The Staff Guild Demands CFT Treat Classified Members Equally

By President Velma J. Butler

Tensions were high at the October meeting of the College Staff Guild’s Executive Board. AFT leaders sent Secretary-Treasurer Lorretta Johnson to meet with us after more than a year of protests against the California Federation of Teachers for mistreating Local 1521A and other classified union locals.

This wasn’t the first time Local 1521A has reached out to state and national leaders. We recently sat down with AFT President Randy Weingarten and CFT’s Jeff Freitas, and met three times with Western Regional Director Gerard Friesz.

I held out hope that Lorretta, a paraprofessional who rose to the second-highest post in the AFT, would listen to our concerns. It didn’t work out that way.

Lorretta made several good points. Unity, she said, is the difference between taking action and making a difference. I agree. When it comes to... Continued on page 4

Rise and Resist!

The White House is out to reverse every economic, social and political step forward that working families have made since the Great Depression. It’s time to fight back.

The daily headlines, sound bites, TV clips and tweets are shocking, from Nazis and Klansmen marching to defend Confederate monuments, to Congress failing by one vote to repeal Obamacare.

Some barriers are also being overturned. Scores of prominent women in many fields dared to expose powerful men who had sexually harassed and assaulted them, inspiring millions of others to respond on #METOO.

Today’s social, economic and political clashes bring the turbulent 1960s and ’70s to mind, as Local 1521A President Velma J. Butler recently noted.

“This is our war,” Butler told more than 200 union members and their families at the Sept. 16 annual Staff Guild meeting, “and we’re going to get rolled over if we aren’t ready to rise and resist.”

Butler warned that public education is under attack. Charter schools continue to gain ground, even in progressive California, and the U.S. Secretary of Education is an advocate of privatization.

“LACCD is a community college,” she said, “not a corporate college.” Butler said her first job at LACCD’s Southwest College was funded by Operation Serve, a District community outreach program. Today’s students still need those outreach efforts, she said.

Local 1521A continues to actively organize Unit 1 employees. Annual statistics show especially strong union participation in the Valley: Continued on page 3
**CALENDAR**

**DECEMBER**

- 6 LACCD Board of Trustees
- 14 Executive Board, City
- 22 Holiday
- 25 Christmas
- 28 Holiday
- 29 Holiday

**JANUARY**

- 1 New Year’s Day
- 10 LACCD Board of Trustees
- 11 Executive Board, AFT Office

**FEBRUARY**

- 7 LACCD Board of Trustees
- 8 Executive Board, AFT Office
- 15 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- 16 President’s Day

---

**AFT College Staff Guild**

The American Federation of Teachers College Staff Guild is an affiliate of the CFT/AFT, AFL-CIO. The AFT College Staff Guild Local 1521A represents more than 1,200 clerical and technical employees of the L.A. Community College District.

President: **Velma J. Butler**

First Vice President: **Mercedes Gaitan**

Second Vice President: **Suleman Ishaque**

Treasurer: **Shirley Chen-Page**

Secretary: **Curtis Smith**

Grievance Secretary: Vacant

Director of Union Operations: **Steven Butcher**

Communications Consultant: **Steve Weingarten**

---

**Sandra Lepore presented a $1000 check to Stacy Chong for her daughter.**

**Amy Chong, then an ELAC student, addresses LACCD Trustees.**

---

**Lepore Labor Scholarship Draws a New Generation**

Sandra Lepore retired in 2015, after devoting 33 years of her life to organizing and building the College Staff Guild. To recognize that dedication, AFT Local 1521A created a scholarship for LACCD students with a strong commitment to Labor Studies.

“It’s very exciting to bring new people into union activism and politics,” Lepore said, “and I’m very honored that the Staff Guild has named this scholarship for me. It makes me feel like I’m part of the future.”

Lepore attended the recent Guild membership meeting to award a $1,000 check to the first winner, Amy Chong, who earned a sociology degree at ELAC and is now studying public policy at USC.

Chong was born in South Korea. Her family moved to Southern California when she was a toddler and got their bearings in Koreatown. At ELAC she interned at the State Capitol and worked with the AFT Faculty Guild to mobilize student “Dreamers” for a large rally at the LACCD Board of Trustees.

“Our main focus was making all nine LACCD campuses sanctuaries,” Chong said. “We went to the Board to demand a stronger resolution to protect undocumented students.”

The Staff Guild will award four scholarships during next year’s competition. The deadline to submit an application is July 31, 2018, and the winners will receive their checks at the union’s September membership meeting.

The number of scholarships and the amount awarded are determined by how much funding is available. Staff Guild members and friends can donate by sending checks payable to the AFT Lepore Labor Scholarship Fund, 3356 Barham Blvd., Los Angeles 90068.

---

**Staff Guild Welcomes New Director of Operations**

Steven Butcher has joined the AFT Local 1521A staff as Director of Union Operations. Butcher has worked for the California State Legislature for the past five years, but he learned about labor growing up in a union household. His mother, Julie, represented L.A. City employees for many years as head of SEIU Local 347.

“I look forward to this new adventure and to serving Local 1521A members,” Butcher told In Strength & Unity.
Contract Offers COLA
Now, Re-Openers Later

On Nov. 15, Staff Guild members approved a new 3-year contract that provides a modest pay raise now and hope for greater relief just down the road. The LACCD Board of Trustees is expected to quickly approve the agreement that union and District negotiators reached in late October.

“This is the first time we’ve wrapped up bargaining before the faculty,” President Velma J. Butler said.

The bottom line in bargaining was compensation. The District proposed adding only a fraction of the Cost of Living Allowance, but the union held out for the full COLA for 2018. That 1.56% raise is expected to increase to about 2%, and will apply to all salaries, schedules, increments and differentials.

Unit 1 employees will receive retroactive pay raises back to July 1. The union or LACCD can reopen bargaining over salaries for the second and third years of the contract.

From the outset, the Staff Guild proposed no change to 20 contract articles, from layoffs and personnel files to grievance procedure. The union and LACCD later agreed to maintain current policies on vacations, holidays, AQMD compliance, tuition reimbursement, transfers and assignments, and performance evaluations.

“There’s no need to reopen those articles,” Butler said, “until the District has a system to train administrators on the existing language, from shared governance to use of student workers.”

Butler and Sheila Jeter-Williams of West led a union bargaining team of Pamela Atkinson of City, Andy Durazo of East, Faith Colt of Mission, Casandra Walker of Southwest, Cyndi Maddren of Valley, Victor Hugo Ortiz of District, Tim Mariner of Harbor, Greg Whaling of Pierce, and Donald Santoianni of Trade Tech.

One key contract provision remains unresolved. The Joint Labor Management Benefits Committee negotiates health benefits (Article 21) separately.

Fern Reisner to Retire

After nearly 30 years with LACCD and 20 years with AFT Local 1521A, Fern Reisner is retiring as of Dec. 29. She and 106 other classified are taking the District’s “Golden Handshake.”

Reisner has big plans for the next chapter in her life. She holds a Masters degree in public administration management and a BA in business, and wants to teach management and supervision skills to adults.

“I’ve been solving problems and implementing contracts for nearly 20 years.”

Continued from page 4

Chancellor Francisco Rodriguez looks forward to teaching new generations.

Staff Guild members donated 700 pairs of shoes to needy schoolkids last year.

AFT Local 1521A passed out 6,000 sno-cones at this year’s Labor Day picnic.

It’s Time to Rise and Resist…

Pierce is the campus with the most new members; Mission had the largest percentage increase; and Valley and Mission – each with 100 percent – tied for most members.

LACCD Chancellor Francisco Rodriguez and newly elected Trustee Gabriel Buelna also spoke.

Rodriguez looked ahead to a wave of changes that are reshaping college campuses, from new technology to meeting the expectations of new generations of students.

“Next year’s freshman class will be the first students born in the year 2000. The year 2000! Think about that,” he said. “I don’t know about you, but that scares me.”

Buelna introduced himself to union members as the son of Mexican immigrants. He said his father worked in the upholstery, steel and laundry industries, and asked audience members to yell out their job titles “with passion.”

“This is the lead team that gets us where we want to go,” he said, “that gets students the classes they need, that gets us our email, that makes our campuses work.”

Continued on page 4
Treat Classified Equally…

Continued from page 1

unity, Local 1521A can write the book: our membership at nine campuses and the District is nearly 100%. She also pointed to classified success stories by AFT members across the country. That is true, of course, and the Staff Guild is one of those successes. I’m proud that we have built Local 1521A into one of our largest classified locals.

What bothered me, though, was Lorretta’s unspoken message: Pay your dues and accept things as they are. Staff Guild members will never accept injustice. We have always used our AFT training to fight for our members’ rights against LACCD administration. Now we are fighting for dignity and respect within the union.

We see the problem as CFT leaders who claim to be our brothers and sisters, but are never there when we need something. The problem is CFT leaders who ignore our complaints and claim this internal fight is a personality clash.

Local 1521A pays per capita dues to the L.A. County and state AFL-CIO and to our state CFT and national AFT. These “per caps” add up to 40% of the Staff Guild’s annual budget, and are the union’s largest single expense.

Classified employees make up about 13% of the CFT, but we aren’t getting the same services or treatment Accounts. Administration delays meant employees couldn’t make the right choices during the open-enrollment period for benefits.

“The Board of Trustees made it impossible for employees to make timely decisions,” she said.

Reisner…

Continued from page 3

as Grievance Secretary,” she said.

Reisner also looks forward to studying at Brandeis University’s Simi Valley campus, getting involved with her synagogue, traveling with her husband of 51 years, Michael, and spending time with their four grandchildren.

First, though, Reisner needs to beat cancer. She has made great medical progress since she went on leave in August. She estimates that her treatment, including surgery and chemotherapy, has cost up to $300,000 so far, but thanks to LACCD health benefits she has only needed to pay the $3,500 annual cap.

“Without this coverage, we would be hard pressed,” said Reisner.

Contract…

Continued from page 3

ment Accounts. Administration delays meant employees couldn’t make the right choices during the open-enrollment period for benefits.

“The Board of Trustees made it impossible for employees to make timely decisions,” she said.