

Cantonese language in peril as Mandarin becomes more favored in China and California



Photos by Yalonda M. James/S.F. Chronicle
Cantonese teacher Joyce Li instructs her class at the Shoong Family Chinese Cultural Center in Oakland. The center is a nonprofit that offers low-cost Cantonese classes for elementary and middle schoolers.

‘An act of cultural preservation’

By Ko Lyn Cheang
STAFF WRITER

Kim Torres was nervous as she stepped in front of two dozen classmates to perform the Cantonese dialogue she’d memorized. Although the language is her late mother’s native language, the 23-year-old didn’t learn it until this fall.

“Emily, *neih daaihyeuk gei-noih tai yat chi hei a?*” she said, meaning “how often do you watch a movie?”

The college student’s biggest dream is to speak in Cantonese with her grandma, who raised her. She wants to be fluent enough that she can talk to relatives in Cantonese during a family trip to her grandmother’s hometown in Malaysia next year.

City College San Francisco, where Torres is enrolled in Cantonese class, is one of the last bastions for learning the language in the Bay Area. And San Francisco is one of the last frontiers for publicly funded Cantonese education not just in the U.S., but worldwide.

As Mandarin, officially favored in China, becomes increasingly widely spoken both



Students engage in an activity in Joyce Li’s class. The number of Cantonese programs in the Bay Area is dwindling.

there and in the Bay Area, Cantonese speakers are grappling with how to navigate threats to the language in the U.S.

Oakland nonprofit Shoong Family Chinese Cultural Center has offered free or low-cost Cantonese classes since 1953, but saw enrollment plummet by about half during the pandemic, threatening the center’s survival, said board president Jones Wu. Enrollment

has ticked back up, but the center still faces tight finances.

“Cantonese is not only a language, but also a history,” Susan Zhong, the center’s head teacher, said in Mandarin. “If Cantonese is lost, the culture is lost. We’re very concerned Cantonese will slowly disappear in America.”

In Hong Kong, a historic home for Cantonese people, *Cantonese continues on A9*

Council member charged with fraud

Alleged San Leandro corruption involves same firm in Thao case

By Megan Cassidy
STAFF WRITER

Federal prosecutors have charged San Leandro City Council Member Bryan Azevedo with two felonies related to what they described as a scheme to help a housing company win city contracts in exchange for kickbacks.

The charges, filed Tuesday, came nearly 10 months after Azevedo’s home was raided by the FBI. Azevedo was told by federal prosecutors in June that he was the “target” of an investigation into potential crimes including bribery and lying to federal agents.

Azevedo, who could not be reached for comment, was charged with conspiracy to commit honest services wire fraud and making false statements, crimes punishable by up to 25 years in prison with a conviction. He did not appear to have been arrested as of Wednesday afternoon.

San Leandro Mayor Juan Gonzalez said Tuesday he had not asked Azevedo to step down, but noted that the City Charter does not allow people convicted of a felony to serve as council members.

Azevedo is the second East Bay elected official to face federal charges related to Evolutionary Homes, a company that sought to build modular housing for the homeless out of shipping containers. The company is not named in the charge- *Fraud continues on A9*

Immigration enforcer honed brash tactics in Imperial County

By Sara Libby and St. John Barned-Smith
STAFF WRITERS

Border Patrol Chief Gregory Bovino glanced at the crowd of yelling protesters in Chicago’s largely Latino Little Village neighborhood, took a step toward them and lobbed a canister of tear gas, a tactic a judge had temporarily banned.

The interaction — captured last week on shaky cellphone video — demonstrated the defiant approach that has powered Bovino’s unlikely rise within the Trump administration: Despite his official role as chief of the agency’s El Centro sector in California’s Imperial Valley, he has been on the ground in some of his department’s most aggressive efforts around the country. And he is literally hands-on, using tactics that stretch or even disregard the law.

His efforts have landed him at the center of multiple lawsuits accusing Bovino and his Border Patrol officers of excessive force and violating the rights of residents in Illinois, Oregon and California — where he has been developing his brazen play- *Enforcer continues on A10*

North Beach divided over zoning rule proposal

By Laura Waxmann
STAFF WRITER

In San Francisco’s North Beach neighborhood, where espresso bars and old jazz clubs still echo the city’s bohemian past, new rules could soon change what types of businesses call the storied area home — stirring both hopes of renewal and fears about losing what has long made it special.

“It’s a really unique ecosystem that allows there to be, on one block, a record store next to a flower shop, a candle shop, a soufflé restaurant and a jewelry store,” said local business owner Stuart Watts, who is also the president of the North Beach Business As-

sociation — the organization’s board includes former North Beach supervisor and longtime neighborhood preservationist Aaron Peskin.

“That’s unheard of in most neighborhoods because ... it can become really expensive for micro businesses like that to operate,” Watts said.

In recent months, Watts joined the chorus of more than 50 small business owners who opposed legislation authored by the area’s supervisor, Danny Sauter, that stands to set aside long-standing zoning restrictions meant to protect the diverse mix of small, locally owned businesses in North Beach and *Zoning continues on A10*



Scott Strazzante/S.F. Chronicle
“District 3 Thrives” is drawing pushback from opponents who worry smaller storefronts in San Francisco’s North Beach neighborhood, such as Knitz & Leather on Grant Avenue, could be pushed out.