

CONGRATULATIONS, EDDIE & LAURIE! ANOTHER CHAPTER 247 FIRST...SEE PAGE 2.



THE VOICE

We can do great things together

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 7

OF CHAPTER 247

THE GOOD...



NTEU WINS FOOD FIGHT

**FOOD & DRINK RETURNS
TO TRAINING ROOMS**

Chapter 247 joined forces with its sister NTEU chapter, Submission Processing's Chapter 72, to successfully negotiate a Food and Drink Policy for campus training rooms. The upshot is that food and drink has been returned to training rooms after a very dry season.

The 2005 season saw the imposition of a policy that initially banned all food and drink for new hires and veterans alike in training classes. An exception was soon allowed for bottled water, but generally it was a very uncomfortable year for employees in training.

NTEU used its right to bargain to reverse that policy, and in celebration of that achievement, **Chapter 247 is offering a special gift** for employees in training.

(See details on page 3)

THE BAD... TWO STEPS BACK



MANAGEMENT FLIPFLOPS ON PEAK OVERTIME...AGAIN

Two years ago, Austin Campus Director **Dave Boose** extended the traditional annual invitation to Compliance and Accounts Management employees to work overtime during peak season at the Submission Processing Building. Compliance Chief **Dick Auby** and Accounts Management Poohbah **Charles Washington**, speaking for their employees, turned him down cold. Chapter 247—the true voice of employees—filed a mass grievance on behalf of 137 employees opposing the directors' decision. The following year—last season—the directors reversed course, and peak overtime was back for the entire Austin Campus.

This year, it appears that the directors have cooked up a fresh approach in order to deny overtime. For the 2006 season, Dave Boose has donned the black hat, choosing not to invite Compliance and Accounts Management to participate, while allowing Dick and Charles to play the good guys.

(Continued on page 3)

and THE UGLY... HURRICANE CHARLES LOSES FORCE



The Mystery Of The Missing FEMA Applications:
Did Accounts Management Kingpin Charles
Washington's Gang Shoot Straight?

Perhaps the strangest chapter in the stormy saga of **Charles Washington's** stint as Austin Accounts Management Director is the highly secretive bobbing and weaving that characterized the application process for AM employees volunteering for the 2,000 available FEMA disaster recovery positions.

In the frightening devastation left by Hurricane Katrina, federal employees were asked by their government to extend their talents and abilities toward relief efforts. Many Austin Campus employees considered it a patriotic and moral imperative—and a historic opportunity—to help alleviate the greatest American natural disaster of our time. The disturbing questions raised by the mysterious actions of AM management are: *Did they sabotage the application process? And did they do it on purpose?*

(Continued on page 12)

The **Grinches** of South Tech
It's No Holiday at Collections
See page 5.

HOW DO YOU LIKE US NOW?
The Worst Managers...NTEU Names Names
Can you guess who they are? Contest on page 6.

ULTIMATE EXPLORER
One Employee's FEMA Story
Travel to the Frontlines, page 8.

CHAPTER HITS 62%!
Membership Continues Upward
NTEU gains, page 14.

THE VOICE IS PREPARED AND PRODUCED FOR THE
SOLE PURPOSE OF INFORMING OUR BARGAINING UNIT
EMPLOYEES. ALL OTHERS READ AT THEIR OWN RISK.

THE VOICE

Staff

EDITOR

Karen Lorch

CONTRIBUTORS

Michael Bunton

Julian Chitta

Caleb Ellinger

Arlene Flores

Tonia Gilmore

Julia Miller

Alia Shoemake

Tera Terbay

Delma Viana

THE BEST ONE YET

Chapter Celebrates Labor Recognition Week

Texas Congressman **Henry Cuellar** pledged to "dance with the one who brung 'im" in an energetic and amusing speech during Chapter 247's observation of NTEU's Labor Recognition Week.

Congressman Cuellar represents Texas' 28th District, including a number of 247's employees, in the U.S. House of Representatives. His stance in favor of federal employees—and his promise to continue his vigorous support for NTEU's legislative program—explains why Chapter 247 was moved to invite him to spread his hope-filled vision with employees in the CSB Atrium. Rep. Cuellar received a warm welcome from the employees, and from Chapter President **Eddie Walker**, who stressed the "good fortune that we have just by being Americans," including in that "good fortune" the driving contribution of unions to achievements such as minimum wage, shorter hours for better pay, and the creation of the middle class.



Chapter 247 members truly felt the love during Labor Recognition Week, as NTEU showered them with ice cream socials, chicken dinners, prizes, and entertainment, including music by rock duo Jason and Beth Richard, and an Employee Karaoke Contest hosted by **Robert Muraida** and won by member **Steve Manning**, with a rock 'em, sock 'em, soulful version of Ray Charles' "Unchain My Heart."

WANT INFLUENCE...ON ETHICS? ON HEALTH & SAFETY? ON THE CAFETERIA? HERE'S HOW!



Chapter 247 has representatives on all Austin Campus committees. It is the chapter's aim to make these groups relevant and formidable forces for change. Employees who have solutions to campus problems can exercise influence by passing on their ideas to the committees.

The union has a newly-appointed contact person for those with suggestions, complaints, or compliments about the CSB Cafeteria: **Tanni Baxter** can be reached at campus extension 0468. Through an arrangement between NTEU and management, Tanni will relay your views on cafeteria service to the responsible parties. In addition, a suggestion box will be placed in the cafeteria area for employees to communicate their ideas.

The Ethics Committee wrestles with ethics questions, but the catch is that employees have to put forward their issues to the committee in order for them to meet. There is a question box in CSB for that purpose, but if employees prefer to directly present their issues to committee members, Chapter 247 has two appointees: **Bill Casey** (X1810) and **Felix Rodriguez** (X1659).

On Health and Safety issues, NTEU has designated **Tera Terbay** (X1046) to represent Customer Service Building employees, while **Arlene Flores** (X5466) serves the South Tech Building. Both have been responsible for initiating many of the resolutions of health and safety problems that have arisen in both buildings over the past year.



Chapter 247 urges employees to make the most of these resources.

WEDDING BELLS RING-A-DING-DING FOR CHAPTER PRESIDENT

Chapter President **Eddie Walker** and glamorous Minnesota banker **Laurie Lee** got hitched without a hitch October 29 in Las Vegas, despite Eddie suffering with—just an untimely coincidence, folks!—a broken arm.

The couple, decked out in tux and gown, exchanged wedding vows at The Chapel at the Luxor Hotel in the presence of family and friends. Represented were travelers from Texas, Minnesota, Florida, Arizona, California, and far off Sweden.

A rehearsal dinner with a Lone Star State barbecue theme was staged by Laurie's Aunt Myrna and Uncle John in their Las Vegas home the night before the wedding. Following the ceremony, the happy newlyweds transported the crowd of 60 celebrants by buses to a posh dinner and dancing reception at El Caribe.

The bride and groom can now cheerfully recommend that everyone get married in Vegas at least once.

NTEU WINS FOOD FIGHT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

For any and all employees who find themselves attending a training class this season, **NTEU will treat them to one free snack each.** In order to collect on this pledge, you may clip the coupon below and bring it to the union office at either the Customer Service or the South Tech Buildings.

Food and drink in training rooms has been an easygoing tradition at the Austin Campus for a long, long time. Training instructors utilized potlucks to build camaraderie. When instructors or employees brought food and drink in, employees were not forced to leave the classroom as frequently. Employees were expected to pick up after themselves.

No controversy existed until the Career Management and Learning Centers Program Manager, located in Seattle, decided to throw her weight around, and unilaterally imposed a ban on food and drink in Austin's training rooms. What Seattle's CMLC honcho knew about food and drink in Austin was apparently nonexistent, at least based on the information provided to NTEU.

Under questioning by Chapters 247 and 72, CMLC was unable to provide any evidence, documented or anecdotal, that food and drink had ever inflicted damage on IRS computers or equipment at any site, locally or across the country, or that "a safe, clean, and odor-free environment"—CMLC's stated concern—was ever at risk.

The sad thing is that none of the three Austin Campus Directors stepped up to the plate to defend the longstanding food and drink arrangement when a new policy was thrust upon them and us by an outside source. The directors made no claims that the original *non-policy* had created a problem, yet many of their managers leaped to enforce the Seattle edict, and forced instructors to do the same. Without NTEU's intervention, food and drink in the classrooms would have disappeared forever.

Over a period of months, both campus chapters fought together to successfully lift the ban on food and drink until a local agreement could be negotiated.

Employees received a copy of and were briefed on the resulting agreement. It calls for the use of spill-proof containers for liquids and encourages individuals to clean up after themselves (just as they always have). Other than those preventative measures, food and drink is not restricted in training rooms, whether or not computers are present. Potlucks are

allowed, as well as small electrical appliances to prepare food.

There is no food and drink policy that applies to the South Tech Building. If Austin Campus management decides that a food and drink policy is needed in STB, it is their responsibility to notify NTEU and negotiate. So far, Campus management has not indicated any interest in imposing a food and drink policy on South Tech.

**ENJOY THE FOOD & DRINK POLICY NEGOTIATED BY
YOUR LOCAL UNION CHAPTER, # 247!
THIS COUPON GOOD FOR ONE FREE SNACK TO ANY
EMPLOYEE IN TRAINING, COURTESY OF NTEU 247.
PRESENT COUPON AT UNION OFFICES AT CUSTOMER
SERVICE OR SOUTH TECH BUILDINGS.**

TWO STEPS BACK

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The problem is, whichever hat they wear, these guys are still cowboys. And their solidarity extends only to shoring up the images of three Lone Rangers, mapping out their separate territories, riding gloriously "out on the range," far from the prying eyes of the U.S. marshals who set the directors' mission.

Dave Boose made a deal to limit volunteers to Submission Processing employees Grade 7 and below. Gone is the joint team of management and union representatives who have coordinated Peak Overtime in previous years. That team was a powerful symbol of campus togetherness that united employees of diverse grades, from various operations and different buildings. Now, **the directors have unnecessarily sown the seeds of division**, in what appears to be a too-clever, nasty act of cynicism and manipulation.

Chapter 247 promptly filed an institutional grievance against Dave Boose for refusing to notify 247 of its plans and failing to negotiate with the chapter.

In addition, the union filed mass grievances against Dick Auby and Charles Washington for denying its employees the opportunity to work Peak Overtime. At press time, **over 150 employees have signed on to the grievance** to fight for their right to overtime. That's more than the mass grievance that was so successful two years ago.

Sadly, two years later, the same cast of cowboys are content to play rope tricks on an audience that has grown weary with feats of illusion. Only now, the cowboys wear flipflops with their spurs.

NTEU & ACS



BATTLING STRESS

As 2005 evolved, ACS employees began to feel that some in management had gone too far in focusing on "production," whether it be inventory or phones. This emphasis spawned an ineffective and inappropriate atmosphere of competition between ACS teams and among individual employees. The drive to meet management's extremely subjective definition of "efficiency" increased the stress level to no discernable end. As NTEU had warned early on, management began to use the Critical Job Element of "time utilization" to a severe degree to promote a discredited (by Congress) concept of production, and employees buckled under the pressure to take call after call after call, summoning up the specter of more errors.

In response, Chapter 247 and management entered a dialogue, and through the efforts of employees and managers on the ACS Advisory Council, are currently devising a series of recommendations to battle the issue of stress in the workplace.

NTEU was able to provide management with a convincing argument that stress was a serious and emerging issue. Management prudently agreed not to use the term "production" or to post the team that was working the most inventories, as some firstline managers had done—inaccurately, in some cases. Although ACS employees are not measured on production, some

managers were behaving as if they were. The result was the undue pressuring of employees to increase the number of cases worked.

NTEU expressed concern over an unhealthy obsession with "idle time" by some that reduced employees to reporting every single activity by the minute, including bathroom breaks. Some managers' efforts to lower Average Handle Time per employee became counter effective as well as improper. The Advisory Council created a survey to give every employee the opportunity to voice their opinions and contribute solutions.



On other fronts, Chapter 247 labored to make certain that new hires were provided with the training assistance they needed to provide good service to taxpayers. In so doing, NTEU helped protect the long-established, negotiated processes for the new hires to be certified on the phones and to work inventory.

For fiscal year 2005, bilingual employees were denied their Bilingual Awards. NTEU filed a mass grievance and the case was settled amicably between NTEU and Management, with all bilingual employees receiving the full amount of their awards.

ACS Operation Manager **Wanda Brown** maintained her policy of conducting focus groups with employees selected by NTEU to discuss their concerns and elevate their issues.

NTEU & EXAM

NOT SO FAST



NTEU has spent a lot of time over the past few months meeting with management in all operations concerning end state plans and the national requirement to achieve a standard ratio of employees to manager. Early in the planning process, Exam agreed with Chapter 247 that there was no urgency to move employees before the mandatory March deadline absent a compelling business need. Operations Manager **John Lindsley** joined with NTEU to assess the impact on Exam employees.

Management and NTEU then met with impacted employees to lay out the reasons for change and to talk about who might be impacted. The parties listened to the employees' concerns and sought to involve them in the decision making. During the process of resolving issues, the Exam operation suddenly received authority to hire new employees, and thus employees were spared another unneeded "improvement."



The Exam hiring that followed triggered its own issues, with the need to ensure that promotion packages were put together properly. In the past, many problems arose when the Personnel department created errors in employee ranking packages. NTEU has had to file many grievances over the improper selection of employees. The chapter has worked to make certain that the packages are examined for errors, and that we expedite the resolution of these grievances, so that employees are not erroneously denied selection to work in Exam.

In a welcome development, the new hires included employees who were allowed to move from an increasingly wretched working environment in Accounts Management to Exam. Freedom of movement between AM and Compliance is a refreshing improvement.

COLLECTIONS UPDATE—The Grinches of South Tech

As it does every year, the holiday season came to Compliance Services Collection Operation (CSCO) in 2005. This time, however, the Ghost of Collections Past reared its ugly head.

The past couple of years has brought impressive improvement in working conditions for CSCO employees under the positive leadership of Operation Chief **Frances Sorrow**. That era seems to have ended—at least for the time being—as the department managers have apparently been given wide berth to innovate and to carry out behavior modification experiments on employees. The result is a lack of holiday spirit in Collections.

National Office has made a decision to centralize ASFR phones in Austin CSCO. Since 1987, when we were the pilot site for ASFR, we have had ASFR phones. Now that the ASPECT phone system has entered the mix, however, it appears that the world has become increasingly unmanageable.

Unfortunately, management doesn't seem to learn by their mistakes. CSCO is going through the same problems that Toll Free experienced long ago, with the introduction of the ASPECT system. Rather than taking all the help they can get, management refuses to work with NTEU to sort out the issues. They have chosen to rely instead on the Labor Relations department to lead them down the rocky path of alienating employees.

When will management learn that LR—like other bureaucratic entities—is in the business of keeping itself in business? Over the past couple of years, management chose to work with NTEU to resolve issues. But when LR enters the room, chaos follows. Employees are unhappier than they have

ever been. Wisely, these dispirited folks are joining NTEU. They are realizing more and more that they are under attack, and that **management is not going to help them without NTEU on their backs, hounding them to do the right thing.** Nightshift membership is already over 63%; dayshift is behind them, but growing everyday.



Many managers in Collections—like their employees—feel powerless, because it is the department chiefs who are running (or ruining) the show. Managers are pressured to micromanage in the same manner that they are being micromanaged. Increasingly they feel lost, without any say into how they can run their teams. They are spending all of their time supplying their supervisors with reports; they are not allowed the time to assist and support their employees as they would like.

NTEU is very proud of the success we have had, working together with CSCO management and employees to get business done. Sadly, a new vision of our roles has emerged. CSCO management appears to be bent on focusing on only one aspect of their business role. They seem to have forgotten how to negotiate, and LR has apparently counseled them that they don't need to talk things out to get to a resolution. The goals of increasing span of control in the workplace were to have fewer managers, and to save the govern-

ment money. In actuality, however, CSCO hired two additional permanent managers despite already having an excess of managers. How does management reconcile this ethical dilemma? **CSCO doesn't have enough employees or phone equipment to answer the phones, but the operation just hired two new managers!** CSCO will camouflage the two or more extras that we have by calling them "floaters."

During the recent negotiations over the realignment of employees, NTEU invited a number of non-steward employees to participate in the process. Management attempted to prevent these bargaining unit employees from being present. They seemingly didn't want the curtain pulled back to reveal Oz. They have apparently latched on to the extremist view that working with the union is not something they need to be doing anymore. Even though none of these managers have ever been on the phones themselves, they believe that they are better equipped to call the shots than the people doing the work. The phones have become an obsession for them, bordering on a compulsion disorder.

NTEU continues to fight for employees and win. Appraisal grievances are being won regularly. We have been forced to file AWS grievances for the first time in a long time in Collections, but we have won them as well. We did battle for nightshift employees to be allowed to go to the dayshift. We are defending employees who are being given AWOL just because they are sick. Chapter 247 will continue to use the grievance process to resolve these and other issues. But it is up to us all to stand and fight for our rights—for the Spirit of Collections Future.

HOW DO YOU LIKE US NOW?

200 Grievances Filed In 2005. NTEU Holds Management Accountable

2005 was a record year for Chapter 247, with an eye-popping 200 grievances filed against management, who staged a last ditch effort to impose their will on employees, contract or no contract.

Considering that 247—in the worst year—files 100 grievances, 2005 showed management behaving badly, for sure. But the real story for the year was not that managers were more belligerent than usual, but that they were finally being held accountable for their actions.

Like a drunk holding forth in a shabby barroom, overconfident of his competency, management has confronted *your* union with the immortal cry, "Bring it on!"

Well, we did. *How do you like us now, management?*

In the chapter's view, the outrageous number of grievances reflects two factors: (1) Management has become totally irresponsible in their attempts to exert unwarranted control over an increasingly resentful workforce; and (2) they have completely underestimated NTEU's determination and resiliency in the process.

The management/labor landscape is not as treacherous as it seems, if you analyze the 2005 data. The chapter is both winning and settling an impressive amount of cases, through both formal and informal methods. There are *pockets of partnership* in both the Accounts Management and Compliance directorates, where many managers recognize the futility and unfairness of endless war against employees. The excessive number of grievances does not reflect this good will.

Still, when we talk about grieving, the Devil made us do it. In Accounts Management, where Director **Charles Washington** runs a sinking ship when it comes to management/employee relations, the title of Queen of Mean truly belongs to Operation 2 Magnate **Anna Medlock**, who ended her first year in the job with a staggering

(Continued on next page)

Who Are The Worst Managers? Be A Winner By Picking The Losers

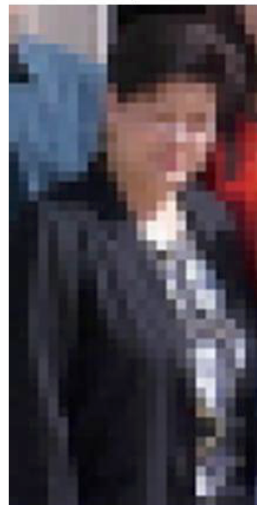


You can win a VISA shopping gift card if you are able to identify any one of the "bad" managers based on the accompanying disguised photographs. A bad manager is determined by grievance statistics (see story above) and employee complaints. Just return your guesses to the CSB union office to enter. Winners will remain anonymous. The managers may not be so lucky.

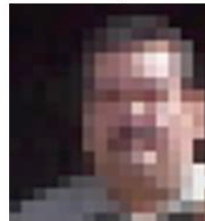
Manager #1



Manager #2



Manager #3



Manager #4



Manager #5 (at left)

HOW DO YOU LIKE US NOW? NTEU Names Names

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

46 grievances. Her Department 2 Chief, **Denise Lage**, demonstrated her management potential with the worst performance of any department head within Chapter 247's purview—**28 grievances**. By contrast, her colleagues in Departments 1 and 3, Steve Rayos and Dago Gonzalez, were love bea-d-clad pacifists chasing after a Nobel Peace Prize, with seven and eleven grievances respectively. Even if they joined forces, Steve and Dago couldn't make enough employees miserable to give Denise a run for her money. Meanwhile, Operation 1 Capitan Della Thomas was positively an underachiever, with her Toll Free empire gathering a mere 29 grievances, unable to wrest the crown for antisocial behavior from Queen Anna's most apt pupil, Denise. Remember when "plays well with others" was required of ambitious toddlers? Red Rover, Red Rover, send these poor sports in management over-board!



In 2005, AM's Ops 2 lived up to its growing reputation as **the worst place to work** in the Customer Service and South Tech buildings. Meanness has broken out all over in the Adjustments operation, and the pressure continues to build despite the outstanding achievement of its CSRs and Leads. The employees persevere, while they hurry up and wait—for the reward that will arrive sometime, far down the road. In the meantime, Denise Lage mentors **Cindy Harrison**, **Diane West**, and **Carol Brewer** into outscoring their fellow managers in racking up

grievances: six, six, and five respectively.



Della Thomas and her Toll Free operation is not down and out completely, however. Her firstline managers, **Janet Hall** and **Tony DelaCerde**, leave their competition in the dust. With seven and six grievances respectively, Janet and Tony are the strongest boy/girl act since their namesakes, **Janet Leigh** and **Tony Curtis**. Disturbing film titles made famous by Leigh and Curtis—*Psycho* and *The Boston Strangler*, for example—come to mind. Janet Hall is no longer managing employees. If she were, her yearly grievance total would likely have been higher. *Talk about disturbing.*

In Dick Auby's Compliance operations, **Frances Sorrow's** Collections operation has taken a turn for the worse this year (see story on page 5), with 42 grievances filed by employees. ACS follows well behind with 33 grievances, while Exam has the fewest upset employees by far, with 14 filings.

Department 1's **Mary Murray** is out front in the Collections operation, with 18 grievances. Department 2 chief **Marsha Kish**, however, has been working overtime—she trails Mary only slightly, with 14 grievances. There's always next year, Marshal!

Collections has two firstline managers that stand out from the pack in Compliance: **Elizabeth Wade** and **Donna Martin** take booby prizes for their

achievements of seven grievances each.

What are these grievances about? In both Accounts Management and Compliance, the grievances that we have been discussing so far are individual employee grievances. The majority (65) deal with individual performance evaluations: annual appraisals, midyear progress reviews, departure appraisals, or evaluative recordations. The next largest categories of grievances are discipline (28) and leave (also 28).

These numbers, however, do not take into account **mass grievances**—encompassing many employees—and **institutional grievances**, where management takes pot shots at union rights. In 2005, Chapter 247 filed mass grievances over leave denials, overtime, and tours of duty, among other issues.

When it comes to the big issues and the bad policies, no one soars with the vultures like Accounts Management's director, Charles Washington. Charles has 17 mass grievances and eight institutional grievances, compared with Compliance's director, Dick Auby, who has five mass grievances and three institutionals. Campus Director **Dave Boose** scored some institutionals as well.

Together, the final score is: 165 individual grievances, 22 mass grievances, and 13 institutional grievances, for a total of 200 grievances. Not included are the disciplinary cases that resulted in 22 oral replies by Chapter 247, and the thousands of incidents solved or totally averted by the presence of NTEU in the workplace.

200 grievances. There could have been more. The challenge for management in 2006 is: *Will there be less?*

ULTIMATE EXPLORER

ONE AUSTIN EMPLOYEE'S STORY FROM THE FEMA FRONTLINES

Some employees were denied their fair shot to volunteer for FEMA disaster positions (see story beginning on page 1), but others made the trek. Arlene Flores is a Collections Tax Examiner and a Chapter 247 steward. This is her story as a FEMA adventurer.

My FEMA adventure was a great experience. I was proud to be a part of our federal agencies' effort to support FEMA following the Hurricane Katrina catastrophe. During the training sessions I attended in Atlanta, all participants were made aware that **there were more employee volunteers from the IRS than any other agency**. In the process, I was able to meet fellow federal volunteers from NASA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Immigration and Naturalization Service, Social Security Administration, and the Departments of Justice, Labor, and Education.

We were checked in, issued photo IDs, equipped with cell phones, vaccinated, and placed into training classes. During our training, we discovered the FEMA personnel to be extremely informative. Our main training was for field work. We were responsible for making contacts within communities, and for spreading the word that people affected by the disasters should register with FEMA. We were also charged with making daily reports, which included writing up assessments of the impacted areas. If we encountered a problem that needed immediate attention, we were instructed to use our assigned cell phones to contact our team leader immediately. Less pressing situations were to be written up and passed on, up the



chain of command.

Following our initial training, we waited excitedly to be deployed. Everyone was fired up about leaving; no one knew where they would be going. Would we be assigned to work indoors or outdoors? Some volunteers were shipped out to Texas and other states affected by Katrina. I saw a table full of sleeping bags and wondered if I would eventually need one.

During our morning briefing on October 18, 2005, we were told that we would all be going to Orlando, Florida. We collected our FEMA shirts, FEMA jackets, FEMA caps, and our supplies (mosquito spray, gel to sanitize hands, and a small flashlight). It appeared to me that we may be working outdoors after all. We were commanded to check out of our hotels and to reserve a flight to Orlando. We were expected to be checked in that day and ready for training tomorrow. Everyone was assigned a partner to travel with and a team leader to contact once they reached the hotel in Florida. We also had to pick up a rental car when we arrived. At first, I assumed that FEMA would be making the travel arrangements, but it was all left up to us. Some employees were able to reserve a block of rooms

for their travel group. We were fortunate enough to have a team leader with plenty of government traveling experience who was able to set us up in a nice hotel.

We drove from the airport to the hotel, ready for training. On our first day of training, we were briefed, and volunteers were questioned about their special skills. Some people were tentatively selected to work as FEMA mitigators in a Disaster Recovery Center (DRC). The mitigators were tested before the final selections were made. The rest of us were trained as workers in a DRC.

"Hurricane Wilma emerged from off of the radar screen to capture our attention. We were now considered fully trained and told that we would be deployed to Florida..."

Most of us were still in limbo, wondering where we would be sent after the training ended. Then, Hurricane Wilma emerged from off of the radar screen to capture our attention. We were now considered fully trained and told that we would be deployed to Florida a couple of days after Hurricane Wilma hit.

Some volunteers were upset that they were not going to assist in the Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita recovery efforts, but it soon became clear that FEMA was now our boss, and when and where they told us to jump, so be it. We

(Continued on next page)

ULTIMATE EXPLORER

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

were informed that we were now trained for two jobs, but that once we got to our assigned areas, we may end up doing something completely different. **Wow! This was a wild ride up until the end.**

We finally got our deployment orders and were moved around into other travel groups. We drove from Orlando to Fort Myers, Florida. The hotels we were assigned to were hard to find. We spent one night at a hotel, and the next day traveled to check in to another hotel. We finally settled into yet another hotel in Naples, Florida. There we got the word that we would be working in Everglades City. The drive was approximately 40 miles, one way. We were merged with another travel team.

In Everglades City, our team as-

sisted in the setup of the Disaster Recovery Center. We met and gave aid to all of the people from the area that came in. There were other organizations working out of the DRC as well.

It was rough at the beginning because the satellite connection for our telephones and computers was erratic, resulting in a great deal of frustration for everyone. Hurricane victims were disconnected before completing the telephone registration process, and the computers were very slow. On the up side, the team of men assigned to work out the technical kinks were available to us whenever we needed them. They were the nicest group of guys.

We saw **over 100 people a day** up until the last day. Most of the people dropping in at the end were

there to follow up on their account status.

It was a thrill to be a part of FEMA. The experience will last a lifetime. This whole adventure showed me a new view of the world. **Don't believe everything you see on TV.** We are all capable of making changes in the world.

Spurred on by tragedy, federal employees joined together and created something positive. Once again, we showed how much that we can contribute if we are only asked. Other government volunteers may be called up in the ongoing recovery efforts, maybe others from our Austin site. If, God forbid, another disaster occurs, I have been trained to react. If I am called on again to help out, **they can count on me.**

**LET'S HURRY UP AND CANCEL
THE EMPLOYEES' LEAVE SO
THAT I CAN GET HOME FOR
THE HOLIDAYS!**

"PLANNING"

by Julian Chitta



Keith Ekakiadis

WINNER OF THE 3RD NTEU 247
CHAPTER SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY CONTEST

Why is it important for everyone to be a union member?

I have been working at the Internal Revenue Service for three years and some months now, and I have often asked myself, "Why should I join the union?"



Up until a few months ago, I was not a part of the National Treasury Employees Union, and I had no intention to ever become a part of a group that takes dues from its members. It is a fact that one does not have to pay in order to reap many of the benefits that NTEU has to offer.

However, in the time I have been working at the IRS, I have come to realize that unions and employees have an integral relationship with one another—each helps the other's ability to function within the work environment. There are a great deal of protections and services that the union provides, which are not wholly available to those who are not members of the organization. These protections and services are invaluable for any employee. They allow for greater, more extensive backing of an employee in situations of mistreatment and/or unfairness in the workplace when it comes to upper management. Even the seemingly smallest of issues holds weight.

For example, in my department there have been several employees who have had to move to different cubicles for one reason or another. The union provided support, making sure these employees were able to choose the cubicle and the general area that they wanted to move to. This may seem like a small issue to some, but it is often details like these that show how important the union is to employees.

"Whether the issue is big or small, the union effectively preserves one's rights in the workplace. It provides services that nonmembers do not have, or are unaware of."

The union also provides health care programs that are exclusive to its members, including vision, dental, and short term disability, universal life, and cancer insurance, just to name a few. Without the support of its members, the union would not be able to provide these essential programs to those that need them the most. Again, unions and employees rely on each other for support.

Another service of NTEU is that it fights on Capitol Hill in order to

preserve employees' annual pay raise. In fact, news of the 3.1% pay increase for federal civilian employees was put into writing recently. Without the union to go before Congress to express the concerns of employees, it is quite possible that a pay increase would not occur every year. The membership dues that employees put into unions are practically returned with interest each year—and with increased membership protections, the services that are provided to union members only get better.

The aforementioned reasons display why it is important for every employee to join the union. Whether the issue is big or small, the union effectively preserves one's rights in the workplace. It provides services that nonmembers do not have, or are unaware of. Unions also provide protection against pay increase adversaries in the White House. Employees and unions rely on one another, but only employees reap the benefits from this exchange. That is why everybody should join a union.



Keith Ekakiadis works as a Tax Examiner in Collections.

"THE SPIN" by Julian Chitta



CHAPTER 247 VICTORIES PILE UP

Chapter 247 was recognized nationally for a number of major arbitration victories on behalf of employees during 2005. We enforced the chapter's local agreements concerning bilingual awards and tours of duty. We scored back pay for employees who had performed higher graded duties, and won a settlement of nearly \$10,000.00 for an employee in a conduct case. Below are some of the highlights of those grievances as they were published in the national NTEU Case Digest.



BILINGUAL AWARDS - The Agency denied five employees of the W&I Compliance Services Division bilingual awards in violation of Article 18, Section 5. The case settled prior to hearing with the Agency agreeing to pay each of the Grievants \$450.00. *Article 18, Section 5.* (John B. Barnard, Arbitrator) Institutional Grievance-Bilingual Awards, **Chapter 247** and IRS, Austin, Texas. 7/19/2005. Staff - Grabske, Michael. Mass Grievance #037-04. A-3266.

HIGHER GRADED DUTIES; COMPUTER ASSISTANTS - The Grievants, GS-335-9 Computer Assistants, argued that they were performing the higher graded duties of the GS-11 User Support Specialist position in Ogden. The grievance also alleged that the Grievants did not properly fall under the GS-335 Computer Specialist classification. Because classification issues are not grievable, the case settled prior to hearing with each of the Grievants receiving ninety days back pay. (LeRoy Bartman, Arbitrator) Mass Higher Graded Duties #074-02, **Chapter 247** and IRS, Austin. 6/24/2005. Staff - Grabske, Michael. A-3274.

REMOVAL-DISCOURTEOUS BEHAVIOR - The Agency charged the Grievant with seven specifications of alleged unprofessional conduct with taxpayer calls. The Grievant did not dispute her conduct, but maintained that her medical issues caused her to engage in the unprofessional conduct. The Grievant had previously been suspended for three days for AWOL. The case settled prior to hearing with the Grievant accepting a clean SF-50 and a check for \$9,975. (I.B. Helburn, Arbitrator) **Chapter 247** and IRS, Austin. 3/23/2005. Staff - Grabske, Michael. A-3286.

TOUR OF DUTY; ACS - The grievance involved thirty-four night shift employees in Automated Collection Systems (ACS) who had their tours of duty changed to a maximum stop time of 9:00 pm, resulting in hardship for many of the Grievants. The parties agreed to hold the scheduling of this case in abeyance pending the outcome of a similar case with the same chapter. When NTEU prevailed in that arbitration hearing, the Agency agreed to settle this case prior to hearing by returning the Grievants to their prior tour of duty if they still so desired. (LeRoy Bartman, Arbitrator) Mass Grievance #038-03 ACS Tour of Duty Change, **Chapter 247** and IRS, Austin. 6/23/2005. Staff - Grabske, Michael. A-3291.

HURRICANE CHARLES LOSES FORCE

The Mystery Of The Missing FEMA Applications

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

In the wake of the Katrina disaster, Charles and his management team conducted a briefing for the benefit of NTEU officials representing chapters in Austin, Denver, Dallas, and Houston. At that time, the Director told Chapter 247 President **Eddie Walker** that the



Wage and Investment Business Operating Division had made an initial decision to deny call site employees the right to volunteer for FEMA positions.

According to Charles, high level management had determined that call sites were already contributing to disaster relief by taking on more phone calls and an increased "paper" workload routed from IRS call sites designated as FEMA phone sites. At Eddie's urging, Charles promised that he would tell his firstline managers to approve any FEMA volunteer applications from AM employees, thereby allowing the BOD to make a final determination.

Next, 247 joined other NTEU chapters across the country in elevating the issue of call site volunteers to National NTEU President **Colleen Kelley**. This led to a September 19 response to Colleen from IRS Chief Human Capital Officer Beverly Babers, who wrote that "W&I has reassessed its work load in the Call Site and Accounts Management functions" and "the decision has been made that we will be able to also include applications from employees in these organizations for the FEMA volunteer solicitation." The process was thus reopened in order to accommodate call site applications.

Eddie then forwarded the Kelley/Baber communication to Charles and Compliance Director **Dick Auby**, requesting that "this important info [go] out to your employees." Dick and his ACS call site Operation Chief **Wanda Brown** swiftly moved into action, resoliciting ACS employees so that their applications could be approved by firstline managers and sent up the chain of command.

Charles appeared to take a different approach to Beverly Babers' memo. The Big Man wrote, "Eddie, all managers have been requested to follow e-mail instructions." This sounded like an affirmative response, but the Accounts Management execution did not take a clear cut path.

That Tuesday, September 20 through Thursday, September 22, all firstline managers in Accounts Management Operations 1 and 2 were offsite at a neighboring hotel, attending the AM Leadership Conference. Chapter 247 obtained a tape recording of a voice mail from Charles, Operation 1 Chief **Della Thomas**, and Department head **Jill Smith** to bargaining unit employees who were acting as managers while the firstline managers conferred.

The instruction from Charles and Company to acting managers seemed to be purposely confusing. Although management had received the Babers memo, and although the updated information was headlined on the IRS Intranet website as "Employees...have until 9/21," Della claimed to acting managers that "I don't know if there is a deadline." She then ordered that employee FEMA applications "must be held" for the firstline managers until they returned from the Leadership Conference—on Friday, September 23, two days after the announced cut-off date of September 21! Further, according to Della, firstline managers were required to discuss their decision whether to approve employee applications with their department managers "prior to faxing."

On the voice mail, Department Manager Jill Smith backed Della up, insisting that each application "gets held till I get back [on Friday]."

Adding to the confusion, Charles piped in to inform the acting managers that the application dates for employees were "the 19th through the 22nd." He conceded that—according to the information that he had received—the policy was to "allow all call site employees to apply for FEMA [disaster relief positions]." After announcing (inaccurately) the change in policy, however, Charles added that "nothing has changed," and that firstline managers needed to review the applications and release or deny employees "based on workload."

Thus, in the absence of firstline managers, Charles and his team advised the acting managers of the following:

- (1) The deadline was September 22—or perhaps there was no deadline at all.
- (2) Acting managers were to hold on to FEMA applications until September 23—later than both the real deadline and the fictitious one.
- (3) On September 23—again, after the deadline came and no applications would be accepted—firstline managers were required to take into account workload concerns before deciding whether or not to approve an employee's application. (To those hip to AM's view of "workload," the sheer summoning up of the term proved that the fix was in for denial.)
- (4) The firstline manager's decision had to be run by their department manager—a further delay, but meaningless, as once more the application was too late to be considered.

To NTEU, either the voice mail to acting managers reflected ignorance and/or incompetence by local management, or it was a deliberate attempt to sabotage the FEMA application process so that no Accounts Management em-

(Continued on next page)

HURRICANE CHARLES LOSES FORCE

The Mystery Of The Missing FEMA Applications

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

ployee would be considered. ***Can there be any other interpretation?***

Chapter 247 elevated the above information to national NTEU. Charles' handling of the FEMA solicitation made its way to the disseminator of the official management policy, Beverly Babers.

Coincidentally or not, on Wednesday, September 21, the D-Day for FEMA applications—and in the middle of the off-site AM Leadership Conference—Charles was spotted onsite, apparently taking an active part in the application process. According to our sources, an uncharacteristically—for management—quick and thorough effort was made to round up application forms from those employees who had previously attempted to apply. The applications were delivered to the employees' firstline managers at their offsite hotel. The managers were then instructed on how to fill out and sign the applications. Finally, the applications were taken back to the Customer Service Building and faxed to the proper destination.

"The chapter was not prepared to take for granted that Charles and Company had crossed every "i" and dotted every "i."

When Eddie called Charles to remind him of the deadline, Charles brusquely replied that all of the applications would be faxed properly and *timely*. NTEU followed up by tracking down employees whom we knew had applied and making certain that they reapplied, and by keeping an eye on those folks designated by management to fax the applications.

Experience has taught us that, for union officials, skepticism is a virtue. Thus, the chapter was not prepared to take for granted that Charles and Company had crossed every "i" and dotted every "i." Chapter 247—and employees represented by NTEU—asked management to return the FEMA applications that they had faxed in order to determine whether they had been submitted correctly.

Management refused to return the applications to the employees who had submitted them. The reason? Management hemmed and hawed at first, but eventually they came up with a single, jaw dropping answer: ***They didn't keep copies of the applications!***

Copies? Management ***faxed*** the applications! They didn't have to send them *anywhere*. Where were the originals?

Can there be any other reaction to this wild explanation save...

(1) Management destroyed the applications after faxing them? Or...

(2) They are withholding embarrassing information?

Chapter 247 was able to get its hands on a number of applications. Whether they were faxed in the same condition as we saw them, we are unable to say. Some, however, were left uncompleted by the managers; others were completed but the managers had marked the appropriate box "Denied." Some managers had denied employees because of "Workload"; still others had written "Seasonal" (for seasonal employee). Some were marked both "Seasonal" and "Denied" for "Workload," which was really hilarious, considering that, within a few weeks, the too busy seasonals were sent home for the year for lack of work.

According to information given the chapter, any of these conditions could have caused an application to be rejected without being considered. If so, is it possible that Charles and his team deliberately "fixed" the applications so that none from Austin Accounts Management would be considered?

As we have seen, Charles told the Chapter 247 leadership that he would instruct his firstline managers to approve any FEMA volunteer applications, leaving the BOD to make a final determination. What happened to that pledge?

Chapter 247 has filed a request under the Freedom of Information Act, asking for "all applications received from IRS employees volunteering for the 2,000 FEMA disaster recovery positions in response to Hurricane Katrina during the month of September 2005. This includes all IRS employees nationwide as well as from the Austin Campus."

The goal is to establish to the public that Austin AM officials "have the highest ethical standards, and that they are not attempting to cover up ethical violations." One would think that it would be in the best interest of Charles and his team to support Chapter 247's effort.

How can Charles help? By giving the missing FEMA paperwork back to the employees who submitted them. The Accounts Management chain of command—along with its notorious henchmen from Labor Relations—has refused to provide the applications to the applicants and to NTEU. With Charles' help, Chapter 247 can drop its FOIA request, and management can shore up the reputation that has been undermined by ***two storms***—one caused by Hurricane Katrina, the other a controversy of its own making.

As of now, the question remains: Did management sabotage the FEMA application process? It could be that the answer is blowing in the wind.

CHAPTER HITS 62%!

In the just over three years since October 2002, when the current leadership of NTEU 247 came on board, chapter membership has increased by 32%, to its current high of **62% of eligible bargaining unit employees!** The result is that the chapter is bigger, stronger, and more vital in the workplace than ever, despite a national effort by some in government to slash the number of federal employees in half, and to contract those jobs out to politically-connected business sharks.

It's true. When the going gets tough, **the tough get going.** By the end of the fiscal year, we hope to see **70%** of employees toughened up with NTEU!

NTEU PRIZES MEMBERS

Chapter 247 held a month's worth of *Members Only* drawings in September. The prizes included NTEU T-shirts, movie tickets, shopping gift cards, and the coup de grace: **Chapter 247 filled one lucky member's vehicle to the top with gasoline!**

NTEU'S NEW YEAR RINGS IN NEW BENEFITS (Ka-Ching!)

IRS employees are ringing in the new year with key gains, thanks to a new national mid-term agreement negotiated by NTEU. Under the new contract—already in effect—the IRS must set aside **\$50 million annually** for performance awards for employees.

The contract also **increases the number of credit hours** employees can work in one day from two to three, allows alternative work schedule hours to be non-contiguous, and expands employee rights in promotions and competitive actions.

Chapter 247 stewards will be given official IRS time to be trained on the new contract provisions, so don't fail to direct any questions that you have to your steward.

ACCOUNTS MANAGEMENT EMBRACES 22" MONITORS

In a recent sit down with Chapter 247 leaders, Austin Accounts Management Director **Charles Washington** clarified management's position on larger computer monitors for all AM employees, a concept that 247 has been pushing ever since the introduction of the Correspondence Imaging System (CIS) confronted employees with a headache-inducing myriad of computer windows.

NTEU filed a mass grievance on behalf of 116 CSRs in AM Operations 1 and 2 in order to encourage management to provide bigger monitors for all their employees. 21 inch, 22 inch, flat screen, double monitors, what have you...Chapter 247 believes that more readable computer monitors are in the future for employees. It is the chapter's policy to get them sooner rather than later.

NTEU requested a meeting with the AM Director in order to determine how far apart the two sides were on the issue. During their talks, Charles revealed the following.

- AM Management favors larger monitors for all employees.
- Management has taken steps to obtain larger monitors.
- Funding, however, is not available at this time.
- When funding becomes available, AM will move to purchase larger monitors.

Charles shot down the rumor that there is a warehouse full of 22 inch monitors somewhere out there that management refuses to share with employees. In fact, several folks present at the meeting—both union and management—volunteered to back their trucks up to any such secret warehouse and "requisition" the monitors on behalf of the CSRs.

With both sides agreeing on the desirability of larger monitors, Chapter 247 suggested that Charles and his team release a statement to employees detailing their position. At the beginning of the new year, **management did just that.**

CHAPTER 247 OFFICERS

PRESIDENT

Eddie Walker

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

Julia Miller

FIRST VICE PRESIDENT

Russell Bokelman

TREASURER

Karen Lorch

SECRETARY

Tonia Gilmore

CHIEF STEWARDS

Ben Eureste (Days)

X0833

Stere Conyers (Nights)

X0180

STEWARDS

MIKE BUNTON X5732

MONICA CAHILL X5435

CHRISTINA CASTRO X5727

ROBIN CHERRY X1361

JULIAN CHITTA X0390

DAVE DAVIS X0253

CALEB ELLINGER X1106

ARLENE FLORES X5466

JIM HARDY X1826

TONYA JONES X0892

SAL MACIAS X1058

LADAN MAKKOUK X1549

BLAS MARTINEZ X5370

STAN MURDOCH X0356

KARINA OROZCO X1638

GAYLA PEHL X5355

ALISON RIGGS X5788

KATHY ROBERTS X1393

CHARLIE RODRIGUEZ X5327

ALIA SHOEMAKE X0839

FAYE STALLION X5314

MELVIN TEALER X0217

TERA TERBAY X1046

ABRAHAM TORRES-MENDOZA

X1128

DELMA VIANA X1996

VINH WAUGH X0692

RAMONA WRIGHT X0991

