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DATEBOOK

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Sentiment cherished — sign, not so much

The Port of San Francisco is honoring Delancey Street co-founder **Mimi Silbert** by designating as the Mimi Silbert Pathway a stretch of sidewalk alongside the bay running approximately the length of the Delancey Street building, from the restaurant to the cafe.

The Friends of the Port of San Francisco gathered Monday in the Ferry Building to celebrate that notion, to honor the woman, to watch a video filled with tributes to her work, and to present her with a facsimile of the sign that will designate the pathway after November, when it is dedicated. The “pathway,” it was said, is a particular tribute to a woman who offers pathways, an idea that’s pretty much sacred to everyone who believes in Delancey Street.

As to the sign itself, Silbert, who was standing at the microphone, looked at it, laughed, and tossed it into the crowd, where it was caught by some of “her guys,” residents of the life-reclaiming facility.

“As uninhibited as she is,” said organizer **Christine Pelosi** of the honoree, “she’s actually very modest.” When Pelosi went to discuss the project with Silbert, she said, “typically, I don’t deserve this, but I’m going to act as if I do,”

which is one of the mantras of Delancey Street.

Contacting folks to solicit support was easy, said Pelosi. Silbert is so beloved that everyone jumped in. The reception was packed with civic powerhouses — the port’s **Leslie Katz**, of course, and **Mark Leno, Mark Buell, John Keeker, Larry Baer, Jack Bair, Anne Halsted, Gavin Newsom, Paul Pelosi, Phil Bronstein, Maggie Lynch** and more — and the video included testimonials from **Nancy Pelosi** and **George Shultz**. (“That’s a little Pelosi,” said **Wells Whitney** about **Bella Kaufman**, 5-year-old daughter of Christine and **Peter Kaufman**, who was whirling around in a party dress, “and she’s working the room.”)

Silbert took the microphone to huge applause and said the focus of it all was those “guys,” a term she uses to include women and refers to the former criminals and drug addicts rescued by Delancey Street. She also said she was glad to be out in public again; illness had mandated a low profile in recent years.

“I will accept this,” she said of the honor, “on behalf of all the residents, past, present and future, of Delancey Street.”

I talked with four residents who were among those selected to attend. The honor to Silbert “reflects on all of us,” said **Taj Feidy**, “as a family there, and what she’s done for us.” The “pathway,” it was said, is not only a geographic place, but also a metaphor reflecting on the program’s role in residents’ lives.

“I see myself as fixing things,” said Silbert. “The people I work with are breaking things all the time. ... They don’t know how to get close to people. I do know how.”