

A Voter Registrar You Should Know: Mike Harootunian

By Steve Cole

Over 5,000 volunteer deputy voter registrars signed up 90,000 new voters between July and October 1. One deputy registrar's determination was a dozen years in the making, and couldn't be stopped in the intensive care unit of Northwestern Memorial Hospital.

Mike Harootunian, a 58-year-old resident of Lathrop Homes, registered the majority of over 300 voters at the Belmont and California unemployment office. But it is with pride that he boasts of his last eleven registrations. "Even with needles and tubes sticking in me in the intensive care unit, I signed up six doctors and five nurses."

With only five days left in the voter registration campaign, Mike was hospitalized when a bad cold filled his lungs and caused them to collapse. The strain brought on what was later diagnosed as a mild heart attack. Asked why he brought his registration kit to the hospital Mike responded, "I'd work till my dying day to get rid of Reagan."

Mike Harootunian along with 400,000 other disabled people might have died when their Social Security benefits were stopped by the Reagan Administration's policy of periodic review.

In 1971, Mike was pinned by a truck at the Union Stockyards. Although doctors told him he would never walk again, Mike Harootunian struggled. "Just like now, I had a purpose then. My wife was sick and she needed someone to help her."

Mike battled through seven years



of rehabilitation therapy, losing his life savings and his home paying for his and his wife's medical expenses. His wife's death in 1975 was a setback, but again he battled back.

But by 1982, Mike hit rock bottom. His disability was cut, and the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) had started eviction proceedings because he fell behind in paying his rent. A lawyer he hired to fight his disability case was demanding up front money but producing no results. Mike's diet was reduced to soup made from ketchup.

Mike was fortunate enough to get the assistance he needed to successfully fight both his disability case and eviction case with the CHA.

With his usual determination, Mike explained why he became a voter registrar: "I know what the good times were and what the bad times were and I've never seen the disastrous conditions that people are going through now. It's the poor against the rich. The forgotten people finally got out of the corner and let their voices be heard."