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Queen Latifah stars as Matron "Mama" Morton in the musical Chicago which is now playing in theaters nationwide. Latifah has been nominated for a Golden Globe Award for her performance.

Chicago

Chicago is a story about two murderers that backstab, lie and cheat. They also sing and dance—in order to make themselves stand out in the Chicago spotlight of the roaring 1920s and the 30s.

But the real spotlight goes to Queen Latifah, who has been nominated for a Golden Globe Award for her role in the movie as the money-loving, low-cut-dress wearing prison warden extraordinaire Matron "Mama" Morton.

She almost didn't get the part. Madonna and Rosie O'Donnell were both after it along with 10 other major name stars. She auditioned three times for the part and finally nailed with her performance of "When You're Good to Mama."

"This story is about 1930s women who were smoking, having sex and shooting their husbands," Latifah told the Daily News. "Things don't seem to be any different these days, and people love to read about that stuff and gobble it up. How many stories have you read about Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez lately? Everyone wants to know who's sleeping with who."

Velma Kelley, played by Catherine Zeta-Jones, has had a sensational nightclub duo with her sister, until she blanks out and shoots her philandering husband after she catches him cheating on her—with said sister.

Kelly lives the high life in jail, enjoying the perks, as long as she pays for them, given to her by the warden, Latifah.

Velma also hires Chicago's slickest lawyer, Billy Flynn played by Richard Gere, to keep her notorious murder case on the front page.

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— Queen Latifah

Then enters little Roxie Hart, played by Renee Zellweger. Hart is a wannabe singer/dancer who's entranced by Chicago's promise of fame and fortune and winds up on the row for offing her abusive lover because he lied to her about breaking her into show biz.

Billy immediately recognizes enormous potential in Roxie's crime of passion and, while postponing Velma's case, turns Roxie into America's latest sweetheart. The press loves her, and Roxie milks it for all it's worth, convinced she'll be famous when it's all over.

The jilted Velma, however, has other plans for little Miss Perfect and sets out to sabotage Roxie's case. The two women stop at nothing to top one another and claim their rightful place in the spotlight.

Still, maybe there is room for two on that stage, after all.

Or maybe Latifah should take the stage alone — to accept her Oscar.

"I feel like I'm living in a dream. Don't even say the 'O' word to me," she told the Daily News of all the kudos and Oscar talk over her performance as Mama.

EL OBSERVADOR

First Latina Elected Statewide Begins Term

(AP) — Oregon's new superintendent of schools, Susan Castillo has a big job waiting for her — schools reeling from budget cuts, federal mandates looming, and a surly legislature.

"There's a huge learning curve still in front of me," said Castillo, a Democrat from Eugene who has spent five years in the state Senate, but never worked in the public school system. "I love learning, so I am looking forward to that part of it, but it's huge."

After years spent wrangling over budgets in the capital, Castillo's more than familiar with that part of the equation. She says she's prepared to do battle for the sticker-shocked schools, which have already absorbed about \$170 million in cuts, even if she's got to forsake other state programs along the way.

It's the other parts of her new job — like coping with the Bush



Susan Castillo

administration's new education reforms, curbing the state's still high drop-out rate and navigating the charged debate over whether to make high schoolers pass a state test in order to graduate — that she'll have to digest in a hurry.

A former television reporter, Castillo says she knows she'll be fighting a war of perception about Oregon schools, especially as one school district after another

"I'm ready for (the job) and I look forward to it. Let's figure out how we can gain back whatever trust has been shaken a bit, so we can stay focused on how we help kids achieve."

— Susan Castillo, Superintendent of Schools

announces plans to cut back school days, and teachers and school boards fight bitterly over contracts.

"We've got to articulate how we are spending those dollars, why those decisions are made, and what we are getting back in return," she said.

So far, Castillo said, her plan is

to be a bridge-builder — with the state's higher education community, traditionally a competitor for education dollars, or with the state's federal delegation, long attuned more to natural resource issues than Oregon's schools.

Her election to Oregon's top schools job made Castillo the first Latina elected to statewide office.

She's a native of Los Angeles, raised by a mother who dropped out of school in the eighth grade, and was determined that her daughter would have the education she never got.

Now, she said, she owes it to the state's mothers, and fathers too, to stabilize, if not increase, funding for their children's schools.

"I'm ready for it, and I look forward to it," she said. "Let's figure out how we can gain back whatever trust has been shaken a bit, so we can stay focused on how we help kids achieve."

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