

## NEWS

Copyright 2004 SF Chronicle SAN FRANCISCO

# It's Final: Fong Made Police Chief

Jaxon Van Derbeken, Simone Sebastian, Chronicle Staff Writer

Thursday, April 15, 2004, San Francisco Chronicle

Without hesitation or a single objection, the San Francisco Police Commission made history Wednesday evening, unanimously approving Mayor Gavin Newsom's appointment of Heather Fong as chief of police. Though most co-workers and acquaintances describe her as quiet and unassuming, the 47-year-old Fong is a pioneer on two counts: She is the first woman to lead the San Francisco Police Department, and the first Asian American woman to head a big-city police force. Mayor Gavin Newsom, who named Fong acting chief in January, made her the permanent chief after the city paid \$25,000 to conduct a national search. Newsom said the search failed to find anyone more qualified than Fong.

At Wednesday's Police Commission meeting, Fong promised to do "everything in my power to move this department forward." But, remaining true to her humble nature, the chief implored the crowd of well-wishers that "this is not a time for celebration." Downplaying her moment of honor, Fong focused on the tragedy that befell her department last weekend, when Officer Isaac Espinoza was killed while on duty. "What is most important is to remember Isaac in our thoughts and our prayers," Fong said, her voice wavering and on the brink of tears, "It is my earnest hope and intention that the violence that took Isaac and many others will be stopped once and for all."

The 26-year department veteran is a native of the city and has lived here all her life. She grew up in North Beach, the daughter of a

delicatessen owner father and a mother who still works as a legal secretary for a Chinatown law firm. She attended Roman Catholic schools, graduated from the University of San Francisco and got her master's in social work from San Francisco State University, Fong speaks Cantonese fluently, and at first toyed with the idea of becoming a court interpreter. Instead, Fred Lau, a neighbor who would later become police chief, recruited her to join the Police Department in 1977. At the time, she was a rarity - a member of the force who was a woman, minority and fluent in one of the city's main second languages.

Wilma Pang, a teacher at City College who is active in San Francisco's Chinese American community, said Fong's appointment is a milestone for the city's Asian residents. She believes Fong's upbringing in a Chinese home "engrained in her the importance of honor and responsibility." But Pang added that her pride goes beyond Fong's race and gender, "You can be a great chief, sitting high with a lot of power," Pang said. "But she's not in an ivory tower. She's great with the community. She's very attentive, caring, dedicated and personable." Fong will earn a salary in the range of \$210,000.

The new chief keeps her private life largely off limits, so much so that friends and colleagues are reluctant to talk about her family without her permission. But she has a longtime boyfriend in the department, and she has a dog.

E-mail the writers at [jvanderbeken@sfchronicle.com](mailto:jvanderbeken@sfchronicle.com) and [sisebastian@sfchronicle.com](mailto:sisebastian@sfchronicle.com).