

## Heavy Duty

Bernadette Conner is sneezing, wheezing, coughing, and blowing her nose at a rate of once every two minutes. But she's at work nonetheless, helping her gang unload a ship at the Red Hook Marine Terminal, Brooklyn's only working pier. If a dockworker doesn't show up for work, a dockworker doesn't get paid. With her job cut back to two, maybe three, working days a week, Bernadette Conner shows up for work.

So it's not that Conner feels she still has something to prove to her coworkers, all men. Eight years of watching her heave and haul alongside them, with that silky mane of strawberry blond hair stuffed into a cap atop her well-packed 215-pound frame, has left no doubt that she can do the work. "It's just that afterwards, you gotta take a four-hour Ben Gay bath," she says, reflecting on the day she and her partner relieved a container of 1,000 bags of coffee beans in less than four hours. Each bag weighs about 135 pounds. All of which makes her, at 29, feel like "the little old ladies who got this pain and that. I've got them all."

Coffee is pretty straightforward, as ship cargoes go. Sometimes there are large drums of grease, and, before some recent improvements in packing, there were animal hides wrapped in burlap and pulsing with maggots. Life for Bernadette has been a lot cleaner in the past year, since she came out of the holds and started working on the docks. She dresses in jeans, as her colleagues do, but her thermals are lavender, like her eye shadow, and she has two big gold-hoop earrings in each earlobe.

"God, this can be disgusting work," she says. "I used to come home filthy, greasy, disgusting, like I'd been rolling in the mud. I don't know what I'd do without Lestoil. I oughta buy stock in that company."

The Waterfront Commission says there are 23 women among the 7,000 registered longshoremen for the New York-New Jersey port. A few other women started with Conner when the International Longshoremen's Association opened its rolls to women in 1979, but she is the only one still working at Red Hook. She's weathered the usual hazing (the first time she had to leave ship to go to the bathroom, the men let her know they never had to bother), plus some unforgettable moments.

Once when she was unloading coffee, she sensed a sinister presence and asked a coworker to lift the suspect bag.

"You wanna be a longshoreman?" he taunted. "You lift it." She did. Eight rats shot out. Conner hurtled up the ladder. Several of the men screamed. After all, they explained, rats bite.

Now Conner has seniority in her gang and earns \$17 an hour—when she works. Even with the uncertain schedule (she never knows if she'll be working until the night before), Conner says longshoremen can earn \$40,000 a year, sometimes \$60,000, though she is not yet in that range. It was the money that initially lured her to the waterfront, where her father had worked as a guard. And now, even as she has watched pier after pier close, she chooses to stay. "I figure whatever happens, happens," she says. **BROOKLYN KROGGER**



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## TOEING THE PARTY LINE

Stacie Teele may look like she's just another blond, 27-year-old club-hopper, but beyond the outrageous outfits and the late night soirees, there's Stacie's steel-tongued mind for promoting Downtown nightlife as business.

When Kamikaze, the club she helped found with three partners in 1983, was forced to close in February 1986 because of escalating insurance costs, Teele turned her party skills freelance. She knew heavily clubs depend on parties to bring the celebrities and Downtown crowds, and she knew how to deliver the goods.

"Throwing a good party means getting the right people to come," says Teele. Her reputation is often enough to get a "use my name" on the invitation; then she makes the guest list to the event. "At Kamikaze we had art parties for artists one night she explains, "and the next night we might have a 'yellow-tie-guys and girls-wear-pearls' party."

Arranging parties is second nature. Teele, who, as daughter of a former Foreign Service officer, spent her childhood years meeting people around the world. Her mother had started a small, Washington, D.C.-based party-giving business, that by the time she was 10, Teele was greeting guests and checking coats.

She's quick to point out that choreographing a party is hard work. "I am not a celebrante," Teele insists, referring to the Downtowners who make a career of having their pictures taken. "I earn a living from what I do."

How much of a living? "If I did two parties a month," she says, smiling at stretching her long legs, "I could make about \$50,000 a year." **JENNY DeMONTE**