

Local 6361 Leaders Attend Summer Institute for Union Women in Hawaii

By Joy Wi, United Child Care Educators of San Francisco, Local 6361 Steward and CFT ECE Comm. Member

Aloha! This was the first greeting that I heard when I arrived at the Ala Moana Hotel in Honolulu, Hawaii, for the 25th Annual Western Regional Summer Institute for Union Women (SIUW).



them.

The Institute was held on July 7-11, 2006 and the location was exceptional. The Ala Moana Hotel is centrally located between downtown Honolulu and Waikiki. It is connected by an outdoor walkway to the world's largest open-air shopping center that was once the largest shopping center in the world, The Ala Moana Center. The Ala Moana Beach Park is down the block and the Hawaii Convention Center is just across the street. Most importantly, the hotel workers are unionized. What more can you ask for?

The SIUW delegates came from the United States (AK, CA, HI, MA, OR, WA) and Canada. Various professions were represented, including teachers, classified employees, musicians, nurses, hotel workers, healthcare workers, government employees, pilots, and parole officers, just to name some. At first, I thought that the SIUW was only for women, but boy was I wrong. There were a few men among the delegates . . . maybe two or three of

The core class that I took was "Grievance Handling," taught by a fun and energetic instructor from Portland, Oregon. This class taught me my duties and responsibilities as a shop steward, and effective ways for handling grievances and representing members before the employer. It was in this class that I realized that a steward's job will sometimes, by its very nature, involve confrontation. Since I am a non-confrontational person and I have only been a steward for a few months, the job terrified me. But upon learning my rights and by keeping in mind that being a strong advocate means being a union leader in the fullest sense of the word, I was able to let go of my fears.

I also attended a couple of other workshops. "Survive and Thrive" that taught us ways to reduce the stress of union leadership. "Organizing an Action" prepared us for the most unforgettable experience that I had in Hawaii - rallying at the Pacific Beach Hotel and at the Hilton Hawaiian Village to help and support local hotel workers in two unions. I

am very proud of being a part of that job action because the facts that I learned about how the management treats their hotel workers made me very upset. Imagine working for 11 years and just getting one raise or working without a contract because the negotiations that began in 2005 is still ongoing in 2006.

How about taking only a few minutes break (not even a half-hour) and being required to lift mattresses, tidy rooms, replenish amenities, scrub, wash, clean and polish toilets, taps, tiles, sinks, bathtubs and mirrors, wash floors, remove stains, and vacuum 16 times per day. These conditions are simply outrageous! But it gave me great pleasure to know that the job action turnout, spirit, and the vocal support of the SIUW participants encouraged the hotel workers to stand up to their management and exercise their new voice at work.

The SIUW was an enriching, intellectually challenging, useful, empowering, fun and energizing experience. Aside from all the knowledge that I acquired there, I was also able to witness the solidarity and strength of our fellow union sisters and brothers who were ready to help each other in times of need. At the end of the Institute, we did not bid each other Aloha (goodbye), we simply said "A Hui Huo" meaning "till we meet again."

Hero

Continued from page 2

a lifetime of learning. As education professionals, we understand that a teacher's work environment is also a child's learning environment. Unfortunately, that environment is currently under threat in America, and our children are the ones who are suffering most.

For the last 14 years, The Center for the Child Care Workforce/American Federation of Teachers Education Foundation has initiated campaigns for Worthy Wage Day to draw national attention to the issue of early childhood educators' wages. Last year, we delivered 3,000 letters, with jars of Play-Doh®, to Congress with the message, "We Can't Make it With Play-Doh®." To mark 15 years, we want to highlight the real "everyday heroes" - you. Teachers are one of the most important factors for achieving quality in ECE programs. Unfortunately, too many children are left behind because preschools can't recruit and keep good teachers. Wages and benefits are too low and teachers don't have the resources they need in the classroom. The Quilt is one way for us to draw attention to the issues of early childhood educators.

The more "Everyday Heroes" on our Quilt the stronger the message we send to Congress. Please add your name to the Quilt by sending an e-mail to firstclassteachers@aft.org and include your name, city, state and include a statement about why your work makes you an "Everyday Hero." You may also sign the Quilt by visiting www.firstclassteachers.org.



California Federation of Teachers *Early Educator*

January 2007 ■ Vol. 1 No. 6

AFT Booth a Big Success at the NAEYC

By Elaine Merriweather, Secretary-Treasurer of the United Educators of San Francisco, Local 61 and Chair of the CFT ECE Committee

My four day experience at the AFT booth at the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) annual conference in Atlanta, Georgia was exciting and motivating. When I walked up to the booth the first day I was so impressed with the huge backdrop created by the AFT - the "Everyday Heroes" display - that had pictures of AFT early childhood educators working with young children around the country. I recognized several of the teachers in the pictures from San Francisco, which made me feel good.

The display really drew participants to our booth. Meeting other dedicated teachers from Florida, Maine, Texas, and other parts of the United States was an opportunity for me to share with them why the AFT was celebrating them as "Everyday Heroes." It made them feel valued and appreciated to be recognized in this way.

The main activity at the booth was collecting signatures for the "Everyday Heroes" Quilt to be present-



ed to Congress on Worthy Wage day next year to bring attention to the need for better wages and compensation for the ECE workforce. Signing quilt pieces became a very popular activity at the conference, and everyone

appreciated the work of First Class Teachers on this project. Some had heard about First Class Teachers and had visited the web site and are looking forward to seeing the finished quilt. Everyone

who signed a Quilt piece received an AFT sticker that stated "I am an Everyday Hero." It was exciting to see the stickers throughout the conference.

Any time you bring up compensation, benefits and workforce development for early childhood staff, it sparks an interesting discussion. Engaging in conversations about these issues made me realize that folks working in the field feel helpless when it comes to improving their working conditions. The majority did agree with the AFT's approach to addressing the issues that concern us most and said they were compelled to do something locally. In addition to the rich conversations and signing Quilt pieces, participants were able to walk away with a lot of free classroom support materials provided by AFT. The giveaways included the series of "Helping Your Preschool Child" books in English and Spanish, a first aid kit, growth charts in English and Spanish, and Colorin Colorado - a kit designed to help teachers and

See NAEYC, page 3

First Class Teachers

A Joint Project of the American Federation of Teachers and the Center for the Childcare Workforce

First Class Teachers, an associate membership program of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), is an organization dedicated to organizing and mobilizing a diverse group of early childhood educators to advocate on behalf of their profession for better wages, benefits, professional development opportunities and working conditions.

As the voice for early childhood educators, First Class Teachers is committed to improving the profession. Their website, www.firstclassteachers.org, provides information and tools that will help you do your job better. In addition, you can get connected to advocacy campaigns such as "We're Tired of Working for Peanuts" and "We Can't Make it With Play-Doh®," where First Class

Teachers sent over 8,000 letters to Congress telling them to stand up for early childhood educators by providing better wages and benefits.

Members work together to ensure that early childhood educators are given the rights, raises and respect they deserve and that every child's "first classroom" experience is indeed "first class."

Visit www.firstclassteachers.org for updates. To sign up to receive our newsletter and alerts visit <http://www.firstclassteachers.org/support/index.html>.

California Federation
of Teachers
AFT, AFL-CIO
A Union of Professionals

President
Mary Bergan

Secretary Treasurer
Michael Nye

AFT Early Childhood
Education Organizing
Project

Coordinator
Sandra Weese

Organizers
Tanya Arnaiz
Carla Woodworth

The California Federation of Teachers Early Educator is published in conjunction with the CFT Early Childhood Committee and the AFT Early Childhood Education Organizing Proj.

Direct correspondence to:
CFT Early Educator
One Kaiser Plaza, #1440
Oakland, CA 94612
510-832-8812
510-832-5044 fax
web: www.cft.org

If you want to publish an article, email Sandra Weese, sandraweese@sbcglobal.net

Tell Congress – I'm an "Everyday Hero"

Over 2,000 early childhood educators and supporters have added their names to the AFT's "Everyday Heroes" Quilt which will be presented to Congress on Worthy Wage Day – May 1, 2007. Many signed the quilt at the annual conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in Atlanta this past December. Participants came in droves to the AFT booth to be a part of the movement to recognize early childhood educators as "everyday heroes" who deserve improved wages,

benefits and professional development opportunities.

Every year, one-third of all Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers leave their jobs. The major reason— low pay. On average, the typical early childhood educator receives a lower wage than the typical parking lot attendant. That's right—we pay more for people to watch our cars than our kids. It's time for that to change. ECE teachers and staff are the key to high-quality early care and education, and they help set the stage for

See **Hero**, page 4

CFT ECE Committee Member Appointed to San Francisco First 5 Commission

By Betty Robinson Harris, CFT ECE Committee Member

I am the United Educators of San Francisco (UESF) child development chair and a long time advocate for children. I currently teach at San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) Burnett Child Development Center, where I have worked for 18 years. During my 30 year career in ECE, I have taught young children in San Francisco at both private and public sites.

On October 5, 2006 I was appointed to the San Francisco First Five (SFFF) Commission. The commission was developed out of the Proposition 10 cigarette tax initiative passed by California voters in 1998.

The commission handles millions of dollars annually earmarked for children 0-5 years of age, thus the name First Five Commission. My appointment is significant because it marks the first time that a practitioner has been appointed to the SFFF by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.

This appointment came out of the CFT Early Childhood Education (ECE) Committee's dedication to young children. The committee has been a leader in California and in the nation fighting for quality ECE programs that are properly resourced. We support better wages and benefits for

the ECE workforce, more and better professional development opportunities, and access to quality ECE for all children. As the CFT ECE committee has become more politically involved we noticed that no practitioners were on the ECE policy and planning bodies making decisions for and about young children and the educators who teach and care for them. We decided that in order to effect positive change our voices must be heard and we have committed to participate in the process to have real input.

My appointment was a collaborative effort supported by Jessica Smith, Deputy Director of Organizing for AFT, Sandra Weese, CFT Early Childhood Education Organizing Project Director and the project staff, UESF President Dennis Kelly and the SFUSD ECE Committee. I was one of three highly qualified candidates who applied for one of the two seats that were open and my successful appointment to this prominent board truly demonstrates what unions stand for – UNITY. I am very excited and humbled at the idea of representing the children, their families and the educators in San Francisco. I will continue to represent them as I always have, but now I will also be able to make sure their voices are included at the policy table as well.

The 'Know Your Rights' Series

DID YOU KNOW
You have the right to representation if you suspect a meeting may result in discipline.

The Weingarten decision from the US Supreme Court stated that an employee who reasonably anticipates that an interview or investigation may result in punitive or corrective action has the right to union representation. An employee cannot be threatened with discipline for insubordination for refusing to meet without a union representative, and once the union representative is present, he or she must be allowed to speak on behalf of the employee.

Denial of these rights is an unfair labor practice.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS



NAEYC

Continued from page 1

parents of English language learners. I had a great time and I feel that we made a valuable contribution to the conference, and that we made some good organizing contacts.



Barbara Kimmel, Executive Vice President and Sue Dalton, Executive Director, from Oxnard Federation of Teachers pictured at the Kidango Book Drive Table at the EC K-12 and Classified Conference in December.

Thank you to CFT locals and staff for donating to Kidango's Gifts from the Heart Program. Kidango, a non-profit organization with early education centers in Northern California, provides early education, early intervention, mental health, before and after school as well as family child care programs for children. The CFT Early Childhood Education Or-

ganizing Project hopes to make this children's book drive an annual project.

Special thanks to: Local 1273, Oxnard Federation of Teachers, Local 1603, Peralta Federation of Teachers, Staff Guild, Local 1521A, Bob Grill, PFT, CFT Staff Margaret Shelleda, Fred Glass, Donna Siu, Sandra Weese, Rosanna Wiebe and Carla Woodworth.