mansion soiree in honor of Puerto Rican Week. It's his time to work a variation of the same strategy employed by recently reelected L.A. mayor Dick Riordan, who won a sizable majority of L.A.'s Latino votes while losing badly in the black

deal with serious issues or dangle economic carrots in front of certain political leaders. It seems clear that the mayor opted for the latter.

It's no surprise that neocons like Antonio Pagan and Toys for Guns entrepreneur Fernando Mateo have swung to Rudy, but the support from

Lopez's campaign manager and the center has ties to tainted contractors like Jobco (unfavorably linked to Al D'Amato and Ferrer, among others).

The rest of the "Gang of Four" includes Olga Mendez, who, according to *Voice* sources, gay-baited the late Richard Irizarry when he was running for state senator in 1992, and low-profile Efraín González, who with ally Al D'Amato once supported the naming of a street in the Bronx after ex-Yankee broadcaster Phil Rizzuto. His stated reason for endorsing Giuliani: a \$500,000 park project the mayor is supporting for his Bronx district.

Probably the biggest factor in the relatively low approval rating of the mayor—42 percent for Latinos—is the police brutality issue, something he has been actively trying to dispel. Giuliani's gradual distancing from Francis Livotti and his subsequent CPR campaign were calculated moves in this respect. However, much of the activist community, which brought the police brutality issue to prominence, is allying itself with Sharpton, who took center stage during the Kevin Cedeno tragedy. Sharpton is planning to march with Local 144, avoiding the end-of-the-line position that leftists and activists have usually been relegated to.

The random factor that may ultimately decide if Latinos have an impact on this race is how many of them will come out for Democratic Party favorite Ruth Messinger. According to recent polls, her best bet is the yawning gender gap, with many Latino males moving toward Rudy El Macho.



Vito Lopez and Olga Mendez: two of the mayor's new-found Latino Democratic supporters

community. "Mayor Koch worked that technique successfully," said Angelo Falcon of the Institute for Puerto Rican Policy. "You know you're not going to win in the black community, so you kind of give up on them and get more active in the Latino community."

The Giuliani Latino strategy may have been born in the aftermath of Board of Education chief Ramon Cortines being forced out two years ago. Giuliani had two choices: either go to the heart of the community and

staunch Democrats like Brooklyn's Vito Lopez is, on the surface, a surprise. But Lopez has centered his power on a social service center that depends on political deal making for funding. A shadow Latino at best (he has a grandparent from Spain and the rest of his lineage is Italian American), Lopez has been well documented as the kingpin of the Ridgewood Bushwick Senior Citizens Center. While several investigations have found nothing illegal involving the organization, its leader has doubled as

## Relocation Blues

BY EVELYN GILBERT

**L**ast week's refusal by the U.S. Supreme Court to hear a case brought by parents on behalf of their severely retarded kids gives them only a few weeks to relocate their children from out-of-state facilities to New York institutions. As many as 30 young adults, who as children were sent away by New York's Department of Education because there were no appropriate in-state placements, are now going to be put in facilities chosen by the state's Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) and the Office of Mental Health (OMH). Parents contend that these institutions are inappropriate and difficult to reach—some as far as five hours away.

The trouble began in 1995 when the city stopped paying for clients in facilities outside New York who were covered under Transitional Care Funding (TCF). The cutoff of city money to TCF, a program for those who have already aged-out of special education after turning 21, forced the state to pick up the entire cost. The state contends it can save money by putting these profoundly disabled people in New York facilities, since Medicaid would then pay half the bill. Critics, however, say the state can apply for a waiver that would allow Medicaid money to be sent to facilities outside

New York. But according to Scott Gerschwer, spokesperson for Brooklyn state senator Carl Kruger, who favors legislation mandating continued out-of-state funding, "The requests to apply for waivers have fallen on deaf ears."

Russell Rice, senior vice president of Woods Services in Langhorne, Pennsylvania, where a third of the patients live, says, "Families will have to take another look at placements they weren't satisfied with before." Woods offers parents the option of paying for a month themselves if a new placement is imminent. But, Rice concedes, most can't afford the cost—up to \$6000 a month. Lisa Friedman, cocounsel for the families, says most will likely be forced to send their children to either Mohawk Valley Psychiatric Hospital near Utica or Sullivan Diagnostic Center in the Catskills.

Verna Hobson, whose 35-year-old claustrophobic daughter Teresa has been at Woods for over 20 years, says the coed facilities she's seen are inappropriate. "She can't even close the door when she goes to the bathroom, and they want to put her into a group home with men," she says.

Even so, it is still uncertain that enough beds are available. There is already a waiting list of 10,000 in downstate New York for institutions that care for retarded and mentally ill people, and Governor Pataki's proposed budget only provides for an additional 180 beds.

The only hope is that legislation requiring New York to continue to pick up the cost of out-of-state care, passed last year by the legislature but vetoed by Pataki, will be reintroduced and passed again this year.

"A few years ago the killers in something like 800 murders escaped arrest. Now it is more like 150."  
—Citizens' Crime Commission president Thomas Reppetto, on the latest drop in city homicides from 1177 to 986 last year, *New York Times*, June 2