

## LOCAL 63's Netra Brown: Woman of Distinction

March 28, 2017

By Vivian Malauulu, Local 13

March is Women's History Month, when women everywhere are recognized in a variety of ways for the many contributions they make to society. In the California State Legislature, women across the state are honored each year by members of the state Senate and Assembly.

More than 100 women who live, work, or volunteer in California Assembly District 70 (which covers Long Beach, San Pedro, and Catalina Island) were nominated in March by their peers to receive special recognition from Assemblymember Patrick O'Donnell.

One of those 100 exemplary women is honored as the district's "Woman of the Year" and rewarded with a special trip to the State Capitol where she is introduced on the floor of the house in early March. Later in the month, a smaller, more personal reception is hosted to celebrate the 20 finalists in AD 70. Those women are recipients of the Harbor Area's prestigious "Woman of Distinction" award.

That event was held on Thursday, March 23, and included one of our own ILWU sisters among the chosen. High atop downtown Long Beach in a penthouse professional suite that overlooks the twin ports complex that is the mecca of West Coast goods movement, ILWU Local 63 Sister Netra Brown stood shyly as Assemblyman O'Donnell shared with an audience of almost 150 guests why she was chosen as a finalist.

"Strong, selfless and heroic women like Netra have made deeply meaningful contributions to our community that deserve our recognition and thanks," said Assemblyman O'Donnell.

Among the many reasons why Netra was nominated for this honor was her recent heroic attempt to save the life of a fellow union member.

On the night of Friday, February 18, ILWU Local 63 Brother Sil Vaifanua had just ended his shift as a floor runner at LB 245 and was turning in his paperwork for the night when he suffered a heart attack on the second floor of the marine tower. Netra, her work partner Sidra Mendoza, and another Local 13 member, Kenneth Jackson, rushed to Sil's aid. Netra was the first to administer CPR and attempt resuscitative efforts until the paramedics arrived. Unfortunately, brother Sil did not make it, passing later that night at a nearby hospital.

Sil's wife, Local 13 member Regina Vaifanua, was aware of the efforts by Netra and others to save her husband. During Sil's funeral service, "Gina" as she is known on the waterfront, publicly acknowledged them with a heartfelt thank you.

However, the two union sisters did not actually meet in person until the Women of Distinction (WOD) Reception.

"The room just filled with emotion as these two union sisters met for the first time in a tearful embrace. It was a very genuine moment of gratitude that drove home the message of the evening," said Assemblymember O'Donnell.

Sil was a longtime member of Local 13 before he transferred to Local 63 in 2006. Gina is a current member of Local 13. They were both casuals together in the mid-1990s. The couple was married for 26 years and together had 6 children and 7 grandchildren. Gina attended the WOD event with two of her children who presented Netra with a bright bouquet of spring flowers.

“I am so happy that Sister Netra is being recognized,” said Gina. “She has a great reputation on the waterfront for being a good person and a good worker. What she and her coworkers did that night to try to save my husband’s life was so selfless.”

Sister Netra held several steady posts at Local 13 before transferring to Local 63 some 15 years ago. She has been a steady Super Cargo for SSA Marine vessel operations in Long Beach for the past 7 years. Netra has a degree in Finance Management from Cal State Long Beach and credits that business school training for helping her to be awesome at her job. She is a busy family woman with three adult children who enjoys traveling, reading, playing tennis, and who also finds time to give back to her community.

“Receiving the award was very surprising,” said Netra. “Having Sil’s family there was completely shocking but very special. Meeting his beautiful wife and sweet children was very emotional for me. Gina held me so tight and his children cried in my arms.”

Netra added that she only did what she hopes other union members would do in the same situation.