



PSRP Reporter

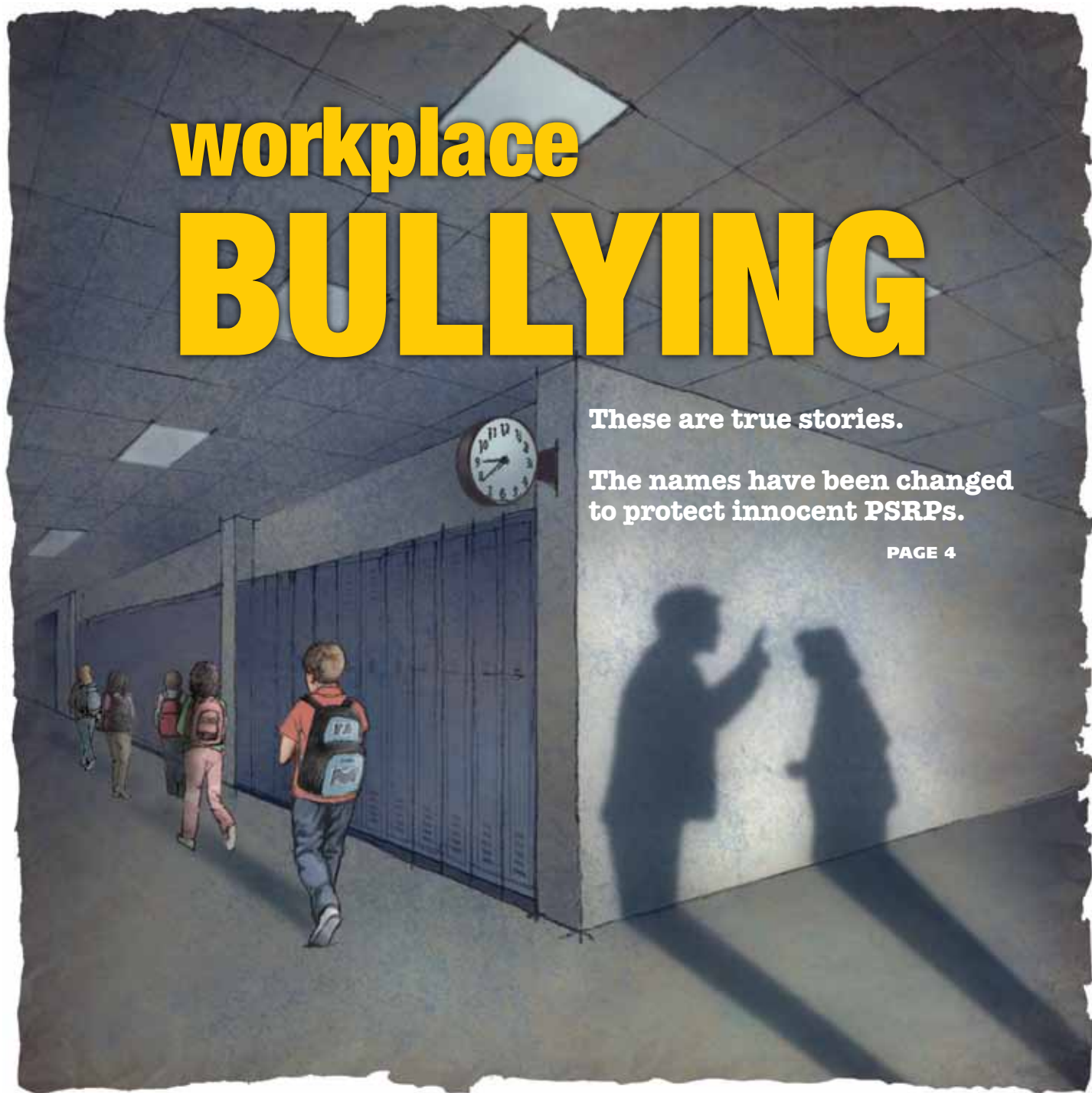
THE NATIONAL PUBLICATION OF AFT PARAPROFESSIONALS AND SCHOOL-RELATED PERSONNEL

workplace **BULLYING**

These are true stories.

The names have been changed
to protect innocent PSRPs.

PAGE 4



What democracy
looks like

PAGE 3

MAKING A
difference
EVERY DAY

PAGE 6



An AFT Everyday Hero

PAGE 8



Evidence matters

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

IT'S A FAMILIAR SCENARIO. When an international comparison of education achievement is released, it reignites talk about the need to provide American students with a "world-class" education. The urgency of this objective is obvious. The world has changed—borders are blurring; higher-order knowledge and skills are a must for all students; and we are being out-competed educationally by some countries and economically by others. America's education system must help all students thrive in the knowledge economy.

There is widespread disagreement over how to make this imperative a reality. Worse, so-called education reformers call for doubling down on policies that don't remotely resemble those used in top-performing coun-

tries and are backed by neither evidence nor experience. And these "reformers" attempt to demonize, dehumanize and delegitimize those who don't agree with them.

They emphasize standardized testing, including its use for evaluating and compensating teachers, and de-emphasize education experience and professionalism. They call for increasing the number of charter schools or vouchers and "dealing" with low-performing schools by firing administrators and staff, or shutting down the schools altogether.

These market approaches share a dubious distinction—they are widely promoted despite little evidence of their effectiveness.

So if not market approaches, what works? In addition to examining best practices in the many U.S. public schools and districts that are helping students achieve at high levels, we can learn much from the high-performing countries that spark so much competitive

interest among American policymakers and pundits, yet whose lessons about improving teaching and learning are so often ignored.

Frontline educators understand the wisdom that underlies success in these countries: their systemic emphasis on quality, equity, shared responsibility and collaboration.

The countries that consistently top the rankings—Finland, Singapore and South Korea—emphasize teacher preparation, mentoring and collaboration. They de-emphasize standardized tests, and each has a well-rounded curriculum that can be tailored to meet the needs of individual students. These countries provide a more equitable education for all students, and they offset the effects of poverty through wraparound services that support students and their families. And educators in these countries are esteemed.

You don't have to look past our borders to find schools where teaching and learning reach great heights.

I recently went to Clarence R. Edwards Middle School in Boston, a school that just a few years ago was slated to be closed after years of lagging performance, and today is one of the most impressive schools I have visited. The changes at Edwards include a longer school day, which allows for tutoring and a host of electives, including music, drama and art. The school has a culture of accountability and shared responsibility. And the AFT was proud to award teachers at the school a grant from the AFT Innovation Fund to develop high-quality lesson plans tied to Common Core standards.

Changes at the school have resulted in greatly improved student outcomes. Now, this school that was about to close has a waiting list of students who want to attend. I think frequently of the excellent schools I have visited that are using best practices to help students reach their potential. And I worry that so-called reforms based more on ideology than evidence will continue to gain a foothold.

We must explore new and better ways to help students achieve. But at a certain point, experimentation must give way to evidence and results. And the evidence shows that a heavy reliance on charter schools, testing, performance pay and other market-based approaches to education won't get us where we need to go.

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In education, as in other important pursuits, evidence matters. Innovation plays an important role as well, but we are dealing with children's lives and futures—and we must pursue the best ways to ensure that all children have access to the rich, rigorous education they deserve and need.

Unfortunately, many education theories that are seeping into federal, state and local education policies actually move us further from that goal. Some theorists refer to these as market-based approaches to education:

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THIS IS WHAT DEMOCRACY LOOKS LIKE

MILLER PHOTOGRAPHY



Americans are backing labor in our fight to preserve bargaining rights

Members of New York State United Teachers march through Manhattan to protest budget cuts.

OHIO

Groundswell of opposition to S.B. 5

In March, Gov. John Kasich signed Senate Bill 5, which curbs collective bargaining rights for educators and other public employees, ignoring opposition from Ohioans who turned out statewide to protest. The law is particularly harmful to children because it gives educators less say in class size and other issues that affect learning.

Union leaders and many others have vowed to fight on, mobilizing around the “We Are Ohio” campaign to repeal S.B. 5. “The people of Ohio are on our side, and we believe the citizens will veto S.B. 5 in November,” says Ohio Federation of Teachers president Sue Taylor.

WISCONSIN

Recall efforts going full throttle

While the legislation gutting the collective bargaining rights of 200,000 Wisconsin public employees remains in the courts, the battle over workers’ rights and public services has moved from the Statehouse in Madison to communities statewide.

AFT-Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals have a new priority: elections. Since early March, petitions have been circulating to recall eight state Senate Republicans. Serving as volunteer signature-gatherers, members

of AFT-Wisconsin and WFNHP have been central to the effort. Recall elections could start as early as late June.

NEW YORK

A fight for the right priorities

AFT affiliates in New York are urging members to fight for restored funding after passage of a 2011-12 state budget that will result in massive program cuts to education, healthcare and other public services.

“Despite all the rhetoric about valuing education, choices had to be made in this budget—and the choice was to protect millionaires at the expense of teachers and students,” says New York State United Teachers executive vice president and AFT vice president Andrew Pallotta.

MICHIGAN

Speaking out in many ways

AFT Michigan members have joined thousands of college students, retirees and others for activities protesting Gov. Rick Snyder’s budget. At one April rally, more than 6,200 postcards from AFT Michigan members were delivered to lawmakers urging them to vote “no” on slashing education and increasing taxes for low-income workers and seniors, and “yes” to protecting workers’ rights.

Snyder’s deep cuts to higher education are a central concern. In March, AFT Michi-

gan president and AFT vice president David Hecker, joined by leaders of AFT affiliates at four universities, testified that the cuts would decrease services for students while raising their tuition, amounting to a de facto tax increase that could diminish young people’s desire to stay in Michigan.

FLORIDA

Changes ahead for destructive laws

Affiliates across Florida are building strength as they counter legislation from Gov. Rick Scott and other fringe politicians that savages educators’ contractual rights and installs an unproven merit pay system based on student test scores. A new “union gag law” would muffle the voice of educators.

These attacks have been met with growing public dismay, and polls show support for Scott is collapsing.

PENNSYLVANIA

Preserving public education

Educators are fighting a bill that would create a voucher program which, if fully implemented, would divert roughly \$1 billion from public schools every year. The bill writes a blank check to private schools that would be paid by taxpayers; it includes no requirement that these schools account for how they spend that money or demonstrate that students are succeeding academically.

workplace

BULLYING



Singled out. Picked on. Discriminated against. Bullied.

All of these are terms for the same thing, says Sharon Baker of the Totem Association of Education Support Personnel in Anchorage, Alaska, and she has no doubt whatsoever that paraprofessionals and school-related personnel (PSRPs) across America have endured harassment and intimidation from other adults on the job. What follows are the stories of PSRPs (their names have been changed or omitted) who have taken a deep breath and confronted their bully or enlisted the union for help in solving their bully problem. It's not always possible to neutralize a bully right away, but even the worst bullies can be stopped.

Union spurs federal lawsuit over racial harassment

WORKING CLOSELY for three years with an AFT member in New York City, the Union of Clerical, Administrative & Technical Staff (UCATS) has prompted a lawsuit by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission against New York University, which is charged with creating a hostile work environment of verbal harassment directed at an African employee.

According to the EEOC's lawsuit, the mail room supervisor at an NYU library regularly called the assistant, a native of Ghana, "a monkey" and "a filthy nigger." The assistant, who is a member of UCATS, complained repeatedly to the university management and human resources personnel. NYU took no action to curb the supervisor's conduct. Even after the assistant and UCATS alerted the university that the supervisor had retaliated against her, the supervisor continued to harass her. The assistant filed a lawsuit against NYU, claiming that the employer violated her rights under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. The assistant also claims that the employer violated her rights under the Fair Labor Standards Act, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin.

Take the case of a library assistant at New York University. A native of Ghana, this AFT member was bullied by a supervisor who called him a monkey, taunted him about eating bananas and told him, "Go back to your cage" and "Go back to the jungle." With a big assist from the Union of Clerical, Administrative & Technical Staff in New York City, he was able to file a federal lawsuit against the university for failing to protect his civil rights (see *Reporter*, January/February 2011).

Not every case of bullying becomes a federal case, but most go well beyond rude behavior. Sometimes, working for a bully requires a simple "no" that's hard to say, as when PSRPs have been instructed to lie for their bosses. In Michigan, an AFT member refused to falsify documents. And in Louisiana, a principal told a paraprofessional she had to lie or look for another job.

From California come several stories of bullying. One new principal told a career secretary that if she applied for a promotion under the district's new reclassification sys-

tem, she would "ruin it" for the rest of the staff. The secretary finally asked her union for help and obtained a transfer to the central office, where she's thriving.

"You know what the sad thing is?" the union rep asks. "This is an *education* institution, of all things. You would think that the educational setting would be more progressive."

Sadly, that's not always the case. Another principal constantly picked on a custodian with special needs who had been groomed for his job, in which he took great pride and served as an inspiration. When the abuse came to the

attention of the custodian's union rep, he met with the principal and questioned her ability to work with special education students.

"If you can't work with a special needs adult, how can you work with children?" the rep remembers asking. "After that, it ended. The harping, the constant write-ups—it all ended."

Making life miserable

Although schoolyard bullying has attracted national attention, workplace bullying has become a quiet epidemic, says Gary Namie,

What you can do

If you feel you are being targeted by a bully, you can:

- **Break your silence.** Tell co-workers, friends and family—in particular, your union representative. Ask for help.
- **Put your health first.** Schedule an appointment with a mental health professional who understands bullying.
- **Read the voluminous research** on health problems related to the stress from bullying.
- **Talk to an attorney** to see if you have any legal recourse.
- **Refuse to believe the lies** told about you. It is not about you. Bullying is about the perpetrator's need to control others.
- **Commit to either finding a new job** or planning a fight-back strategy to reclaim your dignity.

SOURCE: WORKPLACE BULLYING INSTITUTE

For AFT resources on workplace bullying, visit <http://go.aft.org/workplacebullying>.



founder of the Workplace Bullying Institute, an advocacy group based in Bellingham, Wash. According to a WBI survey last year, 35 percent of workers have experienced bullying. Another 15 percent have witnessed it.

A bully can be a boss, co-worker or supervisor. Sixty-two percent of bullies are men, while 58 percent of targets are women, according to the survey. Women target women 80 percent of the time.

“Dumping on employees by workplace bullies can make life miserable,” says Namie, who has teamed up with his wife, Ruth, to put a stop to workplace bullying since the early 1990s. “It is repeated, health-harming abusive mistreatment committed by bosses and co-workers. And employers are letting down their workers by refusing to address the problem; it is an organizational abdication of responsibility. We don’t tolerate domestic abuse or child abuse. Why is abuse in the workplace tolerated? People have to stop accepting this kind of behavior.”

Unlike schoolyard bullying, workplace targets aren’t singled out for being weak but because they pose a threat to the bully, Namie says. Targets often are independent-minded, more technically skilled than their bullies, better liked and nonconfrontational. Nearly 40 percent of targets never tell their employers for fear of retaliation or reprisal.

No state or federal law addresses workplace bullying. Namie’s group has crafted model legislation that would compel employers to prevent workplace bullying. This legislation has been introduced in California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois, Kansas, Massachusetts, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah, Vermont, Washington and Wisconsin.

Despite the lack of protections, workplace bullying can be addressed, and unions in particular are in a good position to help. Namie suggests that union members ask for training to become “internal experts” on bullying so they can create a bully-free environment. “Unions can take the lead in defining the problem,” he says.

There is power in a union

An AFT activist in Florida provides an excellent example of how the union can provide a shield against institutional bullying. At her school, says building rep Patrice Duke, the principal has little understanding of how important it is to use certain procedures in caring for children with disabilities.

“There’s no support. People live in fear,” Duke says. “We know when our principal stands like this [fists on hips], that is his bully stance. He comes to intimidate you.”

Duke remains undaunted. If students come to school chronically sick, or if employees want a voice in their job evaluations or the way resources are allocated, she marches right into the principal’s office.

He once inquired as to why she was speaking on behalf of others. When she told him they were afraid of him, he laughed in disbelief.

“I’m not afraid to go talk to him about union issues, because

we’re equal,” says Duke, a member of her local AFT-NEA affiliate. “He says, ‘Why are you concerned about these issues?’ That’s disrespectful to me.”

The principal once left Duke’s name off the agenda of a school committee meeting (she’s an officer) and refused—for no apparent reason, and against district policy—to establish other committees as needed. “If I was very passive and never said anything, I would never have a voice again,” Duke says.

She encourages every colleague to step forward and speak out because she fears that if certain Florida legislators have their way and weaken the power of unions in her state, employees will be bullied even more.

With Duke’s help, her bullying boss is trying to mend his ways. He even asked her permission to attend a union meeting, where he stood up and told members he supports them in their fight to preserve public education in Florida.

“Things have changed for the better,” she says. “We have gotten some respect. But that’s because we, as a union, came in and did something about it.”

—ANNETTE LICITRA, ADRIENNE COLES

“I’m not afraid to go talk to him about union issues, because we’re equal. If I was very passive and never said anything, I would never have a voice again.”

—PATRICE DUKE
Florida

Have you seen or experienced bullying on the job by a boss or co-worker?

“I’m willing to bet I’m not the only one who has, in fact, experienced bullying on the job. I’ve worked in more than one school district in more than one job capacity, and I’ve experienced bullying by administrators, supervisors and co-workers. With the job market and economy the way they are, many of us are afraid to make any kind of waves for fear of losing our jobs. It can be difficult to speak up.”

ANONYMOUS
Oregon

“I have been verbally assaulted on numerous occasions and, almost daily, humiliated in front of teachers, parents and staff by the principal’s secretary. She once physically assaulted me when she pulled open a drawer that I was standing in front of and hit my legs. I was shocked but didn’t say anything because who was going to believe me? She is the principal’s favorite. She bullies me constantly, but he refuses to do anything.”

ANONYMOUS
Texas

“Our district operations department has a supervisor known for belittling, disrespecting and bullying employees. The supervisor was supposed to pick up some signs from the media and communications department, but there was a miscommunication between the secretary and the supervisor. The secretary then asked the supervisor if he would pick up the signs. The supervisor, in an arrogant, disrespectful and loud voice, said, ‘Me, me, me. That’s not my job. My job is to dictate and sit around in a nice suit.’ The secretary wrote a formal complaint to HR, and that supervisor was reprimanded. Now, that supervisor thinks twice before he speaks.”

KELLY McCLENDON
Missouri

Whether it’s finding volunteers for school projects or helping streamline procedures at your college, tell us how support staff make a difference in the lives of students every day.

IT’S YOUR VOICE We want to hear from you! Visit www.aft.org/voices to respond to this question and to others throughout the year.



2011 PSRP AWARD WINNERS

Child Welfare and Community Service

- Detroit Association of Educational Office Employees, Detroit Federation of Paraprofessionals and Detroit Federation of Teachers

Helping Hands Award

- West Virginia School Service Personnel Association, Fayette Chapter

Community Service Award

- Chippewa Valley Technical College Staff and Clerical Federation

PSRP Union Builders Award

- Denver Federation for Paraprofessionals and Nutrition Service Employees
- Osceola County Education Association

PSRPs in the Spotlight

- Texas AFT

Militancy Award

- AFT-Wisconsin
- Minneapolis Federation of Teachers and Education Support Professionals
- Association of Vestal School Paraprofessionals

Outstanding Legislative Program

- California Federation of Teachers
- West Virginia School Service Personnel Association

Lorretta Johnson

Solidarity in Action

- Cleveland Teachers Union

Dorothea Bell Political Action

- Oregon School Employees Association and AFT-Oregon

Workers Memorial Day

- New York State United Teachers
- AFT Kent Classified Employees
- Denver Federation for Paraprofessionals and Nutrition Service Employees

Union Workplace Advocacy

- Delaware Federation, Local 762

Defender of the Public Service

- San Antonio Alliance of Teachers and Support Personnel



The AFT's annual PSRP conference in late March was supercharged from start to finish. AFT executive vice president Lorretta Johnson, at left, updated members of the union's division for paraprofessionals and school-related personnel on state battles to save education, and enlisted them to join the fight.

The gathering in Las Vegas ranged from the high-tech, with Johnson helping members set up their phones to get text messages, to the highly personal, with an opportunity to meet everyday heroes like themselves—people who have turned their minds, hearts and careers toward helping children succeed.

High school safety officer Charles “C.J.” Johnson of Texas, the PSRP Everyday Hero for 2011, has taken in 38 homeless teens over the years (see story, page 8), and fellow AFT member Lester Lemasters of West Virginia used to make an extra stop on his bus route every day to evade a fourth-grade rider's bully, which earned the driver a national title (see *Reporter*, January/February 2011).

“In my profession, you don't get noticed,” Lemasters said. “It feels good to be recognized.”

The two winners were embraced by PSRPs, by family members who spoke about them, and by singer and actress Tichina Arnold, who recalled that it was a school custodian who told her every day that she could make it as an entertainer. His encouragement helped launch her career.

“How can I say thanks for all the things that

you have done for me?” Arnold sang, paying a musical tribute to school support workers (get the link to this amazing video below).

“It was people like you who got me singing,” she explained. “You give your service every day, and that is so appreciated.”

Standing with Wisconsin

PSRPs cheered on members from Wisconsin and other states locked in battles to protect public services. Kathy Flood and Joan Emery of the Jefferson (Wis.) Support Staff Federation marched with others in their town southeast of Madison. Deb Ausman of the Chippewa Valley Technical College Staff and Clerical Federation spent about half a month in Madison, making



ARNOLD

phone calls and buttons and going to the Capitol early each day to set up the AFT tent for marchers. At home in Eau Claire, Ausman joined a candlelight vigil that drew about



Clockwise from left: School bus driver Lester Lemasters takes a bow together with his rider, Chancellor Coger, and Chancellor's mom; PSRP members display their solidarity with workers in Wisconsin; and Baltimore members, below, flaunt their feathers during Solidarity Night.

500 citizens. "It was not only AFT and other public sector unions but all of labor having rallies," she says. "The city council and the school board and the superintendent and the city manager all came out in support of collective bargaining and against having it stripped."

Kathy Goodman, a curriculum assistant at Chippewa Valley Technical College, attended six rallies in Madison, which is three hours from her home. She remembers the day Union Cab drivers came to the capital and "made their own little parade down State Street, honking their horns." And she took photos when farmers on their tractors rolled through town and spoke on behalf of union families.

"The one that stands out in my mind was the day the Tea Party was there," she says. "I think they were trying to aggravate people and make them upset, but our people were just so peaceful and so purposeful. This is democracy, and we want to see it work."

Lorretta Johnson exhorted conference participants to talk with everyone about the value of labor unions. "The conservative politicians want to silence your voice, and the best way to do it is to silence your union voice," she said. "Like the root in that tree, we shall not be moved. Thank you, Wisconsin, for standing tall."

AFT president Randi Weingarten picked up on the news of the hour, describing Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker as "very special" and tapping him as the union movement's "mobilizer in chief." Unions, Weingarten said, at this point are "the only check on absolute power and absolute wealth. The labor movement is the only institution that fights for working people. We will get strength out of this. Don't give up. Don't hunker down." She pledged that the AFT's top officers "will do anything that's humanly possible to walk this walk with you."

Working hard, playing hard

Professional development was highlighted at dozens of workshops on topics that ranged from school district and college-level funding to educating students with disabilities. Some PSRP members attended pre-conferences on health and safety. Many also attended the AFT's first-ever Head Start conference.



On the playful side, PSRPs staged their famous Solidarity Night. "There are evil winds blowing in Solidarityville," intoned Kris Schwarzkopf of the Toledo federation before unveiling her secret weapon: a cell phone and her superpower as an AFT texter. "LorElvis" (that would be AFT's executive vice president as the King) swooped in to save the day from budget-cutting fat cats, as did dancing angels from Alliance-AFT in Dallas and umbrella-twirling members from the Oregon School Employees Association who kept on "Singin' in the Rain." Sonny and Cher made a special appearance to sing "We've Got Union" ("When we walk the picket line/I've got you to hold the sign.")

Lorretta Johnson brought her own groove. After introducing the PSRP heroes, she turned to the crowd and said, "See, we do make a difference." And spontaneously, the crowd roared back, "Yes we do!"

Making things better for seven generations

AFT PSRP this year bestowed the Albert Shanker Pioneer Award on longtime local union president Robert Chacanaca of the Santa Cruz (Calif.) Council of Classified Employees for his "commitment to social justice for all and his willingness to stand up and fight for those who cannot fight for themselves."

In presenting the award, AFT president Randi Weingarten commended the school security officer and member of the PSRP program and policy council for recognizing the importance of political action in defense of causes from public education to the environment and Social Security—and for leading by example when he ran for elected office in his community.

Time and again, Chacanaca has interceded on behalf of food service workers, secretaries, groundskeepers and others. "Wherever there is a wrong to be righted," says Dennis Smith of the California Federation of Teachers, "Robert is always there."

For his part, Chacanaca attributes his motivation to the Native American ideal of making the world a better place not just during your own lifetime but for the next seven generations. "You know that the things we have today were left to us by our forefathers," he said. "It's our responsibility to make the future better for everyone."



CHACANACA



DALLAS MORNING NEWS

Taking security to a whole new level

THE HONORS KEEP coming for high school safety worker Charles "C.J." Johnson, whom members elected as a 2011 AFT Everyday Hero for his generosity in taking in dozens of homeless students over the years. The North Dallas High School employee and graduate accepted his award this spring at the annual PSRP conference.

The PSRP hero was surprised by an appearance from one of his grown "sons," Jerimi Gonzales, now program director at the West Dallas Boys & Girls Club, who has thrived since joining the AFT member's extended family. For Gonzales, Johnson created "a strong bond of family that we'll never forget. For the seven years I've known him, he's given me 10 brothers."

Radiating warmth and confidence, Johnson thanked members for the award. "It's been hard, but then again it's been fun," he said, adding that he loves working and loves his community. "I really appreciate a family who cares. AFT, I love y'all."

He's such a go-getter on behalf of his kids that someone once stepped forward to pay for a student's college tuition. Last November, Johnson received a prestigious local award recognizing his leadership in improving education for low-income peo-

ple in Dallas. Past recipients have included state senators, a school superintendent and prominent attorneys. Johnson has since become a bit of a local celebrity, having been featured several times in the *Dallas Morning News* and other media. Complete bios of all the 2011 AFT Everyday Heroes are posted at www.aft.org/everydayheroes.

Johnson sees no boundary between his home and his work as a paraprofessional security adviser. Over the years, he and his mother have taken in 38 homeless teens—as many as four at a time—and provided the steady environment they needed to succeed in school and in life. He requires them all to perform community service.

Without Johnson, all his kids would have had to survive on their own. At the PSRP awards presentation, Johnson quipped that "my kitchen is still wide open" for his growing brood of alumni. At home, he displays photos of the teens who have graduated from high school.

"All these kids have different stories and different backgrounds," he says, "but they all needed a little guidance and direction, and that's what I was able to give them. To me, with all they've been through, they're the heroes."



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