

Presence of late West Side leader Lynda Callon still felt clearly

BY MARY SANCHEZ THE KANSAS CITY STAR

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Lynda Callon, director of the West Side CAN Center, died last month of cancer. But her presence lingers at the center. FILE PHOTO BY RICH SUGG / THE KANSAS CITY STAR

Lynda Callon still presides over the West Side CAN Center. Even though everyone working there misses her dearly.

Callon, the center's director, died unexpectedly last month from cancer. She was a force who led this unique collaboration with Kansas City police.

The fact that her guidance lingers, even in death, isn't lost on anyone.

It's how the place has continued to function.

After Callon was diagnosed, she left detailed lists of duties for volunteers, anticipating upcoming events the center would sponsor. Her close friend and a longtime advocate of the center, Barbara Bailey, would step in as interim director during Callon's anticipated chemotherapy.

But the cancer spread wildly.

Now, the temporary sharing of duties can't sustain the center long-term. So a new director will be announced soon.

CAN stands for Community Action Network. The center grew out of community policing, the attitude the police can do their work best when they are ingrained in the neighborhoods they serve. Two officers work out of it.

Callon battled funding issues, engaged with community leadership and tackled problems unique to the West Side. It was Callon who insisted the center could help improve the lives of the Latino day laborers who frequent the West Side seeking work. The center became a home base for them as they pass through the area. It was a spot for a meal and Callon's guidance, but under her strict rules.

Stories abound of how she ensured the men were paid fairly. She also fought legislatively for the rights of the working poor in general.

In that spirit, groups have volunteered each Saturday since her death to serve hot meals to the men who wait for work under a nearby highway overpass.

Few miss Callon more than Fernando Garcia, one of the migrant men from Mexico who grew close to her. He's built an altar to Callon inside the center, fashioning a display case as the focal point from a large mirror by replacing the mirror with glass. The frame is made of Mexican tiles and intricately etched metal.

The tribute continues to grow as Garcia adds lighting and photos and rearranges the many awards Callon won through the years.

"Here, I bought this for Lynda," another laborer said one recent day, handing Garcia a candle set in glass, an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the front.

Garcia nods, taking the candle and gently placing it next to a wooden cross.

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