

Learning politics from a McMaster

WHEN WORD OF THE kidnapping in South America reached the McManus Midtown Democratic Association on W. 44th St. two years ago, the club responded as it always has to the needs of its members for more than a century.

"We chipped in," Jim McManus would recall.

Chip in they did, helping the family raise the balance of the \$25,000 ransom demanded by the gang down in Colombia that had kidnapped a club member's manifestly law-abiding cousin.

The club member was Carlos Manzano, who had emigrated from Cali, Colombia, two decades before with the hope of escaping the endemic violence of his homeland.

The cousin was released, and Manzano had one more reason to be glad he had decided to stop into the McManus Club 18 years ago. He had entered with the same curiosity that made him a whiz at computers.

"I was very interested in how a city like this worked," Manzano would later say.

The man in charge was Jim McManus, whose clan has been running politics in Hell's Kitchen since the turn of the last century. McManus told Manzano that there was only one way to learn.

"He said you can't be a spectator. You have to roll up your

sleeves and get involved," Manzano would later say.

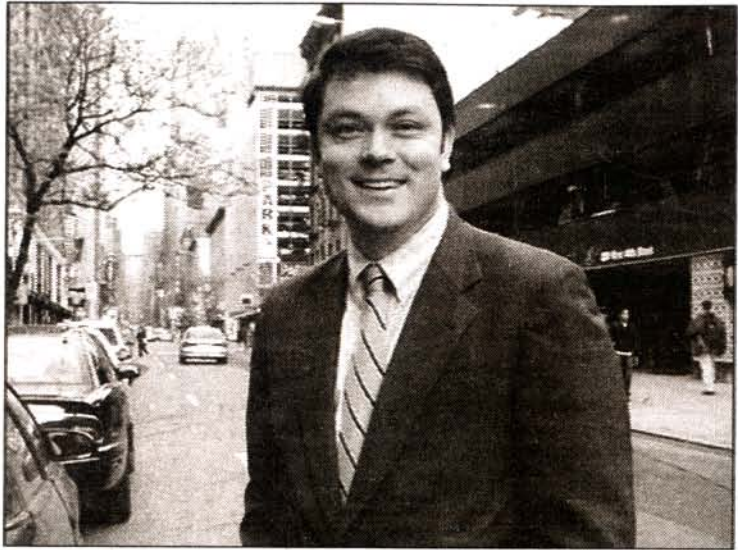
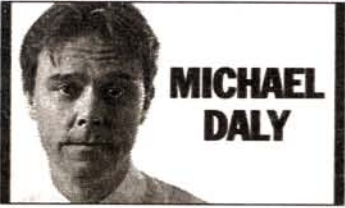
McManus put Manzano right to work as a volunteer assisting constituents who came in with every conceivable type of problem. Manzano brokered landlord-tenant disputes and assisted small businessmen with the local community board and

walked people through the immigration maze and got potholes filled and composed letters to city agencies.

"You never know when somebody walks in that door what problem they might have," Manzano later said. "Your job is to make them feel at ease and find a solution. And it's not easy unless you know where to go."

McManus had learned politics by tagging along with his father, so whenever he was off to meet a person of some influence, he would invite the younger members of the club to come along.

"Carlos was always the one who went," McManus would recall.



COURTESY OF MANZANO 2005 CAMPAIGN

Carlos Manzano is running for Manhattan borough president.

Soon, Carlos was ready to begin becoming somebody of influence himself. He ran successfully for state Democratic committeeman in 1994. He ran for City Council in 1999 and came in second. In the meantime, he earned a master's degree in public administration from New York University and served as assistant commissioner for the city's Beacon Schools.

And he was at the club night after night after night, helping whoever walked in. He became particularly adept at the citizenship process, and people came to him

from all over the city. He helped make some 5,000 new Americans.

In 2003, Manzano became the one with the problem when his cousin was kidnapped in Colombia. The family had trouble raising the ransom, but he needed only turn to McManus.

By then, Manzano was such a part of the club that he might as well have been named McManzano. His actual name came in handy when he joined the present contest for Manhattan borough president. Manzano happens to mean "apple tree" in

Spanish. The campaign button was a big red apple with "Manzano" across the middle.

"Manzano para Manzano!" people cried.

The race is now in full swing, and Manzano's parents marked their 50th wedding anniversary by traveling from Colombia to assist with their son's campaign in the Big Apple. The father, Elias Manzano, celebrated his 78th birthday Monday night sitting with the mother, Fanny Manzano, at a political fund-raiser. Both wore Manzano buttons. The father smiled when asked if he would be working for his son. "Mucho!" the father said.

Yesterday afternoon, the father was one of a half-dozen people at a folding table in the club, affixing stamps to cards bearing the Manzano apple. The younger Manzano had used his computer skills to cull voters by the day and month of their birth. Each day, a batch of the cards is mailed out so as to arrive on their birthdays with his best wishes.

The walls were covered with plaques and pictures from the long reign of the clan known as "the McMani." The present McManus, Jim, was in a smoke-free back room discussing election strategy with the 38-year-old protégé who learned how the city works by making it work.

Who knows, we may someday be talking about the reign of the Manzani.

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CARLOS MANZANO

Democrat for Manhattan Borough President

Election Day Tuesday

September 13