

Clare Named Public Citizen of the Year



(l-r): Janlee Wong, Executive Director of the NASW California Chapter, congratulates Steve Clare.

Terence Lyons
Mirror Staff Writer

Steve Clare, Executive Director of the Venice Community Housing Corporation (VCHC), was named Public Citizen of the Year by the California Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) this month.

Clare, an attorney, co-founded VCHC in 1988 to focus on housing problems at a time when the elderly and other low-income Venice residents were being squeezed out of the market by gentrification trends. But, as he told the *Mirror*, VCHC came to realize that the affordable housing problems of the area were bound up with other inter-related needs, and so VCHC expanded its mission to address education, job training, and other support for at-risk youth to provide alternatives to the street.

The group employed local youth to assist in rehabilitating existing housing and working with contractors to build new housing. Under Clare's leadership, VCHC has developed 175 affordable housing units in Venice and Mar Vista; provided construction job training for over 230 at-risk youth from the community, many of whom went on to full-time employment or college; created mosaic and ceramic tile

murals at public schools and community organizations in Venice; and helped hundreds of local at-risk youth stay in school and abstain from gang involvement by providing comprehensive after-school activities and gang prevention programs at Mark Twain middle school and in affordable housing buildings.

VCHC also launched a successful Teen Court at Venice High School in cooperation with the school, the Los Angeles Superior Court, and the Probation Department. A regular judge presides over the once-monthly court in which students serve as jurors who decide guilt/innocence and recommend sentences for students charged with first-time minor offenses as an alternative to the juvenile system, while providing participants and the 50 to 100 students who observe each month with an inside view of the legal system.

Clare received the statewide award at a Saturday, April 5, ceremony at the LAX Westin Hotel Grand Ballroom. Also honored were Laura Chick, Los Angeles City Controller, as the Social Worker of the Year, and Vendella Barnett, former executive director of the Venice-based Neighborhood Youth Association, who received the 2008 Lifetime Achievement Award.