

PUBLIC LIVES

Sugar, Spice and Everything Equal, Please

By LYNDA RICHARDSON

LYN PENTECOST has no daughters, yet no one is fighting harder on behalf of the Lower Eastside Girls Club. She is the executive director of the group, which she helped establish six years ago. She is also an urban anthropologist and video documentarian.

On a recent afternoon, Ms. Pentecost, 55, was sitting in her club's tiny office in a cavernous former Catholic school on East Fourth Street. She looked like an East Village beatnik; dressed in black, with tuffed jeans and granny boots. On her left forearm, there's a tattoo of a two-tailed cat, emblazoned with her husband's name, Dave.

So why is this mother of sons caught up in the plight of neighborhood girls, presenting everyone she knows with her vision of building — and beginning to raise money for — a permanent home for the club?

Ms. Pentecost seems taken back. "That is a thing that never occurred to me," she says. "I think I've always been involved in the big picture."

"Everybody has a gift, and there's got to be an organization that looks at each girl and says, 'What is your gift and how can we help you develop it?'"

She adds that her involvement is no more unusual than New Yorkers working to save the elm forests.

"We are the only neighborhood on earth that as a boys-only boys club and no comparable services for girls," she proclaims.

On earth? What about the Girl Scouts? (Even he was a scout, in Clifton, N.J.) And what about youth service groups, like Girls Inc., a national organization that offers after-school programs and curriculums to institutions like the Y.W.C.A.?

Ms. Pentecost says no other group provides services like her club does on the Lower East Side, but that it has been forced to operate out of 19 sites, including a church basement and the rear of a socks-and-underwear store.

"There is a time and place for everything, and for girls to fully develop, they need some space for themselves," she says.

If all goes according to plan, she says, the club will have a new home in 2005 on Avenue D between Seventh and Eighth Streets, near the



Nicole Bergness/The New York Times

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Jacob Riis and Lillian Ward housing projects, where many of the club's 500 girls live.

She says the club will have facilities more than comparable to the two neighborhood branches of the Boys Club of New York, which do not allow girls as members. "Our community was letting the girls down," she says. (Jose Vazquez, the associate executive director of the Boys Club of New York, says his organization's clubhouses are in such high demand that boys would be displaced if girls were allowed in.)

Bob Holman, a poet and the proprietor of the Bowery Poetry Club, has no doubt about Ms. Pentecost's ability to make things happen. "She's like the force in 'Star Wars.' When she's in front of you, there's no way around. You are going to dance with Lyn Pentecost. She's a 360-degree universe."

The poet adds whimsically that he can imagine his spirited friend with a cigar, expounding on the peasant revolution in Chiapas, Mexico.

MS. PENTECOST smiles at the image. She doesn't smoke, but she does have a connection with Chiapas, where she worked in the late 1970's as an independent video producer. That led to her interest in anthropology

and her doctorate in the subject from Temple University.

Her cluttered office is warm and bright, with wooden Mayan dolls scattered about. Girls in her club have traveled twice to Chiapas to document the lives of Mayan Indian women, who in turn have visited the Lower East Side in a digital-photography program.

Her shelves are stuffed with literature on girls and on teenage culture, which she has taught at New York University. She says her head remains in academia, though her heart is grass roots.

She stands to give a brief tour, descending to a kitchen on the ground floor where girls are icing cookies as part of an entrepreneurial training program. The baking program, called Sweet Things, took in \$10,000 over the holidays. Outside her office, she insists on showing a 10-minute film, "Rebel," which was produced by club members under the supervision of a professional animator. The short, bouncy film, depicting the girls' lives, was selected for the next Sundance Film Festival. Impressive.

In speaking with Ms. Pentecost, it is clear she has trouble presenting herself apart from the club. She wants to talk about the approval granted by the Bloomberg administration for development of a facility on six city-owned lots, and about the club's \$10 million capital campaign.

Just last month, she bought her first suit, for a club fund-raising breakfast. This being the East Village, she says she had got away without owning one since her move there in the 1960's. She and her husband, a freelance television editor and producer, raised their two sons, now 21 and 18, in an abandoned tenement building they bought with neighbors in 1981.

Truth be told, Ms. Pentecost is from a long line of feminists. Her grandmother and great-aunt were active in women's rights. Her mother, a teacher, was a Jesse Jackson delegate at two Democratic National Conventions. She says her father, an engineer, was a feminist at heart. A good cook, too.

So answer this: Will boys be allowed in the girls club? Ms. Pentecost pauses. Finally, she says she can see boys in cooking and child-rearing classes. "We're hardly an isolationist organization."