

'Grandparents' praised by Koch

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Mayor Edward I. Koch has told a gathering of senior citizens he fully expects to be in office until around 1997 and hoped that everyone present was also committed to continue "doing what you're doing for the next eight to 12 years."

"Because what you're doing is impressive," said Koch, guest speaker for the third annual luncheon honoring participants in the city Department for the Aging's foster grandparent program.

More than 250 participants — including about 40 from Staten Island — attended the program, which was held at the Tavern on the Green Restaurant, Manhattan. The affair was sponsored by the Chase Manhattan Bank.

Foster grandparents work with handicapped children in both school and institutional settings providing the kinds of personal, one-on-one support unavailable in other programs.

They generally work a 20-hour week, receiving \$2.20 per hour, city officials said.

On Staten Island, city officials said, there are components of the program at the Staten Island Developmental Center, the Staten Island Mental Health Society, the Down's Syndrome Learning Center, St. Vincent's Medical Center, PS 69, New Springville, and PS 32 Annex, Great Kills.

In other areas of the city, the program, which began in 1973, has seniors working in family crisis centers and homes for teenage mothers and their babies.

"One has to be impressed, first of all, by the dedication of the people in the program," Koch said. "You've got to be impressed by the affection they show the children. And you've got to be impressed with the youngsters themselves and what they receive from the program."

Koch said he expects "every city in the country" to eventually

set up a program modeled after New York's.

The theme for the luncheon was "To Love a Child," which is also the title of a book on grandparenting by first lady Nancy Reagan, a copy of which was presented to Koch, after being autographed by all 280 foster grandparents.

"This book will now rival anything by Dr. Spock," said Koch, who also received a bright red sweater emblazoned with the phrase "To Love a Mayor."

"To Love A Child" is also the title of a song written by composer Joseph Raposo of Sesame Street fame. Raposo played his composition for the seniors.

Department for the Aging Commissioner Janet S. Sainer praised the seniors for "joy and love you bring the children."

The mayor later presented plaques for 10 years' service to three foster grandparents from Queens. Fifty other participants received one-year certificates for their contributions.

All the seniors received a small red and navy blue pillow bearing the foster grandparent logo and a box of chocolates. Door prizes included dinner for two at Windows on the World and a pair of tickets to the play "Mayor."

As Koch and his entourage left the dining hall, Rochelle Wasserman of Westerleigh, a teacher at PS 32 Annex, was able to get the mayor to slow down long enough to pose for a picture with her.

"It was a pleasure," Koch said.