



# The Advocate

## Nearing the Finish Line: One Generation's Triumphs and Defeats

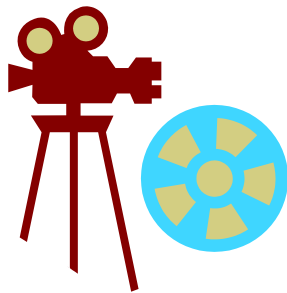
### **Longtime Coming—a personal history of racial integration.**

*American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful, and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it.*

—James Baldwin

I grew up in a people-bland world. By bland, I mean colorless. No diversity. Neither of ideas nor of skin color. But the people-bland people in the small southeast Texas town of my upbringing thought bland was good, and, unfortunately, I thought so, too. Until I reached puberty. Something about the hormones coursing through my pre-teen body somehow affected my thinking, or as acquaintances and relatives said, “Gary’s got peculiar ideas.”

One of those peculiar ideas was to wonder why Blacks had to live in a section outside of town separate from Whites, go to churches separate from Whites, go to schools separate from Whites, and sit in a separate, distant-from-the-screen balcony of the local movie theater. I couldn’t see much difference between Blacks and Whites, except that Blacks had an amazing ebony hue to their skin.



Truth be told, I got my fascination with Blacks from a grandmother who adored Black preachers and often took me to Black churches. She thought Black preachers preached the Bible like God had intended, and she was more on the mark that she knew. It became clear even to my undeveloped mind that Black preachers had an intuitive and intellectual grasp of Biblical literature far more profound than that of most White preachers.



Black school teachers were also a gifted lot, as I learned when one of my school principals took me to a “Black” school on the outskirts of town to deliver a trunk-load of hand-me-down textbooks. I talked with a Black school teacher about my love of science fiction (a natural obsession for a fuzz-faced kid), and she explained to me that Edgar Allen Poe, not Jules Verne, invented science fiction in his prose poem *Eureka*. When I asked my White school teacher, Mrs. Mason (name changed to protect the ignorant) if I could get a copy of the poem, she told me she’d never heard of it. She told me that Poe wrote horror stories, not science fiction, and that I shouldn’t take too much stock in what the Black teacher said because



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“colored” people weren’t as well educated as Whites.

I certainly never saw educated Blacks in the movies. And I wondered how Blacks up in the balcony of the movie theater felt when they saw themselves portrayed as illiterate goofballs or fat, jovial maids while people with White skin were portrayed as brainy heroes. It bothered me. I couldn’t reconcile the Black characters in movies with the brilliant preacher-orators in the pulpit. And then there was this fellow I’d read about in an encyclopedia named George Washington Carver. His life fascinated me because I had been raised on a peanut farm until the age of five. I had never heard about Mr. Carver, though, and his study of the peanut plant, nor had I ever heard of his breakthrough agricultural research. Reading about Carver was an epiphany for me. Blacks, like that Black school teacher on the outskirts of town, knew things and knew things well.

At the time of my pubescent enlightenment about “colored” people, the U. S. Supreme Court handed down the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, (1954) which declared racially segregated schools to be unconstitutional. My school blithely ignored the ruling. As did many other schools. In fact, in the six years after the desegregation ruling, fewer than 2% of southern Black school children went to integrated schools. My social studies teacher, a former Christian minister and otherwise kind gentlemen (don’t remember his name), spoke about the Supreme Court ruling in rather stolid tones: “Integration with Negroes will never work because, as good-hearted as Negroes are, they do not have the intellectual capacity of Whites.”

So, I asked him how an intellectually inferior Black school teacher across town could understand Edgar Allen Poe. And what about George Washington Carver?

“That’s easy,” he said. “Negroes are simple people whom God sometimes imbues with a certain gift of understanding. But God did not create them with



the overall intellect of White people.” (I remember I had to look up the word “imbue.”)

I asked the old Black man named Joe (seems in those days we called all Black men Joe) who carried off junk from my step-father’s store if he had any gifts of understanding. Joe chuckled. “No, don’t think I do,” he said. “ ‘Course, I understands the Devil, yes sir, sure do. And I ‘spect that old Devil mixes people’s minds up and makes them superstitious ‘bout lots of things.”

Joe was poor. He had his own business hauling off junk from store-front businesses in my town. My family owned one of those businesses. My family was never rich, not by any means, but we lived comfortably. Joe didn’t live comfortably. He lived with his family in a ramshackle house in a deep woods Black community. Many Blacks dwelled in the forest around my town in those days, primarily because they were out of White sight and could raise chickens and cows plus shoot deer and squirrels for food. My family’s food came from the grocery store, and our home was a well-constructed edifice that my step-dad built, pretty much by himself, in a well manicured community of White folks.

Joe surely had the skill to build his own house, but he couldn’t have afforded adequate building supplies and definitely couldn’t have built his house in our neighborhood anymore than he could have put a store-front business in town. Nor could he work inside a store-front alongside Whites. The doors of economic opportunity were bolted shut for Joe. He and his family were part of the 55% of Black families in those days living below the poverty level of income. He would have fared no better had he lived “up north” where Blacks were likewise excluded from White neighborhoods, businesses, and, yes, unions. Wherever he could have lived in America, he would have had little chance of earning more than half as much money as White men. His children had only half the chance of completing high school as I did, a third of my chances for completing college, and a third of my chances of becoming a professional. I’ll never know how long Joe lived, but I do know his life expectancy in those days was seven years less than White men his age.



The 1960s saw me in college, off and on, but ultimately finishing. Blacks were not in my college classrooms in the early 60s, and I along with a cadre of post-adolescent rabble-rousers raised a ruckus about it with our professors. A college vice-president at an esteemed private college in Tennessee told us aggravators that we probably weren't suited to his institution.



I parted ways with that college and went to work. But I found that conditions for Blacks were no better in the "lowbrow" work-world than in "highbrow" college-world. Multiple color barriers blocked any chance of Black success. But color barriers began to crumble under the weight of two larger-than-life figures, who just happened to show up on the world stage at the same time. The first figure was Martin Luther King, Jr., who said while standing in a northern, not southern, city,

We're through with tokenism and gradualism and see-how-far-you've-comeism. We're through with we've-done-more-for-your-people-than-anyone-elseism. We can't wait any longer. Now is the time.

For me, King was the epitome of Black preacher brain-power I'd grown up watching and admiring. King also had an inestimable genius for getting people to translate passion into footsteps. And so, with unparalleled oratorical skill and courage, King marched Blacks headlong over the barriers of the White world for an equal sitting at the table of freedom and dignity.

The second towering figure to demolish color barriers was Lyndon Baines Johnson, who manhandled southern legislators to get a cannily crafted Civil Rights Act engraved into law in 1964 and who engineered the much



maligned legislation of The Great Society. Johnson's legislative genius brought a sea-change to the economic well-being of Blacks. Despite his Vietnam debacle, Johnson's Great Society initiatives saw in the 1960s and 1970s median Black family income rise 53%, Black employment in white-collar jobs going from 11% to 28%, Black college graduates going from 10% to 21%, and Blacks living below poverty falling from over 50% to under 30%.

Unfortunately, economic conditions for Blacks came to a standstill or began deteriorating after the 1970s. During the 1980s, twice as many Black males as White males were out of work. By the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, median income for Black families was about \$33,000, while it stood at \$53,000 for White families. By 2004, the unemployment rate for Blacks was just over 10%, but just under 5% for Whites. Although estimates vary, the approximate wage level today for Blacks is about 75% of what Whites earn in similar occupations.

We lost the vision, if not the political will, of The Great Society. Our vision of "hope for all" was lost in a labyrinth of political arguments over government's role in providing a helping hand to our historically disenfranchised citizens. The argument was that since Blacks had been given a full seat at the table, they had as fair a chance as anyone of making good. But Lyndon Johnson saw the flaw in that argument when he said, "You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, 'you are free to compete with all the others,' and still justly believe that you have been completely fair."

Still, the economic opportunities in 2007 for Blacks are greater than ever, and Blacks do succeed in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century in ways I couldn't have imagined in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. My friend, Joe, the middle-aged Black man from whom I learned about economic and social impoverishment, could never have had a seat at the White man's economic dinner table. He had no chance of being one of America's richest citizens or of being a top level manager in an international corporation. But today,



Oprah Winfrey with a net worth of \$800 million is in the Forbes 400 list of wealthiest Americans—the only Black on the list, but at least there is a Black.

Kenneth Chenault is a Black CEO who has been heading up a Fortune 500 company called American Express since 2001, and he steered the company to a profit of \$1.1 billion in the third quarter of this year. Another CEO of the Fortune 500 elite is Clarence Otis, Jr., CEO of Darden Corporation, which owns restaurants like Olive Garden and Red Lobster. But the success of Chenault and Otis along with a handful of other high-level Black business executives accounts for only 1% of all corporate CEOs.

Joe could never have dreamed of being a respected business leader in my little home town, not to mention the impossibility of his serving as a city councilman. But today, we have a Black man who may become President of the United States, a possibility that also occurred in 1984 and 1987 when Jesse Jackson became the first Black to run for President.

That means Joe's children and grandchildren have seen Black people of their generation able to reach for the highest office in the land. It keeps hope going. I remember Jackson's voice ringing from the podium of the 1988 Democratic convention in one of the greatest speeches ever given:

Hold your head high, stick your chest out. You can make it. It gets dark sometimes, but the morning comes. ...We must never surrender. America will get better and better. Keep hope alive. Keep hope alive. Keep hope alive.

Some time ago, I was giving a speech about birds (of course!) to a rather staid group of well-heeled folks, and I mentioned that one of the reasons birds have remained viable in the face of horrendous environmental degradations is

because of their incomparable diversity--- something we humans should take note of. Monoculturism in nature is weakness. Multiculturism in nature is strength. One of the oh-so-dapperly dressed men in the audience came up to me afterwards and said in a rather deprecating tone, "Don't you work at a school where mostly Blacks go?" Now, I could have responded with an exposition of the demographic make-up of my campus, information emblazoned on my brain, but I didn't. Instead, I said, "Yes sir and I'm proud of it because it's taken me six decades to get to that level." Today, as I forge ahead with my colleagues on an initiative called "Achieving the Dream" —didn't Martin Luther King, Jr. have a dream?—to bring hope to minority students, especially scholastically disadvantaged Blacks, I do so casting bureaucratic frustrations aside and keeping my "eye on the prize" despite the naysayers. Because I remember Joe. I remember his kids. And I will never let go of the dream that all Black Americans will one day be fully, fully, fully free.

*The problems of the world cannot possibly be solved by skeptics or cynics whose horizons are limited by the obvious realities. We need men who can dream of things that never were.*

—John Keats

Gary Clark  
Dean of Business, Social and  
Behavioral Sciences, NHC

**Editor's Note.** Dean Clark's essay is the latest in our periodic series called "Nearing the Finish Line," reflections of the baby boomers' experience in various national areas. The Advocate invites you to join in this series with any well-conceived article on topics such as changes in the work place (our national shift, for example, from industry to service economy), education, economics, etc., as they have influenced our country from about 1944 to today. We welcome your ideas.

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## **AFT Member Survey**

Next spring, probably in February, the union will conduct a survey of all AFT members in the Lone Star College System. The survey will include approximately 90 questions and take about fifteen minutes to complete. Among other issues, the AFT will be seeking member feedback on their views of union leadership, satisfaction with representation, and advocacy on their behalf. Surveys will be anonymous and will include space for additional comments. Members will receive the surveys at their home address and return them in postage paid envelopes. We encourage all members to take advantage of the opportunity to participate in this important information gathering process.



## **2007/2008 Salaries**

The AFT's article in the September/October 2007 Advocate focusing on salary increases for this academic year certainly generated an enormous amount of discussion. My email and phone lit up. I couldn't walk down the hallway on any campus without employees wanting to talk about the article. As expected, faculty and staff were taken aback by the news that the Board of Trustees adjusted upper administrative positions from 14.4% to 29.5% while most other employees saw only a 5% increase. As a reminder, the chart on the next page shows the changes. To be clear, the change for the Chancellor's position was not a raise. The Board adjusted the compensation for the position from last year to this one by 29.5%.




**Chancellor**  
**2006/2007**

Salary	\$211,229
Deferred Compensation, performance-based	15% (28,167)
Auto Allowance	\$1000/month
Business Expense Stipend	\$1000/month
<b>Total Compensation</b>	<b>\$263,396</b>

**Chancellor**  
**2007/2008**

Salary	\$310,000
Deferred Compensation, performance-based	10% (31,000)
Auto Allowance	\$.0/month
Business Expense Stipend	\$.0/month
<b>Total Compensation</b>	<b>\$341,000</b>

**Presidents, Vice Chancellors,**  
**and Executive Vice Chancellor**  
**2006/2007**

Salary	\$133,547
Deferred Compensation, performance-based	10% (13,355)
Auto Allowance	\$800/month
Business Expense Stipend	\$600/month
<b>Total Compensation</b>	<b>\$163,702</b>

**Presidents, Vice Chancellors,**  
**and Executive Vice Chancellor**  
**2007/2008**

Salary	\$155,000
Deferred Compensation, performance-based	10% (15,500)
Auto Allowance	\$800/month
Business Expense Stipend	\$600/month
<b>Total Compensation</b>	<b>\$187,300</b>

(information obtained from AFT requests to DSTC)

The changes in upper administrative compensation were intended to bring their salaries to the national average for their positions. The union requested and received from Human Resources the surveys used to determine those averages. The surveys are long and complicated, and we are slowly working our way through them. We plan to provide data from these documents in a future issue of the newsletter.

A recent article in Community College Times (September 28, 2007) is worth noting. It reports 2006 Total Cash Compensation for community college CEOs (p. 16).

**Compensation of Community College**  
**CEO's, by College Type: 2006**
**Total Cash Compensation**

College Type	Average
College in multi-college district	174,319
District Office of multi-college district	221,629



Compensation adjustments place the NHMCCD presidents and vice chancellors' positions \$12,981 above the 2006 average and the chancellor's position \$119,371 above it. Of course, one assumes the national average increased some for 2007. We'll have to wait until next year to see how our administrators' adjustment compares nationally. The AFT will also compare the data reported in Community College Times with the data in the surveys used by Human Resources.

When the AFT inquired as to why national averages were used to adjust upper administrative salaries, we were told that the adjustment was market driven. The explanation noted that the size of the pool from which to hire quality administrators is so small that our System must advertise and compete in the national pool. On the other hand, we were told, the pool for faculty and staff is sizable enough that the System can find well-qualified candidates in-state.

It is worth taking a look at the rationale for upper administration in terms of current and, in one case, a recent employee.

Position	Number	Hired from in-state	Hired from out-of-state
Vice Presidents	10	9 (8 from within the System)	1
Presidents	5	3	2
Vice Chancellors	4	3 (1 from within the District)	1
Chancellors in the last 15 years	2	1	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>5</b>

Of the top 21 administrators, all but five came to the District from Texas. It would appear that the District is able to hire the majority of highly qualified upper administration from within Texas.

The AFT's position is that if the District is going to benchmark national averages for some employees, it should do it for all employees. Faculty and staff would certainly fare better.

The union wants to be clear. We are not complaining that upper administrative salaries increased 14.4% to 29.5%. We are troubled by the fact that while they have gained significant ground financially, most faculty and staff have lost ground by 3% since 2003. Something is wrong with this picture, something the Board of Trustees should have considered this year. They will obviously have to take a look at this huge gap as they consider salaries for next year. The problem is not the increase the upper administration received; it is the increase other employees did not receive.

The Sept./Oct. 2007 Advocate article ended with a call for faculty and staff to become more active in their careers here in the system. We urged them not to sit back and complain but to do something—join the AFT. The union is gratified to note that the week that the last issue came out, eight employees joined immediately, and more have since. We continue to urge all non-members to consider joining the AFT—a union of professionals.

Alan Hall



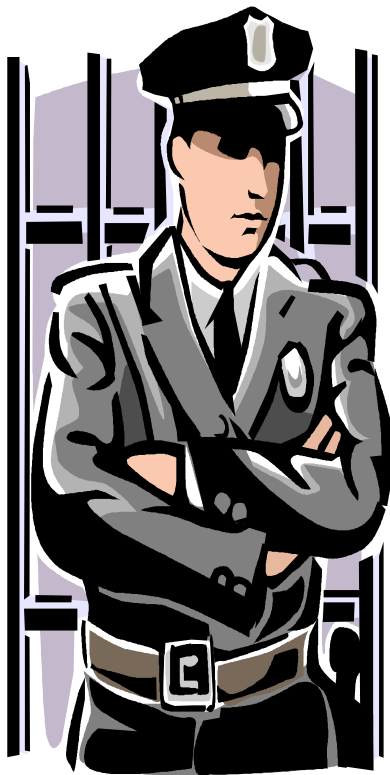


## Campus Safety

The AFT remains committed to playing a role in promoting campus safety. The union has sponsored three training sessions presented by the Counter Terrorism Intelligence Group, an FBI taskforce that focuses on school violence. Two sessions were held at NHC and one at Tomball. The program was open to college system police officers as well as officers for area agencies. All participants have praised the training as truly outstanding. The union plans to offer additional training in the future.

More needs to be done with regard to campus safety. The 1960 Sun ran a story on 11-06-07 titled "Student Reportedly Attacked" about a female student who "reported last week that she was the victim of an attempted sexual assault while walking to class." According to the victim, two men knocked her to the ground, pulled down her pants, and then left. There were no witnesses, and campus police are still investigating. Dr.

Tom Butler, Montgomery College President, appropriately sent an email to the entire college



community regarding the report and urging all to use caution to protect themselves on campus.

The Sun article noted,

"The only reported sex offenses in the Lone Star College System... occurred at Kingwood and Tomball Colleges, according to Lone Star College System crime statistics on the district's website. Aggravated assaults were reported at Tomball College in 2006 and the District Service and Training Center in 2002 when it was located at 250 N. Sam Houston Parkway E. in Houston."

AFT urges the administration to take a hard look at the campus safety issue. That review should ensure that there is an adequate budget to provide the number of officers we need and make sure that they have the equipment they need. In addition, it is time to install cameras on all building exteriors and in all parking lots. If cameras were already in place, perhaps we could identify the two reported attackers at Montgomery College and they would be in jail rather than perhaps still walking around campus.

Our students and employees need to both feel and be safe on campus. The union is committed to helping in that cause.

Alan Hall

## Membership Eligibility

Membership in the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) is open to full and part-time faculty and staff up through the dean level. If you would like to join or find out more information about membership, please contact any of the officers listed on page 20 of this newsletter, or check out our online information and application at [www.aft-nhmccd.org](http://www.aft-nhmccd.org).

## Monthly AFT Dues

Full-time Faculty	\$29.30
Full-time Professional Staff	\$25.50
Full-time Support Staff	\$21.90
Adjunct Faculty & Staff	\$10.00





## A Trickle-down Tribute?

In a transparent cost-cutting strategy disguised as tribute, the administration has unilaterally changed the nature and format of the annual Employee Awards Banquet. In the past, the awards dinner has been a justifiably lavish affair at which award winners could dine and celebrate with their coworkers and colleagues. Now, it seems, the administration will offer a winners-only “luncheon” at 1pm on Friday, February 15<sup>th</sup>. This decision, in the wake of administrative pay raises that eclipse the “across-the-board” employee raises of 5%, is yet another example of the district’s (now “system’s”) trickle-down economic sensibility. In other words, while the district’s top administrators’ cups runneth over, the rest of us are expected to gratefully quench our thirst with the resulting, and trickling, run-off.

I can’t help but be reminded of a situation documented in Bill Moyer’s 1994 PBS special on education in America. Among the documentary’s profiles was that of a small high school in Appalachian Ohio that underwent an astonishing transformation. In fewer than ten years, the school went from performing (academically and athletically) in the bottom 10% of the state’s schools to consistently ranking in the *top* 10%. The difference, some would argue, was a matter of finances. A nuclear power plant was built in the district, and the resulting tax revenues afforded a dramatic overhaul of facilities and amenities. Students who were once asked to “learn” in dilapidated school buildings with leaky roofs and smoky, coal-burning furnaces suddenly found themselves graced with new, clean, state-of-the-art facilities. But new buildings and other facilities don’t educate, nor do they learn; people do. The dramatic difference, then, was a matter of bolstered student and employee morale. Strangely enough, when people *feel* valued, they perform accordingly. When they don’t, they don’t. What, then, is the



likely result of “saving” the cost of an annual event that shows employees how greatly they are valued and appreciated? I would argue that this “savings” promises, in the end, to be a great liability.

Of course, there are other reasons that this diminished celebration is ill-conceived. For starters, most employees work on Friday afternoons, so we must consider the cost of their lost performance should they choose to attend the luncheon in lieu of working during that time. For the same reason, many will find attendance impossible or inconvenient. In addition, the annual dinner banquet offered many employees (not just the award winners) an all-too-rare opportunity to get dressed up and enjoy a special evening with family and friends — an opportunity, alas, to feel as worthy of tribute as they are. Take that away, and the “award luncheon” becomes yet another reduction in the benefits of employment.



The subtitle of Billy Moyers’ documentary was “A Bunch of Flowers Growing in the Garbage Can.” This district is abloom with talented employees. We can only hope that the administration will rethink this decision and refuse, in doing so, to complete the Moyers metaphor.

Bruce Machart  
Professor of English, NHC

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**HAPPY HOLIDAYS  
FROM  
THE AMERICAN  
FEDERATION OF  
TEACHERS**





## Campus Updates

### NORTH HARRIS COLLEGE

Since our last report we have conducted one mediation, represented six employees involved in conflicts, and advised five employees on dealing with difficult situations. We are happy to have gotten positive outcomes and made progress in each situation. We are, of course, very pleased by Dr. Steve Head's appointment as NHC's president. We look forward to a continued excellent working relationship. Our holiday celebration will be December 12th, from 11:30 - 1:30, in the private dining room.

Bruce Machart, AFT Faculty VP

I hope everyone enjoyed the Fall Celebration at Bill's Café as much as Laura and I did. It was good to see everyone and share good food, spirits and fellowship. If you're in the neighborhood they serve a pretty mean steak! I can't believe there's only six weeks left in the semester. It goes faster every year. Have a Happy Thanksgiving! December 12th, 1:00pm - 3:00pm, we celebrate the holidays with apple and peach cobbler with vanilla ice cream in SFA -125 & 126.

Rich Almstedt, AFT Faculty VP

### CY-FAIR COLLEGE

Robert McGehee, VP for Cy-Fair, continues to recover from surgery he had earlier this year, and we are glad to report that he is doing well. Until he returns, staff members with questions or concerns are encouraged to contact Earl Brewer at Cy-Fair College. Faculty are encouraged to contact Charles Wuest at the Fairbanks Center.

### MONTGOMERY COLLEGE

Our semester AFT members meeting was held on Monday, Nov. 12th from 3:00-4:30 in A110. Our guest was AFT President, Alan Hall. With the end of the semester approaching, we are busy planning our End of the Semester Celebration. This will be open to all employees. It's on Monday, Dec. 10th from 11:00-2:00 p.m. in the Blue Star Café. Come by for some yummy holiday treats!.

Julie Alber, AFT Faculty VP  
Cheri Riggs, AFT Staff VP

### TOMBALL COLLEGE

Well Maties,

Tis seems the winds thar ar achangin! No sooner the sails set taking us outward bound than the telltales showed a zephyr bringin a change in course. Signal flags from a passing trawler resulted in a reverse heading back to port. By the time we reached port the eye of the wind was sure and true. Once dockside we were racked and the scraping, painting and renaming began as TCS Tomball is re-registered under new ownership from the NHMCCD – TCS Tomball to the LSCS – TCS Tomball. Suspicions are that as soon as the Flagship has completely changed over to the new stationary, the TCS Tomball will be finding a change in the name for this fine ship as well as the rest of the fleet. (Twill see, twill see.)

On another note, the change of wind brought aboard a few new hands and officers, but all still seems quiet on the western front. That taint to say that there be no scuttlebutt goin` round the water barrel, tis just that the admiralty staff hasn't openly keel hauled anyone lately.

Till next report from the Bridge,  
Richard Becker, AFT Faculty VP

**All are welcome to attend any of the AFT holiday events. You do not need to be a member.**



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## CALL FOR ARTICLES

We invite all employees to send us their opinions, news, questions, and so forth. *The Advocate* is a forum for information and free interchange of ideas. Send your articles to **Pat Gray, Editor**, NHC, ext. 5545 or e-mail: [patsy.gray@nhmccd.edu](mailto:patsy.gray@nhmccd.edu), or **Heather Mitchell, Assistant Editor**, CFC, ext. 3254, or e-mail: [heather.mitchell@nhmccd.edu](mailto:heather.mitchell@nhmccd.edu) or submit to any of the other following officers:

Alan Hall, President	North Harris College	ACAD 217-G	ext.5544
Velma Trammell	North Harris College	DTEC 101	ext. 5612
Bruce Machart	North Harris College	ACAD 217-A	ext. 5542
Bob Locander	North Harris College	ACAD 270	ext. 5592
Allen Vogt	North Harris College	ACAD 264-C	ext. 5583
Vivian Brecher	North Harris College	LIBR 114	ext. 5403
Rich Almstedt	Kingwood College	FTC 100-G	ext. 1656
Laura Yates	Kingwood College	SFA 113-D	ext. 1414
Catherine Olson	Tomball College	S - 153 - H	ext. 3776
Richard Becker	Tomball College	E-271-D	ext. 1835
Julie Alber	Montgomery College	E 205-E	ext. 7241
Cheri Riggs	Montgomery College	C 100-C	ext. 7370
Robert McGehee	Cy-Fair College	ART 113-H	ext. 3935

## Membership Has Its Benefits

The union encourages employees to join because they believe that college employees should have a voice in their professional lives. We don't encourage employees to join because they anticipate conflict or are already engaged in a conflict. In fact, if they are already embroiled in a situation, we are unable to help them. It is all too common for someone to approach the AFT and say something like, "I've been an employee for the district for several years, and I've just recognized the importance of joining." Typically, following that comment is, "I'm in trouble and need help." I finally lost track of how many times in the last year I've had to say, "I'm sorry, but member benefits don't cover anything that predates membership." The individuals to whom I had to say that were invited to join and provided some advice on how to proceed with their

situation, but assistance ended there. Were they members, a host of benefits would have been available. The AFT provides its members with advice and guidance as well as representation in conflict resolution and grievances. We have our own local attorney and can seek legal advice and counsel for members. We maintain a local legal defense fund. In addition, membership dues include, at no extra charge, \$8 million in professional liability insurance for claims arising out of professional activities.

Most of our members don't join because they believe that they may need the AFT's help in a conflict. They join because they believe in the values of the AFT—that employees should be treated with dignity and respect, that employees should help each other, that employees should have a voice in their professional

lives, that employees deserve fair pay and good working conditions, and that the district needs a system providing checks and balances. They join because they want to support an organization that helps others in so many ways. A nice benefit is that, if they do need help, it's there for them.

If you believe in these values and are not a member, now is the perfect time to join. The AFT advocated effectively for the raise employees received this year. The annual membership dues are a small percentage of the raise. If you believe in our values, take action now and join the AFT.

Alan Hall