

Chapter 247 Hits 70% Membership Goal Just In Time For 20th Year Anniversary, page 2.



THE VOICE

www.nteu247.org

VOLUME 4, ISSUE 9

OF CHAPTER 247

SHARKS ON A PLAN

IRS SHARKS SINK AT THE BOX OFFICE, LOSING TO UNION IN COURT. NOW IT'S TIME FOR PLAN B.

IRS Moguls were torpedoed by NTEU and immersed by defeat in federal court, as the government's scheme to shear federal employees of their union rights was engulfed by its own thirsty ambition. As sharks have no alternative but to constantly move forward in their destructive pattern or die, Agency Predators have hungrily advanced to Plan B: They have declared the IRS/NTEU National Agreement to be null and void—and in the process, they are giving employees a disturbing glimpse into a world without federal employee unions.

Just as the film classic, "It's A Wonderful Life," showed what life in Bedford Falls would be like, sans the solid and upright leadership of Jimmy Stewart's "George Bailey" character, IRS Operators seem eager to let employees see just how sour the workplace could be minus the protection of NTEU.

(Continued on page 9)

dis-Connected

NTEU, Collections Phone Efforts On Hold

Collections employees suffering under fumbling, makeshift working conditions—and the lack of a national phone agreement—took it on the chin yet again as the Compliance Services Collection Operation (CSCO) management team pulled the plug on ASFR phone negotiations with NTEU Chapter 247, citing the recent antiunion stance of IRS Muckamucks (see story above) as justification for the sudden turnaround. The swift metamorphosis of CSCO into a national site handling Automated Substitute For Return phone calls has been undertaken without the sort of governing labor-management agreements that exist in other operations. The result is that a local management structure with little phone experience is struggling to keep afloat while the Agency's Lifeguards distantly decree that it ignore the life preserver that NTEU is offering.

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UNITY CONTINUES

Chapter 247 Leadership Uncontested

In an historic development, the current NTEU Chapter 247 Executive Board—President **Eddie Walker**, Executive Vice President **Julia Miller**, First Vice President **Russell Bokelman**, Treasurer **Karen Lorch**, and Secretary **Tonia Gilmore**—have been returned to lead the chapter for another two year term without an election contest. The ballot box election that had been scheduled for August 23 and August 30 was not held.

Labeling itself "The Unity Ticket," the group distributed a flyer urging voters to "Support Your Team!" The candidates further stressed continuity by including the present lineup of Chief Stewards—Day Shift Chief **Ben Eureste**, Swing Shift Chief **Sal Macias**, and Chief Steward, Night Shift, **Mike Bunton**—on their handout.

The team pledges to continue its efforts to increase NTEU's membership and influence in the workplace.

Shotgun Wedding Is Off?

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THE LAST FALLING DOMINO?

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Chapter 247: The Website

www.nteu247.org Uploads
Link to page 2.

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

Chapter 247: The Website

www.nteu247.org Uploads

Chapter 247 has created a website which is now fully operational and accessible to all members—and potential members. It's www.nteu247.org, and it's up and running. And employees are already taking advantage of its features.



The Chapter website is designed with a local flavor. It has an easy to use Steward Finder that enables employees to keep in touch with the NTEU Steward assigned to their team. When an issue needs to be elevated, there is a special tool to contact Chapter Leaders. This contact form can also be used to notify 247 when you are in need of a NTEU mug or an Official Chapter 247 Mouse Pad, freebies that are the privilege of every chapter member.

Chapter 247 has long had a human distribution system that quickly delivers breaking news or initiatives to employee drop files. But whenever quickly isn't quick enough, there is "Breaking News" on the Chapter website. For employees away from the workplace or on furlough, Breaking News will bring you regular updates. If management views you as "out of sight, out of mind," Chapter 247 does not.

www.nteu247.org also has links to the national NTEU website, health benefits, retirement, and other concerns relating to federal employees like you.

The Chapter 247 Website. Check it out. Now, more than ever, Chapter 247 is "Working for you 24/7!"



20 YEARS FOR CHAPTER 247

We're Getting Older...And We're Getting Better!

In 1986, Chapter 247 received its charter with NTEU. 2006 marks twenty years of working for employees, and we're not only getting older...we're getting better!

On August 30, the chapter's reach caught up with its grasp when we hit our target of **70% membership**.

Earlier in the year, 247 did the math and realized that it needed to recruit 95 members to achieve its goal by October 1, the beginning of the fiscal year. The chapter constructed a giant chart to track the countdown to zero. In August, NTEU reached the Final 15, and we offered the prize of an **Apple iPod** to a member who recruited at least one of the 15. Each member signed up earned the recruiter another chance in a random drawing of 15.

The winner of the iPod was NTEU Steward, **Tonya Jones**. Second Prize, a \$50 VISA Gift Card, went to Chapter 247 1st Vice President, **Russell Bokelman**, and the Third Prize title-holder was star Steward **Delma Viana**, who took home two movie tickets.

Although Stewards are generally among our top scouts for members, the Final 15 recruiters included several civilian members. Even though the prizes went to Stewards, each recruiter received \$20 per new member. So there were no losers!

Chapter 247 is celebrating its 20th Anniversary with 70% membership, a brand new website, and lots of food and fun for October's Labor Recognition Week! Check in at www.nteu247.org.



Coincidence? We Think *NOT!*

We work for the IRS. We know math.

So... What *was* the 247th day of the year this year?

September 4. Labor Day!

Here at Chapter 247, we don't believe in coincidences.



THE VOICE

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The Shotgun Wedding Is Off?

Chapter 247 Members Dump Employee Engagement Survey



IRS Honchos hit us with their best shot and came up short in their attempt to con employees into propping up their feeble, overpriced, thinly-disguised **Employee Engagement Survey**. Since the law requires all federal agencies to address "employee satisfaction," an organization that cares nothing about the issue doesn't have much of a horse to ride in on. The Brass' efforts to substitute its lame, outsourced Survey for a serious effort to undertake employee concerns have become pitiful, and no one has pointed that out to such devastating effect as NTEU and Chapter 247.

Here in Austin, Chapter 247 has been effective in marshalling support for a boycott of the Survey among its members, and employees have responded spectacularly, with 247 representing the lowest participation rate in the nation among IRS Service Center chapters. Chapter 247 repre-

sents approximately 1,300 bargaining unit employees. Management has chosen to include managers in the Survey numbers, which boosts the participation statistics. Therefore, as the charts below demonstrate, **virtually no bargaining unit employees took the Survey**.

Charles Washington's Accounts Management operations did not share its poor participation rates with employees. Nor did they share them with firstline managers, reportedly figuring that managers—with loyalty diminishing for the Man at the Top—would shuttle the humiliating evidence directly to NTEU. Despite rumors of record low numbers, Chapter 247 wanted AM's results in writing. Once the Survey results were released from captivity, the embarrassing news could be contained no longer.

The numbers *are* wretched. If managers are included, a total of 18 Toll

Free employees took the Survey. In Op 2, Adjustments, Department 1 scored only 9 participants, including management. Department 2 did better, with 14 Survey takers, but the results could have been skewed by **the employee who claimed to have taken the Survey several times!**

Op 2, Department 3 marshaled its resources better, but the totals include another chapter in the results.

Compliance managers *were* trusted with Survey stats by their Director. Thus Chapter 247 has the data to compare the percentages of employee participation over three years. The numbers are catastrophic for management, with participation falling by 86%, 91%, and 92% in ACS, Exam, and Collections!

Chapter 247, which first coined the slogan, "The Engagement is Off," now has proof positive that, among its members, management's Shotgun Wedding is off!

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES PARTICIPATING IN THE SURVEY: AM *(Includes Managers)*

2006	Dept. 1	Dept. 2	
Toll Free	11	7	
2006	Dept. 1	Dept. 2	Dept. 3
Adjustments	9	14	24

PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYEES PARTICIPATING IN THE SURVEY: COMPLIANCE *(Includes Managers)*

Operation	2006	2005	2004	Drop In Participation since 2004
ACS	12%	38%	84%	down 86%
Exam	7%	33%	75%	down 91%
Collections	7%	56%	83%	down 92%

ACS MANAGEMENT



IN RETREAT?

Despite a good deal of elbow grease expended by Management, NTEU, and the ACS Advisory Council toward devising and rolling out a groundbreaking Stress plan, a continuing obsession with Average Handle Time is triggering ACS employees to stress out all over again.

The Advisory Council is comprised of employees selected by Chapter 247 and managers chosen by the Operation Chief. After working so diligently on the Stress plan, employee members are disappointed in the lack of commitment to the plan displayed by management. After the initial hoopla surrounding the rollout of the plan, implementation was marred by management's canceling of Council meetings, where members expected to conduct follow up.

Meanwhile, many firstline managers have ignored the plan. Rude managers continue to be rude without penalty. Lead meeting minute notes are rarely distributed to employees in defiance of the plan, and management's mania over Average Handle Time is beginning to resemble less an attention to management goals and more a serious case of Attention Deficit Disorder Syndrome.

Average Handle Time Disorder—or AHTD, as Chapter 247 calls it—is

in danger of killing the golden goose represented by Austin's stellar ACS employees. The demands on Collection Representatives are exploding, but AHTD increases the pressure on CRs to cut corners. Meanwhile, management's not so secret determination—nationally and locally—to drive evaluation ratings down creates alternating impulses for employees: "Should I speed up to protect my rating on time utilization, or slow down, in order to preserve my quality ratings?"

When employees believe that management is more interested in setting a trap for them than in improving individual quality or production, that creates cynicism rather than achievement. Currently, managerial approvals are a big issue. If an employee "gets dinged" with an error—no matter how minor—he or she receives a Form 13009 documenting the infraction. No matter how hard an employee works, or how successful the organization is, anyone can be vulnerable to committing one simple error that will bite back in his or her performance evaluation.

On the other hand, even veteran employees are susceptible to a failure of time utilization. The crushing burden of answering call after call, while each minute is tracked in order to maintain a perfect alignment of 3081 time sheets, the Aspect report, and the eWFM report, is creating employee whiplash.

Managers must be suffering stress as well, judging from the panic that results when an error is made or a goal is (temporarily) missed. Management's instinct is to implement a slew of new procedures. The question for employees is not, "What have you done for me?," but "What have you done for me lately?"

The reduction in ACS Inventory

Days is a national initiative by management which has been elevated to the national NTEU leadership by Chapter 247, but that issue has not yet been settled. It is, however, a significant factor in generating ACS's pressure cooker atmosphere.

The failure of management to support the Stress plan has created a credibility gap for the ACS Operation. There is currently a two tiered system of leadership in ACS. The Operations Manager and the Department Heads are the good cops, dispensing cake and punch, while the firstline managers give tough love, dish out a heaping helping of reality. ACS has become the place to work for, but only if you work your cases perfectly, take calls all day one after the other, only go to the bathroom during lunch or breaks, don't request leave, and never call in sick.

"Average Handle Time Disorder—or AHTD, as Chapter 247 calls it—is in danger of killing the golden goose..."

There is currently a proposal by management to eliminate the Advisory Council. In creating the Stress plan, did the Council do its job too well? Putting in writing procedures that address day to day concerns that can result in stress seems to be a laudable and reasonable undertaking that helps business results while providing relief to employees.

ACS management must make a recommitment to combatting employee stress head on if it truly wishes to keep quality high. This is not the time to retreat from its pledges to NTEU and to employees.



dis-Connected

NTEU, Collections Phone Efforts On Hold

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

In Chapter 247's view, CSCO management is drowning in the same hot water that Accounts Management's Toll Free operations did years ago. It is hiring employees off the street without IRS experience, and after three short weeks of telephone technique training, workers are thrown onto the phone with limited knowledge of the Agency. This is the same sort of fiasco that AM had to extricate itself from several seasons ago.

On top of this considerable blunder, management has assigned itself the thorny task of retraining an entire operation on ASFR phones without a well thought out plan. Again avoiding the lessons of Toll Free, CSCO management is attempting to train employees on returns while answering phones. Meanwhile, management has not yet proved capable of instituting a set phone schedule. Employees report that they bearing the brunt of management's unworkable processes.

At the same time, bullying employees seems to be a popular management sport in Collections. In a recent Wage and Investment newsletter, Compliance management boasted of its hiring of a dozen new CSCO bilingual employees. The 12 were added to the two bilinguals that remain from an earlier round of recruiting. Those two are survivors from an initial group of five bilingual employees. Of the twelve new bilinguals, at least three employees have left CSCO within the first four months on the job.

Slippage...Idle codes...leave...AWS...lunch and break schedules...training...lack of training...these are contentious issues familiar to Phone Land employees. Chapter 247 worked for months with CSCO management to nail down a local ASPECT phone agreement. When negotiations were nearly completed, Operations Manager **Frances Sorrow** told the union that the IRS had taken away her power to negotiate locally.

This is the true meaning of the Agency's attack on the IRS/NTEU National Agreement. Despite a critical need to confront the issues raised by a transition to ASFR phones, the Agency has instead made fighting the union its primary mission. That policy of neglect is being felt today in many areas, but nowhere more than among CSCO's employees, who are reeling from the growing pains of new phone responsibilities, but dependent upon inexperienced leadership for guid-

ance.

Chapter 247 does have the experience—from years of dealing with phone environments—to help management in the transition to phones, but CSCO management apparently prefers to ignore the damage created by its lack of phone savvy. And it does not want to hear any bad news—not from its employees, nor the employees' legal representative, NTEU. Apparently seeking to keep a lid on its more embarrassing actions, management has notified Chapter 247 that it is no longer welcome at team meetings. NTEU will fight that silly, petty strategy as well.

"Chapter 247 worked...with CSCO management to nail down a local ASPECT phone agreement. When negotiations were nearly completed, [the] Operations Manager...told the union that the IRS had taken away her power to negotiate locally."

Employees are reminded that if they see wrong-headed or unethical policies—or contractual violations—it's their right to notify their union stewards; that way, NTEU can address the situation before the operation travels too far down the path of no return. Chapter 247 has already put forward proposals that would institute consistent telephone procedures, protect employees from unwarranted pressure, and yet enable management to achieve its business goals.

It is, of course, the union's responsibility to shine the light on bad behavior by management, but that is only a means to an end. NTEU's major purpose is to tackle the tough issues so that employees will be freed to do their jobs professionally and without harassment. At the present time, CSCO management is embracing the worst of the ASPECT phone system, while wreaking havoc on employee morale. CSCO needs to take its negotiations with NTEU off hold, and return to the bargaining table. It has proven that it cannot do the job by itself.

EXAM



THE LAST FALLING DOMINO?

If one operation were to be labeled the last place on Earth that phones would rule, Exam would be that operation. Now, as part of a questionable, faddish initiative, non-telephone Compliance areas nationwide are placing a new emphasis on diverting Tax Examiners from resolving cases to answering taxpayer calls. As operations fall like dominos into the Phone Land camp, the question remains, "Is answering taxpayer calls the same thing as answering taxpayer questions?"

As phone mania takes hold in Collections (see the story on page 5), Exam's priorities are changing as well. This year, the way calls are routed to Tax Examiners working in Exam has been drastically altered. The program was rolled out with little direction to employees, and without a negotiated Memorandum of Agreement to govern how telephone calls are handled. As a result, TEs who take calls are subject to an ever-changing phone schedule. Calls are routed through the national Joint Operations Center (JOC) in Atlanta. (If you want to see how many calls Austin Exam is scheduled to handle on a certain day, you can visit the JOC website at www.joc.enterprise.gov.)

On any given day, a TE could be

signed on to the ASPECT phone system on 1) the paper line; 2) the toll free line; or 3) the extension routing line. Each one of those lines has a different ASPECT number. If one is a bilingual employee, there are additional ASPECT numbers to contend with. At any moment, a TE could be directed to sign on to one of these three phone lines. This is in addition to keeping up with assigned inventory, checking for messages from taxpayers, and returning taxpayer calls. There is little routine or consistency to the day. It's no wonder that some employees are suffering from a ringing in their ears.

By the time the ACS and Toll Free operations began taking nationwide calls routed by JOC, a negotiated agreement was in place. This pact is referred to as the Customer Service Operations Center agreement (CSOC). NTEU bargained with the Agency before the telephone routing system changed, not after. Why did the IRS neglect to negotiate a similar agreement regarding Exam employees? Perhaps it's part of the Agency's nationwide initiative to cut the union out of implementing changes in working conditions by any means available.

Chapter 247 was among those who elevated the Exam phone issues to national NTEU. The union subsequently filed a grievance at the national level to get an agreement for Exam. Like a number of critical issues currently affecting employees, resolution has been obstructed by management posturing.

The CSOC agreement offers advantages to ACS and Accounts Management employees. For example, CSOC says, "The parties agree that there is value in providing sufficient read time and meeting time for all Customer Service employees...to keep current with new technical and procedural information necessary for quality cus-

tomers service and employee satisfaction." This means that each week a team meeting is scheduled, and 60 minutes a week is given to employees to read and keep updated on new changes. If one feels more time is needed, additional time can be scheduled with the manager. Wouldn't this be of value to Exam employees who are faced with new job requirements?

In addition, CSOC defines six different Reason Codes for use on the ASPECT system. These codes were negotiated to address employee needs as well as Agency interests. Shouldn't these codes be available to Exam employees? It is frustrating when managers give employees the third degree over the use of their time. These codes would help limit the inquisition.

"Is answering taxpayer calls the same thing as answering taxpayer questions?"

CSOC allows time to take a "stress break" for ACS and Toll Free employees, but not Exam. Don't Exam employees receive stressful calls from taxpayers, too?

Chapter 247 has copies of the CSOC agreement in the union office for employees interested in discovering what can be achieved through bargaining between management and NTEU.

If management continues to implement half-baked ideas without union and employee input, quality could be the next falling domino.



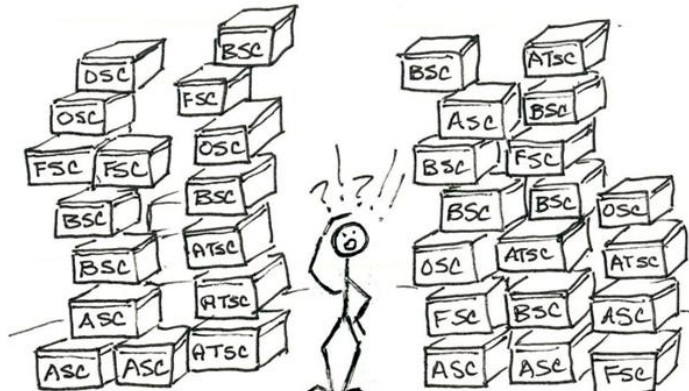
"THANKS A LOT!"

by Dobi Early

**AUSTIN AM
#1 SITE**



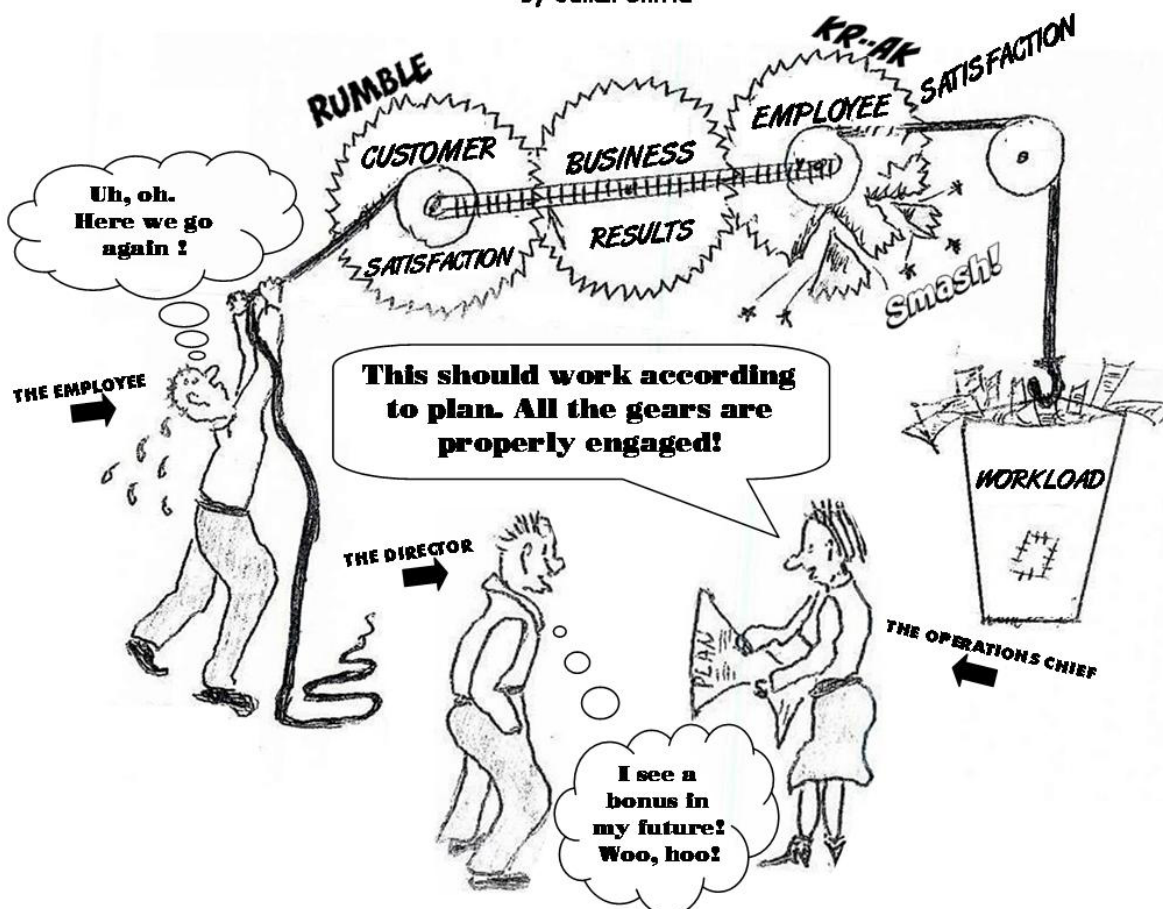
FAKE PRIZE



REAL PRIZE

"Ghosts In The Machine"

by Julian Chitta



NTEU FILES NATIONAL GRIEVANCE ON BEHALF OF DEAF & HARD OF HEARING EMPLOYEES

In the last issue of *The Voice*, we reported how Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees who had instructed classes on sensitivity toward the Deaf and Hard of Hearing were put off for two years before they could receive a required debriefing. Why? Because management failed to provide interpreters for the meeting.

Was the irony of this additional lapse of sensitivity to Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees appreciated by management? Was the blunder an unthinking oversight, or a deliberate smack down by management, who perhaps resented having to fulfill the requirements of a settlement forced upon it by its past disinterest? Unfortunately, the lack of management follow through was not an isolated affront, but an attitude that Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees and NTEU have had to fight over and over again.

The problem is not just a local one. Management has not been supplying the proper support to its Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees nationwide. NTEU members have complained that they are often pro-

vided with unskilled interpreters—or no interpreters at all—when they attend meetings. Based on national inquiries, NTEU has determined that management has often not engaged qualified interpreters, or made them available to employees for such basic topics as discussions of work procedures; policies or assignments; safety talks; or for meetings when Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees—like other employees—face the chance that disciplinary action might result.

As Chapter 247 has previously reported, the IRS has made it difficult for employees to receive approval on Reasonable Accommodation requests, while other federal agencies provide better equipment routinely, without forcing employees to beg for months and years for basic work tools.

NTEU has already fought and won an arbitration case on these matters at the Andover Service Center. However, despite a clear decision in favor of the employees, management is still not providing the interpreters the employees need to fully participate in meetings, and is still

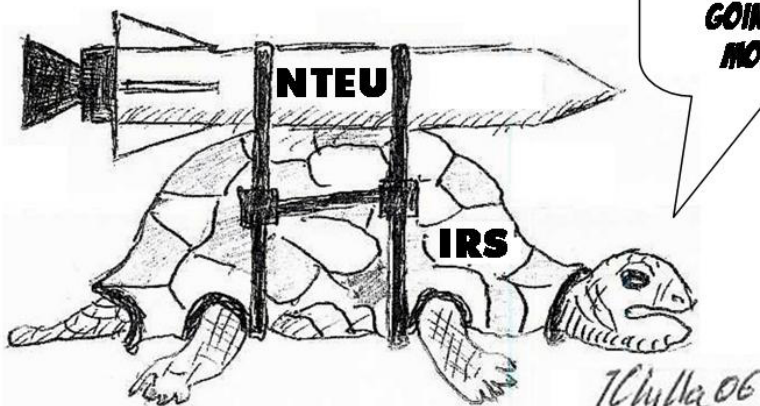
not informing employees of their rights to Reasonable Accommodations.

NTEU is now hoping to settle the matter *once and for all*. As the result of repeated violations of employee rights documented by Chapter 247 and other chapters across the country, NTEU has filed a *national grievance* demanding that the Agency provide certified or otherwise qualified interpreters to our Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees on a reasonable basis, and insisting that the IRS immediately comply with all regulatory requirements for informing these employees of their right to Reasonable Accommodations.

The union is pressing management to follow the law and provide qualified interpreters for all meetings or conversations during the workday, or whenever Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees need the assistance. NTEU and Chapter 247 will continue to fight for the rights and dignity of all employees. We will not allow management to shirk not only its duties, but the basic tenets of common decency.

"MODERNIZATION"

by Julian Chitta



IF WE'RE EVER GOING TO CATCH UP WITH THE 21ST CENTURY, WE'RE GOING TO NEED MORE JUICE!

YOU AIN'T TALKING CARROT JUICE, DOC! GOT NTEU?



SHARKS ON A PLAN

PLAN B: IS THE IRS' HORRIFIC PLOT FROM EARTH OR FROM OUTER SPACE?
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



The original Bad Idea: Plan 9 From Outer Space. The horror...the horror.

One of the first benefits to be deep-sixed is health insurance for new hire seasonal employees. Federal workers are guaranteed health benefits after five months on the job, but NTEU negotiated four months. Management contends that NTEU's position is defunct. A short season means no health insurance. This scheme is more likely to affect Submission Processing employees than Chapter 247's seasonals, who traditionally work longer, but it's a perfect illustration of the gusto with which management seeks to cut back union gains.

The hardball strategy includes the elimination of negotiations at the Campus/Site level. The Agency is currently refusing to bargain with chapters over local changes, but that policy is already backfiring on management. The need to *get things done* has led to IRS proposals to negotiate over *some* issues, but not others. The Agency Bosses want to manipulate the system to get what they want, but they shy away from their responsibilities to employees and to sensible, efficient management.

The truth is, federal law protects virtually all of the benefits and working conditions contained in the National Agreement, and IRS Poohbahs are

all bluff.

The timing of management's latest assault just happened to coincide with the Administration's smack down in the U.S. Court of Appeals by a coalition of unions led by NTEU. A unanimous panel of federal judges blasted the government's plan to cutback on employees' union rights in the workplace as "bizarre," proclaiming that the scheme "defies common sense." The feds wisely chose to avoid further humiliation by appealing its disappearing arguments to the Supreme Court.

The court case was aimed at the Department of Homeland Security, many of whose employees are represented by NTEU. Next in line on the government's hit list was the Department of Defense, and finally, all federal agencies, including the IRS.

Thus ends the greatest threat to the rights of federal workers waged in the past 75 years. The current hissy fit by the Agency—its Plan B—is a desperate reaction to their weakened position.

To paraphrase Samuel L. Jackson in the much publicized action flick, **Snakes On A Plane**: That's it, employees have *had it* with these #%*\$ sharks and their #%*\$ plans!

TOP TEN WAYS To *NOT* BE MADE A MANAGER

*How do you rise as an IRS employee? If you follow these time-tested methods, you could become an effective manager somewhere else...but you are iron clad, 100% guaranteed **not** to be made a manager at the IRS.*



10. Know the rules of the game before you start to play.

9. Back your employees—they will respect you for it, and they will work harder for you.

8. Embrace the strengths of each employee when building your team.

7. **Never** deny leave, unless it is absolutely crucial that the employee be present.

6. Show appreciation for a job well done.

5. Treat employees like the intelligent beings that they are—do not talk down to anyone.

4. Always tell the truth—it is impossible to be an effective manager if you are perceived to be a liar!

3. Smile often—a non-smiling mug is a real downer for morale.

2. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. (You *have* heard this one before, right?)

And the Number 1 way to **not** be made a manager at the IRS:

1. Become a good motivator—a big stick is **not** a good motivator.

Turning The Screws

IS ACCOUNTS MANAGEMENT VIOLATING THE LAW BY LEANING ON EMPLOYEES?

Is management repeatedly breaking Federal law? After numerous reports of violations from employees this filing season, Chapter 247 did what it has done for the past few filing seasons. The union distributed a survey to Accounts Management employees to determine whether management was again ignoring RRA '98, the federal law that bans numerical quotas on IRS employees. According to respondents, managers have been pressuring employees to close a certain number of cases an hour.

Although employees have been off of production for eight years, the Congressional directives of RRA '98 seem to stick in management's craw more with each passing year. During the 2006 filing season, Charles Washington's managers have dared to cross the line again. In the timorous fashion of their AM leadership, however, they make their move whenever they believe that Chapter 247 is not listening—during impromptu “standup” meetings where managers fail to notify the union as required by the contract, or during one on one conversations with employees which can be denied later.

Employees responding to NTEU's survey were given the option of identifying their managers. Since we fervently believe that one should hate the sin, not the sinner, Chapter 247 has decided to mask the most egregious offenders by assigning fictitious names to the accused.

For example, employees peg “Elena Gualtier” and “Clarence Oxford” to be among the firstline managers who explicitly ask CSRs to close a specific number of cases: “2.4 cases an hour,” “2.5 cases an hour,” “double digits,”

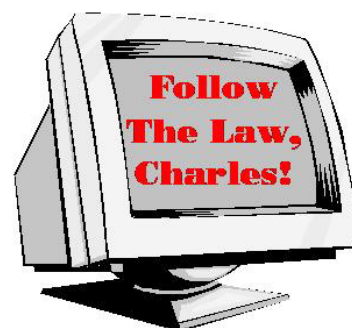
and “20 cases a day.” An employee reports that Mr. Oxford has “light-heartedly, but none the less repeatedly, stressed to our unit that the expected closure rate is 2.5 cases an hour. He has also mentioned while walking through our unit that he is ‘not allowed’ to remind us that we should be closing 20 cases per day.”

Mr. Oxford is right about that point, since NTEU's position is that federal law does not allow him to *even imply* a required number of cases. This employee reports further that the manager has “kept new hires on 100% review after they have met the accuracy percentage because he does not think they have worked enough cases to be taken off review.”

“Since...one should hate the sin, not the sinner, Chapter 247 has decided to mask the most egregious offenders by assigning fictitious names to the accused.”

Another manager—we'll call her Mabel Cagney—approached an employee on several occasions and told him that he “did not produce the same level as my team members. The word ‘closure’ was not used; ‘productivity’ was used instead...No mention was made of what I needed to do to improve, or what plan was needed to get me up to my fellow team mates’ productivity levels.”

Some managers have punished employees by denying them the right to work overtime, or credit or comp hours, if they were not clos-



ing what the manager determined to be enough cases. One Adjustments manager—“Beatrix Harmon”—required 10 to 15 closures a day from employees as an overtime quota, while a NTEU survey respondent reports that a co-worker in Toll Free was not allowed credit or comp hours if they were not closing 4 cases an hour. (That manager remains unnamed.)

Even more disturbing are accounts that upper management is now requiring firstline managers to report employees who are not closing the magic number of cases to the Department Manager as part of a “snitch list.” As one employee explains, “Employees who are not closing 10-15 cases a day are put on this list which is sent to the DM (concealed for our purposes as “Stavros Ramon”). He then uses CIS (Correspondence Imaging System) to monitor the time a CSR uses from one case to the next. If he thinks too much time has elapsed between closures, he calls the team manager, who then approaches the CSR, asking ‘Do you need help?’ ‘Is something wrong?’ etc.”

Only “low” producers are placed on this snitch list. Employees naturally infer that they are being monitored, as well as threatened,

(Continued on page 12)



CUT and RUN

Where In The World Is Charles Washington? And Does It Matter?

Has anyone seen Austin Accounts Management Director **Charles Washington** lately?

Some might have noticed him tentatively loitering about at Toll

Free's half-hearted "Employee Appreciation" celebration, but few if any observed him—what's the word?—**engaging** with employees at that event. If management had enlisted a cardboard cutout of Charles, it might have interacted more with the troops—and it might have been more responsive to employee morale.

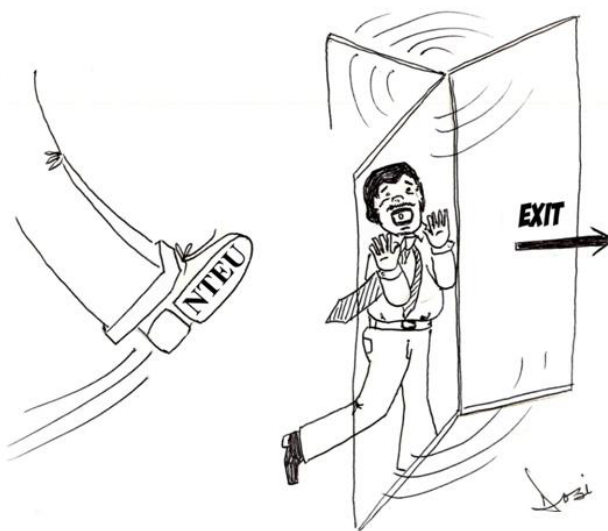
This year, the top dogs of Toll Free and Adjustments defiantly celebrated the end of the filing season without the participation of NTEU. Symbolism was rampant, including the puny balloons employed by management to compensate for the splendid ones supplied compliments of Chapter 247 in the past. The previous season, Op 1's **Della Thomas** joined with Chapter President **Eddie Walker** to address employees on the end of a spectacular season. That style of cooperation was not in fashion this year—although once again, Toll Free's management put a little more effort into their observation than their rivals in Adjustments.

For several years, the union has pushed for the inclusion of the Texas Workforce Commission at furlough briefings, and employees have appreciated the valuable information provided by TWC. Toll Free added TWC to their presentations this year, but unsurprisingly, Adjustments didn't—even after Charles' Adjustments Deputy, Acting Op 2 Manager, **Dago Gonzalez**, implied that it would do so in an E-mail to NTEU. (After being upstaged by Toll Free, Deputy Dago later said that Adjustments would bring in TWC sometime before the beginning of the furlough.)

The message management was sending Chapter 247 was: "Accounts Management doesn't need NTEU"—but of course, that was untrue. AM needs the union now, more than ever.

Accounts Management's recruitment goals are sagging, and one can't help but consider the brutal treatment of new hires (see past issues of *The Voice*) as a contributor to the attrition level. Even veterans with exemplary records are being slammed with written reprimands for missed assessments based on new standards being applied to past cases. (At other sites, oral counseling is practiced.) Employee after employee are applying for jobs in other areas in an effort to escape the rule of the AM Director. Charles himself admitted to the Chapter 247 President that recruitment by the Compliance operations was "wiping us out."

Management has named January 3 as the official date for



"Chapter 247 will be hosting its own 'Goodbye to Charles' event, so keep your eyes and ears open for details."

Charles' retirement, and if he will be missed by any non-bargaining employee, Chapter 247 has yet to meet that soul. (NTEU will be hosting its own "Goodbye to Charles" event, so keep your eyes and ears open for details.)

Throughout his reign as AM Director, Charles has stood steadfast in his policy of "Scorched Earth." His unilateral efforts to break Chapter 247's local AWS Agreement and squeeze employees into later start times worked for a while—until the union won an arbitration decision over the action and forced Charles to reverse himself. Despite that failure, Charles has repeatedly looked for ways to restrict tours of duty for employees, including forcing returning seasonals into 10:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. TODs. That policy has been relaxed following persistent counterattacks from NTEU. Charles' imposition of "leave denial days"—nixing 100% of leave requests on selected days rather than go to the effort of approving some leave and denying other leave in accordance with the national Customer Service Operations Center (CSOC) Agreement—reflects apparent laziness on the part of management, as well as cruelty.

There was also the "FEMA-Gate" fiasco, where Charles' team blackballed Austin AM employees from participating in the FEMA disaster recovery efforts, then—under pressure from NTEU—went to a great deal of effort to act

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CUT and RUN

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as if it were truly allowing its employees to volunteer. It took Chapter 247's pursuit of the FEMA application forms through the Freedom Of Information Act to get to the truth of the matter—that Charles' managers had denied the release of all its employees who wanted to help FEMA. (Management refused to return the applications to the volunteers after marking them disapproved.)

During his tenure in Austin, Charles passed up *every opportunity* to work with NTEU for the benefit of employees. He has shot down many of the mitigating factors that make stressful workplaces bearable, even enjoyable. Peak overtime, Black History Month, the IRS Gospel Choir, have all suffered a battering from the Director's employee-unfriendly bent.

"Suppose you go to war, you cannot fight always; and when after much loss on both sides, and no gain on either, you cease fighting, the identical old questions...are again upon you..." - Abraham Lincoln, First Inaugural Address

The glory days are over for the Big Man now. To Chapter 247, the great war horse's bearing appears unsure, on those rare occasions when he is sighted walking among the "little people" whose lives he has touched in so many thoughtless ways. Where past Directors were expected to address their troops from time to time, Charles has been AWOL at many big events; of course, speaking to employees might require that he share the stage with—and be upstaged by—Chapter 247.

NTEU's leadership has been a problem for Charles during his tenure here. Chapter 247 has not rolled over for the extreme transformation of the workplace that the Director has tried to impose. One of Charles' former underlings used to pronounce that AM employees needed to accept change in "the culture."

Well, the employees are willing to accept change in the culture...if that change is a new Director, one who will truly appreciate the contribution that only the employees can make.

OK, FIRST THINGS FIRST...WHAT IS THE EXIT STRATEGY?



Accounts Management Leadership: Time To Cut And Run?

Turning The Screws

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because they have not closed enough cases. One manager—"Breanna Alden"—advised her employee that it "doesn't look good [for employees] to have gaps in their work," by closing several cases in the morning and then only a few in the afternoon. Manager "Dalton Rottenberg" told his employee that there was "something new on their computers and [management] could now tell how many cases were being closed per hour." He asked her why she had closed so few cases so far that day.

This practice has already exacted a price from Accounts Management in terms of employee morale. One valuable long time employee was so outraged at being subjected to this practice that he resigned from the Service. His wealth of experience and knowledge—as well as his contributions as a reviewer and OJI—has now been lost to Adjustments. Ironically, he was one of the top closers.

Each case is different, so it is absurd to think that employees can work at the same rate of speed all day. A scramble, or a case involving multiple years, takes longer than adding a W-2 to a taxpayer's account. Even a W-2 case can become complicated if the document reveals a discrepancy. The case may be a mixed period or a mixed entity. Further, CSRs who are instructed to justify their overtime hours by closing "easy cases" will not be able to match the same rate during their regular TOD when it becomes necessary to tackle more difficult cases.

When Congress passed RRA '98, they were trying to rein in a system that rewarded IRS employees for collecting more money—or for closing more cases—at the expense of taxpayer rights. They expressly enacted this federal law so that management could not evaluate employees based on the amount of taxes they collected or the numbers of cases they closed. Even the *implication* that an employee had to close some set number of cases is illegal under this federal law. Although managers may use code words like "time management" and "efficiency," employees are fully aware that they are talking production.

When employees are pressured to "ABC—Always Be Closing"—quality declines. Mistakes are more likely to happen, and taxpayers are more likely to suffer. If CSRs err, speed will not guarantee them any brownie points on their evaluations. New hires feel the pressure to produce, but that can result in termination if they don't calibrate the balance just right.

Employees are proud of their work ethic and the quality product produced in Accounts Management, despite undue and unethical pressures. Employees do *not* want management telling them that they are taking too long researching cases, when time is needed to do a quality job. Veterans and new hires alike should request that any demands by managers for specific numbers of closures be put in writing—then visit the union office.

LR: The Shadow Management?

Who Are The Mysterious Enablers Of Management's Worst Instincts?

Labor Relations: Is it a knowledgeable and useful resource for management—or an employee-unfriendly, union-busting waste of taxpayer dollars? NTEU Chapter 247 has a definite opinion on that question.

Once upon a time, firstline managers made their own decisions, based on their knowledge of their employees and the totality of the circumstances. They had a reasonable amount of individual autonomy and—if discipline was called for, or if an employee needed special consideration to deal with a hardship of some kind—the manager could actually make a decision. LR's role was that of an advisor to management.

To NTEU, the influence of LR in any area depends on two factors: 1) the level of enthusiasm that that LR area office has for creating chaos; and 2) the willingness of management to use LR as a tool for terrorizing employees and undermining union rights. From Chapter 247's vantage point, the local operations that most allow LR to dominate the workplace are Charles Washington's Accounts Management (no surprise there) and Collections, which has lately become a haphazard yet hostile place to work.

"No, no!" said the Queen. "Sentence first—verdict afterwards." - Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures In Wonderland

LR is heartily welcomed into the workplace by bad managers, but its destructive influence has to be imposed on good managers from the top. Time and time again, LR seeks to usurp the power of firstline managers. It sits in on grievance meetings at all levels, and it writes the decisions that management issues. Grievance responses have become cookie cutter exercises, constructed by a team of unfunny comedy writers headquartered in an ivory tower, free of the burden of knowing those whom they whack like penny arcade moles from above with a few, indifferent strokes on their government-issued keyboards.

Chapter 247 has filed unfair labor practice charges and institutional grievances—grievances which address disputes over union rights—to protect its ability to gather information that can exonerate employees of unfair accusations and unwarranted punishments. It has done likewise in order to compel management to provide "substantive responses" to employee grievances, rather than to ignore the issues at stake, as it has attempted to do via LR's notoriously sparse, non-responsive responses. The union has insisted on its right to present witnesses during grievance meetings, while management has attempted to limit employees from testifying.

It took Chapter 247's unyielding availing of the Freedom Of Information Act to rouse LR into handing over employees' applications for FEMA positions, which revealed the unsettling means that Charles Washington's Accounts Management team used to shut out Operations 1 and 2 employees from volunteer opportunities.

In all of these cases, LR is the tool used to obstruct the processes set out in the contract, which are the agreed-upon means for resolving disputes...reasonably. And the techniques utilized are a demonstration of the new, unkindler, ungentler IRS approach toward employees and their sole legal representative, NTEU.

LR has even been known to insert itself into the witch doctor business, determining through crystal ball or other clairvoyant methods the level of sickness that allows employees to avail themselves of sick leave or the Family and Medical Leave Act. Yes, that's LR hassling you on behalf of management and its broad, brave new vision.

***"Austin Labor Relations Chief
Tony Judd made a strategic
blunder...confessing—in front of
NTEU—to being 'part lizard.'"***

Firstline managers learn quickly these days that—between orders from Labor Relations and micromanagement from above—they have become powerless puppets. Where firstline managers used to take LR's advice into consideration before making up their own minds, they now concede to NTEU that they would have taken a different action if left to their own devices, but they have been instructed by LR to do things the hard way. E-mails have even changed in a matter of a few hours from reasonable and friendly, to unilateral and demanding, because the manager was told by LR that the language was not "tough" enough.

Discipline is supposed to be necessary and corrective, not pointless and punitive. It is supposed to be graduated, starting out milder to give employees the chance to correct their behavior, and only progressing to harsher measures if the action does not fix the problem. That is why it is so important to have personal knowledge of the employees involved, so that discipline is effective.

During a gathering of several NTEU Chapter Presidents with the Austin Campus Directors in a stifling conference room, Austin Labor Relations Chief **Tony Judd** made a strategic blunder when she claimed that the temperature didn't bother her, confessing—in front of NTEU—to being "part lizard." To NTEU, which considers LR's behavior to be slippery and beastly, as well as cold-blooded, it will be a long time before that slithery image is forgotten.

If the IRS ever changed its priorities from expanding the coffers of private collection agencies to cutting government deadwood, it would start with the Labor Relations force. LR is a bureaucracy in desperate need of being slashed. In fact, LR is a lizard just hissing for some bean-counting hot shot to chop off its head.

"THINGS HAVE CHANGED"

Eddie Walker Chapter 247 President

"We are very sensitive to political perceptions," IRS Commissioner **Mark Everson** candidly told *The New York Times*, after an audacious E-mail demonstrating as much made the rounds of Compliance managers and their employees.

The E-mail was sent by Beth Tucker, Director of Communications, Liaison and Disclosure, SB/SE, to Jim Grimes, Director of W&I Compliance:

"Jim, we just spoke with Commissioner on the enforcement issue in the gulf...he prefers that we do not resume any enforcement action until after December 31st **due to upcoming elections**, holiday season, etc."

Apparently, IRS Honchos were not concerned that the Agency would be accused of being politicized in this very political season, because this E-mail traveled—uncensored—from Beth Tucker to Jim Grimes, to Compliance Directors, to Operations Managers and analysts, to Department Chiefs, all the way down to first-line managers and their employees. No government cover up here.

In fact, when the E-mail was published October 27 on the front page of *The New York Times* website, under the headline, "IRS Going Slow Before Election," the Commish owned up to the ethical lapse...or the political gaffe...or the "every day" occurrence, as Mr. Everson categorized it. The Commissioner admitted that he had "probably" mentioned the elections to Ms. Tucker during a conference call with senior IRS staff members.

Okay, using the word "probably" appears to be hedging a bit, but the Commish was remarkably straight-forward concerning the suggestion that he might be politicizing the Agency. Commissioner Everson took the position that postponing collections efforts was—in the words of *The Times*—"a routine effort to avoid casting the Internal Revenue Service in a bad light."

"We talk about the elections here every day," Mr. Everson said. "We deal with the Congress—is there going to be a new Finance Committee chairman, a new Ways and Means Committee chairman...Of course, we think about whether our actions will play in the public space..."

According to *The Times*, a bipartisan group of

four ex-Commissioners had a different view of the Agency's actions. "Never, never, never...Oh my God, that is unthinkable," former IRS Commissioner Jerome Kurtz told the paper when asked if he would have delayed collections efforts on account of election concerns. Ex-Commish Donald Alexander responded that "he would never have even thought about delaying enforcement because of an election," and former Commissioner Sheldon Cohen "said it was wrong to delay any broad-based enforcement actions because of a pending election."

IRS employees who recall **Charles Rossotti**, Mr. Everson's immediate predecessor, might not be surprised to learn that his response to the news was, "That's not appropriate...given the culture of the Treasury and the I.R.S., I just can't imagine anyone would even bring anything like that up."

Cynics might be reminded of the police chief in *Casablanca* who shuts down Humphrey Bogart's café with the announcement, "I'm shocked, shocked to find that gambling is going on here!" right before he is presented with his nightly winnings from roulette. But things *have* changed. The bar is being lowered here, if Watergate-age assumptions toward the interconnectedness of politics and tax collection are accepted so lackadaisically in the current era by the folks at the top.

The Commissioner's concession that politics are a factor in the decisions made by the Agency likely diluted this news story, because Mr. Everson candidly asserted that this confession was not news. His stance is refreshing for a government official, but wrong.

The Times described the Commissioner as having "close ties to the White House," and Mr. Everson's assaults on the union—and his mad rush to outsource collection functions—underscores that here is a man with an agenda.

Who bases their vote on the policies of the Commissioner of the IRS? Sadly, Mr. Everson's admissions in *The New York Times*—and his approach to managing the Agency—help to erase the line between electoral politics and professionalism in government.

Yes, *things have changed*.

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
Sal Macias (Swing)
X1058
Mike Bunton (Nights)
X5732



STEWARDS

VALERIE BROOKS X0400
MONICA CAHILL X5435
ROBIN CHERRY X1559
DAVE DAVIS X0253
SUE DEVANEY X1106
ARLENE FLORES X5466
TONYA JONES X0892
WILLIE HINES X0390
JUDY LACOUR X0430
MARLA MCADAMS X0873
LADAN MAKKOUK X1549
BLAS MARTINEZ X5370
ELI OLIVERA X1194
CHARLIE RODRIGUEZ X5327
ALIA SHOEMAKE X0839
MELVIN TEALER X0217
ABRAHAM TORRES X1128
GLENDA TORRES X0377
DELMA VIANA X1996
VINH WAUGH X0692
JANICE WOODS X0391
RAMONA WRIGHT X0991