

Classified Insider

UNION NEWS FOR THE CLASSIFIED SERVICE

Spring – Summer 2012
Volume 2, Number 2



ORGANIZE!

Classified employees choose AFT as their union

PASADENA: College Instructional Services

AN INDEPENDENT association, the Instructional Support Services Unit, has represented classified staff at Pasadena City College since 1991. Relations on the campus have been generally good, until about five years ago, when more than 200 employees

decided the Federation would best fit their needs.

“We wanted a union that was reputable, strong and nationally respected.”

— Alice Araiza, Financial Aid Office

Computer technician Julio Huerta said, “Once we decided on CFT, things moved pretty fast.” Activists called and visited each member. In May, members voted 103-20 in favor of affiliating with the AFT.

One of the first things the new local union did was elect leaders. Araiza retired after 23 years in the Financial Aid Office. Huerta was elected president, and Potts treasurer. “We’re confident this affiliation will give our members stability,” Huerta concluded. ■

took early retirement and the ongoing economic crisis brought staggering budget cuts.

“We needed to get stronger to protect our members,” said Association President Alice Araiza. “We wanted a union that was reputable, strong and nationally respected.”

By 2011, Araiza and the executive board had begun to analyze member needs and unions. “We didn’t affiliate in reaction to anything that happened,” said board member Gary Potts. “We did this because we were looking forward.”

In January, the executive board met with the CFT Organizing Department and gave CFT high marks for offering both autonomy and additional resources, and bringing CFT classified leaders to speak with them. The Pasadena group

LAWDALE: Enrichment Program Workers

NINETY academic support employees staffing an extra-curricular program recently joined the Lawndale Federation of Classified Employees. Realizing Amazing Potential, or RAP, offers before- and after-school activities at nine campuses in the K-8 elementary district.

Started by an outside organization, RAP was absorbed by the Lawndale district but workers had no process for discipline or evaluation, and experienced at-will dismissals, reduced work hours and transfers without notice.

Kristia Groves, an activities specialist at Will Rogers Middle School, said RAP employees

wanted the same benefits as classified employees represented by AFT Local 4529. Because Groves helped research the Education Code, the union was able to show how the duties of RAP employees were

similar to those of union-represented instructional assistants and support staff.

Local President Carl Williams said, “It made no sense to exclude them from our bargaining unit.” After personal visits and phone calls, more than 86 percent of the RAP employees signed union cards. The district quickly recognized the union, giving employees due process and equity. ■



RAP worker Kristia Groves

BERKELEY: Operations and Support Personnel

CLASSIFIED EMPLOYEES who were divided between two unions for nearly a decade were reunited late last year when 170 operations and support workers sought representation by the Berkeley Council of Classified Employees, AFT Local 6192.

“We’re very happy to be back together,” said Johnny Billups, who has driven district buses since 1972 and helped lead the reaffiliation. In 2002, clerical employees and teacher aides voted for AFT, while bus drivers, food service, maintenance workers, campus security, and

custodians joined Stationary Engineers, Local 39.

“That union had no experience in public schools,” Billups said. “In negotiations for the first contract, they gave up many rights we had before.” At meetings of the Berkeley Unified school board, he added, they would watch AFT local President Paula Phillips fighting for her members and think, “This is where we need to be.”

Last fall, the Stationary Engineers gave up its representation rights and Phillips circulated petitions among the workers.



SHARON BEALS

“People had already made up their minds that they wanted us to represent them,” said Phillips, who collected 120 signatures in just three days.

The board recognized AFT as the workers’ union and the local is building a unified contract. ■



Newly elected Pasadena leaders Gary Potts, treasurer, left, and Julio Huerta, president.

STEVE WEINGARTEN

YES on revenue measure, NO on Special Exemptions Act

THE POPULAR CFT-sponsored Millionaires Tax merged with the governor's revenue proposal this spring to become the **Schools and Local Public Safety Protection Act of 2012** on the November ballot.

The measure will generate \$9 billion in vital funding per fiscal year. About 85 percent of the revenue will come from the highest income tax brackets.

The state budget has already suffered huge cuts in every program, from education and childcare to public safety programs for the needy. Colleges and schools have seen reduced offerings, increased class sizes, and classified and faculty layoffs. Without new revenue, schools, universities, and public safety will face billions in additional cuts.

The merged revenue measure raises revenue in two ways.

- Single filers earning at least \$500,000 yearly would pay 3 percent more; those earning from \$300,000 to \$500,000 would pay 2 percent more. Individuals earning below \$250,000 and families earning below \$500,000 will pay no additional income tax.

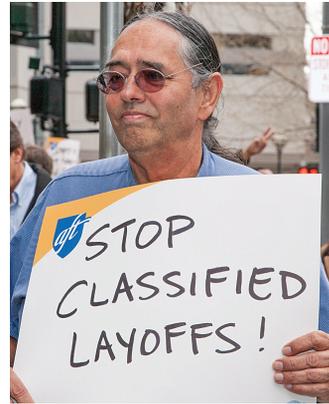
- The ballot measure also increases the sales tax by a quarter percent.

These revenue increases are temporary, with the income tax provisions lasting seven years and the sales tax provision lasting four years.

STOP SPECIAL EXEMPTIONS

ANOTHER MEASURE on the November ballot is not what it seems. **The Special Exemptions Act** claims to be a "simple, fair and balanced solution" to the problem of special interest money in politics.

The measure prohibits corporations and unions from collecting political funds



Santa Cruz campus security officer Robert Chacanaca fights for classified.

from employees and members through voluntary payroll deduction, and makes employee political contributions by any other means strictly voluntary, requiring annual written consent.

On the Web

> Learn more at protectschoolsandpublicsafety.org and download a union toolkit at cft.org. Learn about the anti-labor measure at stopspexemptions.com.



But let's take a closer look at the Special Exemptions Act.

- Employee contributions to political campaigns are already voluntary under existing law.

- The measure creates special exemptions for billionaire businessmen, giving them even more political power to write their own set of rules.

- It exempts secretive Super PACs, which can raise unlimited funding from corporate special interests, and does nothing to prevent anonymous donors from spending millions to influence elections.

- It exempts Wall Street investment firms, hedge funds, real estate developers, and others from the ban on contributions, and specifically exempts insurance companies from the ban on payroll deductions.

What the Special Exemptions Act does is limit the voices of everyday workers — educators, nurses and firefighters — on issues that matter to all Californians.

CFT budget analysis saves classified jobs in Aromas

AT THE BARGAINING table June 8, administrators of the Aromas-San Juan Unified School District proposed layoffs, demotions, and reduced hours for a third of the 68 members of the Federation of Classified Employees. Most of the member negotiators

school board joined the district team, and the CFT budget analyst joined the classified team.

The board member was moved by eloquent testimony of school secretary Thelma Buckley on how the proposed cuts would impact students and parents. Buckley, a

from checking children's heads for lice to contacting parents.

After reviewing district finances, the CFT analyst learned the administration had underestimated state funding available for transportation, a big-ticket item in rural San Benito County.

When negotiations resumed a week later, the district took most cuts off the table, and the parties agreed to reduce just one job.

"We're thrilled," said Aromas-San Juan Federation President Tonya Large. "We have cut and cut and cut for the past five years. We're so thin that, when they told me we were going to have to cut again, I asked 'Where?' We're so excited to avoid that."

"We have cut and cut and cut for the past five years. We're so thin that, when they told me we were going to have to cut again, I asked 'Where?'"

— Tonya Large, President, Aromas-San Juan Federation of Classified Employees

would feel the cuts personally. Two visitors saved the day: A sympathetic member of the

union site representative, described the many tasks performed by elementary secretaries every day,



Classified Calendar

Council of Classified Employees, the CFT division representing classified and paraprofessionals, meets **September 28** at the Westin LAX. State Council meets **September 29**.

National School Lunch Week is **October 14–20**, and **National School Bus Safety Week** is **October 15–19**.

Classified Conference is for classified and paraprofessional members of CFT. Join your colleagues on **October 26–28** at the Double Tree in San Jose.

VOTE in the **General Election November 6**.

Council of Classified Employees meets **December 1** at the Hilton Oakland Airport.

Extreme Makeover: Compton style

THE BUILDING FOR rent on South Long Beach Avenue wasn't much to look at, but officers of the Compton Council of Classified Employees could see exciting new possibilities for

the Compton Unified School District, pay for that kind of remodeling? Sweat equity.

Local 6119 leaders, members, and relatives have done most of the work: First Vice President Derek Hefflin, who works as a carpenter for the district, found the location and has put in the most time, including laying new flooring and moving walls; Chief Steward Rocky Thompson has created partitions and installed glass; and former President Ronnie Goins has painted inside and out. For Acting President Gwen Holmes, the high point of the project was knocking down a wall with a sledgehammer.

The previous union office was a storefront with no meet-



Carpenter and union officer Derek Hefflin moved walls and laid floors.

ing room, parking or privacy. The local's new office has a meeting room, is handicapped accessible, and has an office for the president and work areas for union officers.

Local 6119 took possession of the building in January and was ready to move in by late March. In June, members held their first meeting in the new building, followed by an office-warming party on the front patio.

CFT fights for death benefit equity

TO HELP COVER the average funeral cost of \$7,775, CalSTRS pays survivors \$6,163 when a retired teacher dies.

But when a retired classified employee member of CalPERS dies, beneficiaries are paid only \$2,000. To close that gap, CFT sponsored AB 2606, carried by Assemblyman Tony Mendoza, D-Norwalk, calling for an increase in the classified death benefit to \$6,000 over four years.

"Equality in public policy is a fundamental principle," Mendoza said. "The fact that the heirs of classified employees receive less than other education employees is unfair and unjust." Despite Mendoza's effort, AB 2606 died in Assembly Appropriations.

AFT LOCAL 6119



Former President Ronnie Goins painted.

their union. First, though, AFT Local 6119 would need to move a wall, install a floor, and paint.

How could the union, which represents 540 employees of

MEMBER SPEAK OUT

Classified work makes a difference every day

ARTI O'CONNOR

Paraprofessionals matter more now than ever

I KNOW MY WORK as a special education para makes a difference when I look into the faces of the children I teach. I know I matter when an excited child says, "Now I get it! I understand it now!" I know I touched a child's heart when he or she tells me, "You're a very nice person." And when a child talks about something sad that has happened in their lives, it means he or she trusts me enough to share something meaningful.

A welcoming, encouraging, caring attitude every day makes a difference in the lives of our students. Our students deserve a safe environment, one in which they aren't afraid to make a mistake; one with structure but also the freedom to

express themselves; consistency, but flexibility when appropriate.

Students are not statistics on a spreadsheet. They are the future of our communities and our nation. The character each develops matters, regardless of what jobs they may eventually hold as adults. As paraprofessionals, we help shape our students in ways we may not even realize. In these most difficult of times, why would anyone want to be a para? Because it matters now more than ever.

— Arti O'Connor is President of the Gilroy Federation of Teachers and Paraprofessionals, AFT Local 1921



Arti O'Connor

BESSIE LOVE

College staff contribute to student success

THERE'S A SCHOOL of thought that classified employees play a very limited role in student success. In truth, staff members are the unshakeable, earthquake-proof foundation on which students can build success, despite many potential obstacles.

For example, this spring at Los Angeles City College, students had to apply online because paper applications were no longer being accepted. Classified staff from Admissions, Academic Affairs, and the Career and Transfer Centers volunteered to help students enroll. Some staffers were trained to take student identification pictures in addition to their other assignments.

Similarly, because the administra-

tion decided not to print a schedule of classes, staff helped students look up classes online and print class sections. Since the online schedule of updated classes contained no information on prerequisites, staff also educated students about those requirements.

The contributions and expertise of classified employees should be part of the planning process as the California Community Colleges begin to enact state legislation on student achievement.

— Bessie Love is a Student Services Specialist and member of the College Staff Guild-Los Angeles, AFT Local 1521A



Be heard! Register to vote

IF YOU ARE NOT registered to vote, now is the time to make sure your voice is heard in the General Election! To register to vote in California, you must be a U.S. citizen, a California resident, and at least 18 years old on November 6.

Also, if you have moved to a new permanent residence, changed your name, or chosen a different political party, you must re-register to vote.

You can find voter registration forms and all the information you'll need on the Secretary of State website at sos.ca.gov. You can also phone (800) 345-8683; for instructions in Spanish and eight other languages call (800) 232-8682.

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Make your voice heard November 6!

PLAN AHEAD! The deadline to register to vote in the November 6 presidential election is **October 22**. If you want to vote by mail, the deadline to request a mail ballot is **October 30**.



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What labor lost and won in Wisconsin

THERE IS NO DENYING or candy-coating it: Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker was not recalled in the June 5 special election. Progressive voters led by public sector employees fell short of that goal, beaten in large part by a 7-1 flood of anti-union money.

The media, however, missed a big part of the story. A key progressive vote in the Wisconsin Senate, plus the earlier recall of two conservative senators, has stopped Walker in his tracks. Without

a compliant Legislature to rubber-stamp his Tea Party agenda, the wheels have come off the governor's wagon.

But a burning question remains: Why did Walker attack the rights of Wisconsin workers to bargain collectively when the public sector unions agreed to more than \$100 million in healthcare and pension concessions? That wasn't enough for the governor, who was bankrolled by a national network of corporate political action funds disguised as "non-profits."

He was clearly playing to a broader audience of special interests.

The crisis in Wisconsin gave some credibility to an utterly false notion that public workers are paid too much. It is outrageous to attack firefighters, nurses, school employees and others when tax cuts for the wealthy were a major cause of this economic crisis. How can this be fair and economically sound? Wisconsin has started a domino effect, judging by local ballot measures passed in San Diego and San Jose that cut the pensions of public employees.

Working families in Wisconsin and across the country, however, will never give up the fight to protect the communities where we live and serve. In California, the CFT is co-sponsoring a measure on the November ballot that will raise taxes on the wealthiest Californians to restore funding for vital public services. Every California student deserves an opportunity for an affordable education.

Through it all, we remain in solidarity with our Wisconsin brothers and sisters, who sparked both the Occupy movement and a labor resurgence.



By **Velma J. Butler**
President,
CFT Council
of Classified
Employees



Classified Insider is published by the California Federation of Teachers, an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO. The CFT represents faculty and classified workers in public and private schools and colleges, from early childhood through higher education. The CFT is committed to raising the standards of the profession and to securing the conditions essential to provide the best service to California's students.

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