

FAST FOOD NATION'S GREG KINNEAR | EDWARD SCISSORHANDS CUTS A RUG | THE CITY'S BEST TOY STORES

# Los Angeles

Culture Shapers,  
Troublemakers,  
Gatekeepers,  
And Billionaires  
Gone Wild!

**45<sup>th</sup>**  
ANNIVERSARY!  
\*\*\*\*\*  
New Features!  
New Look!

# The Influentials

The definitive LA power list, from A to V (Villaraigosa, that is)

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# MONEY

## Ronald Katz

PATENT ENFORCER



» **Age:** 70. **Greatest hit:** Telecredit. **Why him?** The holder of 52 patents that dictate how computers interact with telephones—from check authorizations to voice menus—Katz is the preeminent practitioner of “patent trolling,” extracting licensing fees from the corporate giants that use his technology. He has initiated 3,000 patent claims over the past 15 years and reaped some \$750 million. **Because he can:** A “Katz letter” usually runs hundreds of pages, persuading most companies to settle rather than fight him. **Achilles’ heel:** The Fortune 500 considers him a parasite. **The test:** The U.S. Patent Office has been asked to review his portfolio.

WORK FORCE: María Elena Durazo



## Thomas Nix Jr.

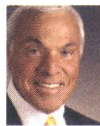
COMMUNITY BANKER



» **Age:** 58. **AKA:** The 7-Eleven Banker. **Greatest hits:** 61 branches, 600,000 customers. **Why him?** A fixture of low-income L.A. since 1979, Carson-headquartered Nix Check Cashing has grown into the largest check-cashing chain in Southern California. Although the industry has been criticized for gouging the poor, Nix is credited with investing in neighborhoods long ago abandoned by banks. **Bonus point:** During the L.A. riots, many Nix stores were burned, but employees still showed up for work in the rubble. **Because he can:** Sold a 40 percent interest to Union Bank. **The test:** Competing for immigrant customers with Mexican banking powerhouses.

## Angelo Mozilo

MORTGAGE LENDER



» **Age:** 68. **Greatest hit:** Number ten on *Forbes*’s list of “Best Paid CEOs.” **Why him?** With the help of looser regulations, Mozilo has made mortgage banking an assembly line business, building Countrywide Financial into the largest home lender in the nation. Credited with boosting shareholder value 23,000 percent over two decades, the Bronx-born CEO is a member of the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans. **Bonus point:** Son of an Italian butcher. **Because he can:** Made noises about retiring this year but changed his mind. Countrywide stock rose at the news. **The future:** An uncertain housing market, which has already led to layoffs at the Calabasas-based lender.

## Geraldine Knatz

HARBOR CHIEF



» **Age:** 55. **Greatest hit:** Busiest container port in the nation. **Why her?** The first woman to serve as executive director of the Port of Los Angeles, Knatz is responsible for 43 miles of gritty waterfront, which last year handled 7.3 million containers and \$190 billion in cargo. The former managing director of the Long Beach port, she has to juggle shippers, unionists, environmentalists, regulators, and politicians while also worrying about the harbor’s vulnerability to terrorism. **Bonus point:** A doctor of biological science, she teaches civil engineering at USC. **The test:** Cracking down on pollution without scaring off industry.

## María Elena Durazo

UNION LEADER



» **Age:** 53. **Greatest hits:** 440,000 hotel and restaurant workers. **Why her?** The widow of the charismatic labor boss Miguel Contreras oversees the colossal Los Angeles Federation of Labor, with 350 unions and 850,000 members—20 percent of the county workforce. Although she was a tireless champion of UNITE HERE Local 11, Durazo will need her late husband’s uncanny political sense to broker the complex needs of an entire federation. **Extra credit:** She was national director of the 2003 “Freedom Ride,” a convoy of immigrant workers campaigning for economic justice. **The test:** Enduring fallout from revelations by the *L.A. Weekly* that officials may have covered up the unseemly circumstances of Contreras’s death.