

NORTH HARRIS COUNTY COLLEGE UNITED FACULTY

2700 W. W. THORNE DRIVE • SUITE A-217 • HOUSTON, TEXAS 77073

THE ADVOCATE

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Edited by Steve Davis

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN---NEW CAMPUS MANAGEMENT

Last semester, for the first time in my tenure in this position, I felt like a real union president. The reason for such a feeling was that I was able to operate like one. A union president must work with administration on conflict resolution in which reasonable cooperation and the art of compromise prevail. The problem with the college's previous administration was that these elements not only failed to prevail, they were totally absent. On almost every issue that AFT leadership brought before them, we were met with obstinate resistance. Conflicts were resolved, not in an atmosphere of quiet discussion, but in one of unnecessary hostility. Each union victory was the result of hard-nosed, aggressive tactics, sometimes with the help of legal counsel.

Times have changed. We no longer have campus leaders who automatically throw up a wall when they see the AFT coming. As a result, union leadership has been able to move more effectively in the resolution of problems. While I can not disclose names or specific departments, I can give general examples, which include getting back pay for an employee whom we believed to have been unfairly docked and resolving a conflict in pay schedules. We also discovered that policies have often been applied in one department and not in another, or policies have been interpreted in widely various ways. The AFT was able to secure administrative agreement that policies will be applied in a consistent and fair manner in the future. We have also had a couple of members who encountered difficulty in some area of job performance. Rather than call Austin to line up legal counsel in preparation to fight premature dismissal, the AFT sat down with administration and found ways to help the employees understand the problem and improve. In each instance, the AFT found the administrators involved to be cooperative, rational, and willing to work out reasonable solutions. In areas where our members were clearly in the right, we instantly secured everything for which we asked. In situations that were gray, we were given the benefit of the doubt. In areas where members had a deficiency of some sort, we were able to work out agreements satisfactory to all parties.

"Education for Democracy — Democracy for Education"

EDITORIAL NOTES

Congratulations are in order for two loyal members of AFT. Michael Ratz, formerly of Kingwood College, has recently been appointed Coordinator of Police Services for North Harris College. PSRP President Greg Mitchell informs us that every full-time police officer employed by NHMCCD is a union member. These officers---literally blue-collar workers---bring a high degree of efficiency and professionalism to their work. We are most proud to count them in our ranks.

Some of you may have heard before the holidays that Patricia Plunk of the District Personnel Office had been selected to appear on Jeopardy. Patricia traveled to Hollywood, where she participated in a taping on January 13. She finished second to the champion of the previous game, beating out a doctoral student in Italian Renaissance literature in the process. (The editor is most proud to report that she answered a number of questions in American History.) While Patricia did not win any money for her performance, she did come away with a seven-day ski trip to a Colorado resort. To even appear on this program, one must survive an incredibly rigorous selection process. Of the thousands of individuals who expressed interest during Jeopardy's Houston search, only three hundred were contacted, only thirty of those selected for the program, and only a handful of those will actually appear on TV. For Patricia to get as far as she did is a real testament to her ability. This is only further proof of the fine quality of employees at NHMCCD and yes, of the fine caliber of members of the AFT. Patricia's segment will air the week after Easter. The Advocate will give more specifics at a later date. We reiterate our pride in her achievement.

This was an unusually long intersemester break. Perhaps the fact that Christmas and New Year's Day fell on Wednesday accounts for its duration. Most welcome was the fact that staff employees received the full week off between Christmas and New Year for the first time in memory. I know they all appreciated the extra time this gave them to relax with their families away from the demands of the work environment. Even administrators deserved this break from the normal routine. It seems fairly clear that no students were unduly inconvenienced by the college's being closed for that short period. For all these reasons, this should become the permanent policy at NHMCCD.

In addition, in-service week was streamlined by the deletion of the traditional Monday gathering at North Harris College. I can speak for faculty in saying how much this benefitted us by providing extra time to prepare for the first week of classes. I also appreciated the degree to which staff were included in in-service activities. Dr. Pickelman's earlier decision to forego a December graduation ceremony in favor of having one big function each May in the Woodlands was also laudable. These positive changes deserve our praise. In many cases, the new Chancellor frankly has dispensed with some of the baloney that formerly prevailed at this institution. Also, many of his appointments have been superb. The promotions of people like Nellie Thorogood and Steve Head, the hiring of Sandy Shugart, and the current news that Bonnie Longnion will become the Chancellor's assistant, prove that Pickelman is willing to put dynamic, progressive folks in positions of high responsibility.

A lot of administrators have been working well with AFT leadership in this new atmosphere. Of particular note, however, are Sandy Shugart and Jim Taylor at North Harris and Steve Head at Kingwood College, who have made it clear that they welcome AFT involvement. The union has proven its ability to step into the arena and go toe-to-toe with a hostile, combative administration. We much prefer quiet conversations with our friends.

Alan Hall

UNION ADOPTS NEW NAME

As indicated in an earlier issue, AFT leaders have been examining the possibility of changing the name of our local organization to reflect dramatic changes in its composition. Late last term, members overwhelmingly approved the choice "EMPLOYEE FEDERATION OF NHMCCD" to replace "NHCC United Faculty." We thus announce this alteration in our first communication of 1992. We expect the full name to be shortened naturally to "the Federation" or that folks will continue to style us simply as "the AFT." Whatever the case, our mission remains constant--to advance employee rights and the cause of educational excellence at NHMCCD. A rose by any other name...

For now, the old Advocate letterhead remains in place. Being environmentally correct, we intend to deplete the old stationery before the new masthead for this newsletter makes its debut. Stay tuned for further exciting details.

GEE, I WISH I HAD SAID THAT

"I worry about inequality between the poor and the rich; justice between the less fortunate and the more fortunate. I think in the last ten or fifteen years, our country has become more polarized."---Dr. Sandy Shugart quoted in The Paper, Dec., 1991.

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God."---Jesus of Nazareth, Mark 10:25

"We won. Not that the victory matters a damn. And perhaps we didn't win anyway. Perhaps they just lost. Or perhaps, without the bonds of ideological conflict to restrain us any more, our troubles are just beginning. Never mind. What matters is that a long war is over. What matters is the hope."---George Smiley, a character in John Le Carré's The Secret Pilgrim, reflecting on the end of the Cold War.

I'M GLAD I DIDN'T SAY THAT

"Are you customers or are you part of the action around here?"---George Bush to several young women at a country-western dance club in Beeville, Tx., Houston Chronicle, Dec. 28, 1991.

"Hawaii has always been a very pivotal role in the Pacific. It is in the Pacific. It is a part of the United States that is an island that is right here."---Dan Quayle on a "fact-finding" trip to the East.

"Let them eat cake."---Marie Antoinette upon being informed that the people of Paris had no bread. She was guillotined in 1793.

AFT leaders are keenly aware that some huge decisions still loom, especially concerning compensation, that provide rich potential for administrative mischief. We intend to maintain our vigilance, applying to college developments the same skills in critical thinking that we try to impart to our students in the classroom. When necessary, the AFT unhesitatingly will don the mantle of loyal opposition. But view our criticism in its proper context. In the past year, we've witnessed at NHMCCD the crumbling of our own ancien régime. To paraphrase Lincoln Steffens--an American muckraker from another era--we've glimpsed the future and it just may work.

Steve Davis

"JFK" LECTURE

Allen Vogt, History Instructor and AFT Treasurer, will speak on the topic "'JFK': Has Hollywood Solved the Crime of the Century?" on Thursday, February 6, at 7 p.m. at North Harris College (room yet to be determined). Dr. Vogt has been recognized for years as one of the local experts on the Kennedy assassination. In 1987, History Teacher published his scholarly article on the subject. Don't miss his provocative presentation. For more information, call the North Harris History Department at 443-5580.

TFT Recognized For Outstanding Growth

The Texas Federation of Teachers has been awarded the AFT Carl Megei Membership Growth Award for 1990-1991 in recognition of having the third highest percentage of growth in the AFT. TFT President John Cole accepted the award on behalf of the TFT at the annual AFT State Federation Presidents Conference last month.

"TFT had a banner year largely because of membership gains made by the Alliance of Dallas Educators and the Houston Federation of Teachers," stated Cole. Other locals with good growth included Corpus Christi and El Paso.

"More and more teachers and paraprofessionals are turning to TFT for leadership to solve the critical problems facing their

school districts," Cole said. "TFT locals have provided that leadership and are now gaining new members as a result of their outstanding programs."

The TFT's national affiliate, the American Federation of Teachers, continues to be one of the fastest growing unions in the country. "Membership in AFT and other unions is growing because professional employees are demanding better working conditions, affordable health care and job security," AFT President Albert Shanker said.

AFT membership has increased by 30,000 since 1990, including a 4,000 member increase since September.