

Eagan: Star Emerges From the Pack



Photo by Matt Stone

Thursday, September 26, 2013

By: Margery Eagan

Most of us, let's face it, barely get through the day.

Then there's Michelle Wu, the political neophyte who finished fourth in the at-large Boston City Council race Tuesday — in perfect position to win one of the four seats in the Nov. 5 final.

Start with Wu's resume, which is impressive.

Graduated from Harvard and Harvard Law School. Worked at City Hall to streamline the byzantine restaurant permitting process; for Elizabeth Warren's Senate race and for Legal Services. Volunteered with battered women and Oiste?, the big Latino nonprofit. Taught citizenship classes in Chinatown (her parents came here from Taiwan and Wu speaks four languages).

Since then, she's held down a big job in the Financial District, ran her own small

tea shop and taken over care of her chronically ill mother and two younger sisters — all while campaigning.

“My team and I were out every single day starting at 7 a.m. shaking hands for two hours with morning commuters,” Wu told me yesterday at her small Tremont Street headquarters. “We’d go nonstop during the day, then neighborhood associations, then two or three or four house parties a night.”

I was exhausted just listening to her.

And Wu is a mere 28.

I think it’s safe to say: A star is born.

Wu raised tons of money, got lots of endorsements. She wants liquor licenses in small out-lying restaurants, green gardens on big building roofs, fruit and vegetable trucks in neighborhoods without supermarkets — and most of all, online, simplified, at-your-fingertips access to all city information, regulations and services — from schools to health care to building permits. She’s serious and earnest, and local progressives are swooning.

Asked why she decided to invest her enormous energy in the oft-maligned City Council (instead of sticking with that big financial job, as her parents had hoped), she said she realized firsthand, when trying to navigate her mother’s care and her sisters’ education, how hard it is to learn about the right government services. They’re there, but near impossible to figure out on your own.

And no one, Wu said, should have to “take the day off from work” to go to City Hall for this permit or that license when everything should be available, on your home computer, a click away.

“I saw that when you have great energy and ideas, in city government you can accomplish things immediately,” said Wu, who is ready to accomplish much.