

UNION SPOTLIGHT

AFT Washington, AFL-CIO

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Spring 2014

First-ever Solidarity Event



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Children selecting their books at our "Celebrating Books and Reading" Solidarity Event May 17th. See President's Column on pg. 3 for more details.

Photo by Christine Landon

Another successful venue for classified members

More workshops than ever were offered at this year's highly-acclaimed professional development conference on Saturday, March 17.

About 70 classified members attended a wide variety of workshops:

- Financial yoga and identity theft prevention
- Humor in the workplace
- Providing healthy nutrition for kids



- Early brain development and the effects of trauma on young brains
- Flying your 'True Colors' for true success (personality and communication styles)
- Outlook Email and Calendar Tips
- Basics of Microsoft Word

Every workshop presenter received glowing remarks in the evaluations. In fact, many attendees said that the presenters were fun, energetic, humorous, engaging, and passionate about their topics.

A big thank you to **Lee Williams** (Bates Technical College), **Kira Acker** (Renton School District), **Linda Tyler-Murray** (STARS-certified trainer on brain



development), **Janet Caldon** (Tacoma Public Schools), **George Thompson** (School Employees Credit Union (SECU)), **Nancy Kennedy**, and **Merrilee Miron** (AFT Washington staff).

We appreciate for the third year in a row, Tacoma Public Schools' **Cathy Martin** for co-sponsoring the conference, providing a continental breakfast and two of the workshops.

Once again we had fabulous door prizes. AFT Renton president **Janet Watson** solicited business donations, SECU donated an item, and TFP and AFT Renton contributed gift certificates. **Shannon Walker**, Sunrise Dental (a union company) donated a 32-inch flat screen television! Thank you all!

For more information, contact **Sylvia Watson**, Communications Coordinator, at 206-432-8084 or swatson@aftwa.org.



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Board meetings are usually held on the first Saturday of the month except for holidays and summer months. Board members are elected to two-year terms.

AFT Washington represents over 6,500 members in early childhood education, K-12, and higher education in Washington State and is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers, which represents 1.5 million members nationwide.

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Photos by Sylvia Watson unless otherwise noted.
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AFT Washington's Union Spotlight is affiliated with the International Labor Communications Association (ILCA), ALF-CIO, CTW, CLC



Karen Strickland

President's Column

Focus on solidarity a success

Summertime – a chance to slow down, soak up the sun's warmth, read a book, maybe even take a vacation. Summertime is also a chance to reflect on the work we do in education, the successes we had over the course of the year, and the challenges we faced, overcame, and learned from.

In the AFT Washington office, this time of year offers us a chance to take a breath, catch up, and get back to projects delayed to make way for more pressing demands. It is an opportunity to review our work, in particular our first-ever Solidarity Event, and plan how best to build on what we started. From Friday evening's member dinner through the book and resource fair on Saturday afternoon, the event offered a variety of opportunities for our members to connect with one another, with our labor brothers and sisters, and with the broader community.

I want to send a grand shout out to our staff - Bernal, Christine, Cris, Dorothy, Elizabeth, Jonas, Kristin, Merrilee, Nancy, Sylvia and Tracey! This event was bigger, more complicated, and less familiar than other events we host, but they pulled it off – and in my opinion, practically without flaws.

Through the efforts of our staff,

members, and community volunteers, we supported kids and families in the form of books and resources, we brought union and community members together for an evening of fun and celebration, we created a space for members to share knowledge, ideas, and strategies with one another, and we sent a powerful message of unity, strength, and action to a broad range of allies and potential allies.



Christine Landon

According to the participant evaluations, the events were fun, relevant and beneficial. Kudos to our members who showed off their talents at Labor's Got Talent: Janet Morgan, her husband James, and their back-up singers from the Tacoma Federation of ParaEducators Local 461; and David Hatch from AFT Renton Classified Local 6367. We all sang along with Janet and friends, and David had us in stitches with his song about the woes of being a school bus driver.

In addition to our regular, ongoing work, this event shows us what we are capable of.

Now we have the task of determining our next steps to build on what we started. For example, how can we move Labor's prosperity agenda which

we share with organizations like Casa Latina and El Centro de la Raza? How do we ally with organizations like the Public Health Department to strengthen our communities? The event reinforced our partnership with the WFSE Local 304, which represents staff in the Seattle, Green River, and Shoreline Community Colleges and who supported our event, and with the Washington Bus, a partner on campus voter registration efforts. We will also be a stronger and more effective organization by building on the member events. Feedback was terrific – members valued learning from one another on topics like social justice, building an inclusive union, online education, and effective bargaining strategies. Given how personal relationships are essential to getting things done, creating this opportunity strengthens us at the local and the state levels.

cont'd on page 7

By the Numbers

- 77 guests and members** attended our member dinner
- 12 AFT locals** were represented
- 10 unions** represented in Labor's Got Talent
- \$580 raised** for our education scholarship fund
- 18 community organizations** participated in the Resource Fair
- 49 volunteers** helped at the book and resource fair
- 463 books** given away
- 18 organizations, unions, individuals, and companies** contributed money to the event

Is it summer yet?

by Bernal Baca, Lobbyist

It seems like just yesterday that I was in the rain going from hearing to hearing, legislator to legislator at the State Capitol. Now, the climate is beginning to get warmer and sunnier and the political climate is beginning to gear up for primary and general elections.

This is a good time to reflect on Olympia and the State Legislature and ask “how did the rascals do?”

They will tell you that they stabilized the budget and gave more money to education, put a freeze on tuition, and take credit for the passage of the state’s Dream Act. “Closing tax loop holes” became the mantra of the day; taxes of any kind are always out of the question! But when you look closer, it will be revealed that much of the budget

was still balanced on the backs of State employees.

There was one thing every legislator could agree on in Olympia and that was ending the session on time. Yes, getting out of Olympia as fast as possible only to get back to their districts to begin asking for campaign money for all the wonderful things that were accomplished in Olympia. Let the campaign kickoff begin!

One aspect of AFT Washington’s legislative program is conducting “Legislative Education Groups (LEGs).” These meetings are set up to introduce our members to their respective representatives in their District to talk about our issues and essentially “educate” the legislator about our concerns and our values. Sometimes these meetings

are held at larger venues, such as a college, but more often than not, they are small, intimate meetings at a coffee shop or a member’s home. These private conversations are designed to have an honest, open dialogue with the legislator.

In a recent LEGs meeting with Speaker of the House **Frank Chopp** (D-43), AFT Seattle Local 1789 Co-President **Tracy Lai** said, “I was amazed how candid the Speaker was, he just spoke his mind; candid and honest.”

Our goal is to have more meetings before the school year ends and in the Fall. If you are interested in meeting with your representative at a LEGs meeting, call **Bernal Baca** at 206-432-8086, or e-mail him at bbaca@aftwa.org. Have a great summer!

Go Green



If you’d like to save paper and conserve resources, get the “Union Spotlight” electronically by contacting Christine Landon, 206-432-8075 or clandon@aftwa.org.

Student Debt? There’s Help!

If you or someone you know have federal student loan debt and are having trouble affording the payments, there are programs available to help you. There are several programs and they can (and should!) be used in combination.

The first and most important program to know is **Public Service Loan Forgiveness** which forgives the remaining balance on federal direct loans after 120 on-time repayments, which typically takes 10 years. Nearly all AFT members qualify for this program – educators from early childhood through higher education, healthcare workers including nurses, and anyone working for local, state, or federal government bodies. All it takes is a short form [<https://studentaid.ed.gov/sites/default/>

[files/public-service-employment-certification-form.pdf](#)] to verify your employment. Payment you’ve made since 2007 will even count towards the 120-payment threshold – you could already be halfway there.

There are other student loan programs to reduce monthly payments [<https://studentaid.ed.gov/repay-loans/understand/plans/income-based>] and loan forgiveness (<https://www.studentaid.ed.gov/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/charts#perkins-loan-cancellation>).

If you have questions about your options, you can contact **Mike Pierce** at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (Michael.pierce@cfpb.gov) or **Nicole Hochsprung** at AFT (nhochsprung@aft.org)

Board recognizes members, community



Above: The Equity in Education Coalition and the Racial Equity Team, recipients of the Cesar E. Chavez Award for their activism in communities of color to advance equity issues in education and in state policy.

Below: AFT Renton Classified Local 6367 received AFT Washington's "We Are One" award for their community work with the Salvation Army's "Community Supper" program for homeless people.



Photos by Christine Landon

Not pictured: AFT Kent Classified Local 6344's members Eduardo Alcaide Alvarado and Andromeda Aguirre de Alcaide received the Cesar Chavez Human Rights Award for their work to ensure that access to school district benefits is not limited by language barriers and includes bilingual translation.

Strong locals, leaders lay framework for Reclaiming the Promise

by Dorothy Gibson, Organizing Director

The strength of our union is in membership. And the most effective local unions have leaders and members who are knowledgeable and experienced about building strong locals, bargaining and defending strong contracts, and organizing new members around their issues.

AFT's Northwest Leadership Forum is one of the most effective events we have designed to help develop and support members and leaders. From **July 31 - August 3** in Vancouver, Washington, AFT members from around our region will come together to have training on a variety of important topics.

These regional skills-based trainings are short courses on everything from Union 101 to Helping Ensure our Unions are Inclusive; hour-long semi-

nars on Just Cause, a workshop on understanding the situation surrounding the well-funded attacks on unions, and a primer on assessing your leadership skills.

There are longer two-and-a-half day classes intended to help members and leaders learn to effectively strengthen and defend contracts, plan a contract campaign to build power and member engagement to support negotiations, and learn the tools and tips for effective communications, and more.

So mark these dates on your calendar and talk with your local leadership about registering to come. If a team from your local can attend a course together, you'll be able to take a plan home to implement with your newfound knowledge and the ongoing support of AFT Washington staff.

Knowledge is power, and the confidence that comes from knowing what you are doing in potentially tough situations is an important tool in our collective tool boxes as union leaders. Connecting with other AFT members from around this region deepens our ties to the broader labor movement. All of these aspects of the Northwest Leadership Forum make this an experience you will want to be a part of. Come experience the forum!

Since there is a registration fee and hotel costs, please check with your local leadership to see if your local will cover your attendance. **You can register on line at <https://leadernet.aft.org/webform/2014-aft-northwest-leadership-forum>.** Registration and hotel reservations are **due July 17th.**

For more information, please contact **Dorothy Gibson** (dgibson@aftwa.org; 206-432-8082).



Introducing Labor's Voice!

by Kristin Elia, Political Organizer

The legislative session is behind us and it's time to gear up for this year's election cycle! Over the years, AFT Washington has consistently and relentlessly worked with our elected representatives and key policymakers to ensure that our voices are being heard in Olympia and in legislative districts across the state. We've fought for what's right. We've advocated for fully funding our education system from early learning through higher education, protecting our health benefits, respecting working families, and securing compensation options for our members.

And we've done so in the face of many obstacles – most notably the takeover of the State Senate by the Majority Coalition Caucus. In December 2012, two Democrats joined the Republican Caucus to take control of the Senate and began to block progress on issues our union cares deeply about. We saw good labor bills never get a vote. We saw bad bills come forward that threatened justice, fairness, and investments in our future.

But it doesn't have to be that way. It's through your efforts to call, write, testify, and meet with legislators that we've been able to defend against bad policies in Olympia, move the needle on issues we care about most, and build solidarity among our members and partners.

Elections are our opportunity to make sure that we hold legislators accountable. Our collective voice will elect those who are going to be champions for the values that will help shape a

state Legislature that invests in strong communities, builds a strong working-class economy, and creates a better future for Washington. This year that effort will come in the form of a newly developed political action program called "**Labor's Voice.**"

In previous years, the Washington State Labor Council and its affiliates, including AFT Washington, have focused on a Labor Neighbor program that allowed all of us to communicate with union members across the state about endorsed labor champions.

This year, through Labor's Voice, we'll be able to communicate not only with our union members, but with general public voters as well. This maximizes our efforts and helps educate an even larger audience on why our endorsed candidates are the best choice when it comes to supporting working families, funding education, and building strong communities.

You are key to our success. To make sure these candidates make it to Olympia in January, we need to do more than cast our vote. We need to speak to each other and our neighbors about the best choices when it comes to championing those values in the legislative arena. We need you on the phones, at the doors, and in your locals helping to secure a government that works together with us to advance our shared priorities. We're counting on you to join us this year!

To sign up to help with the primary, please contact **Kristin Elia** at 206-432-8085 or kelia@aftwa.org.

Education Scholarships Available

The application process for the **2014-2015 AFT Washington/Schwerin Campbell Barnard Iglitzin & Lavitt Scholarships** is under way! At least two \$1,000 education scholarships are available to locals' members in good standing and their family members or dependents.

Our scholarships program began in 2006 when the principals of the Seattle-based labor law firm approached AFT Washington, asking us to partner with them to improve access to higher education and the awareness of labor rights among our members and their families. This is the ninth year of the cooperative program, with 27 students receiving scholarships thus far.

Qualified applicants must plan on attending an institution of higher education during the 2014-2015 academic year to earn a degree or credential at any level from associate to graduate.

The scholarship application must be received in the AFT Washington office **Friday, July 1, 2014**. Eligibility requirements, application guidelines, and the scholarship application form can be downloaded from our website at wa.aft.org/scholarships.

For more information, or to receive application materials via mail or email, contact **Christine Landon** at 206-432-8075 or clandon@aftwa.org.

From the President (cont'd)

This strength, solidarity, and effective action will serve us well in the upcoming elections. For six years the majority of our members have gone without a cost-of-living adjustment and many have had practically no salary increases paired with higher healthcare costs. We've gained very little in the way of legislation and have had to fight back against bad legislation, largely due to gridlock in the Senate. The good news is that the labor and progressive communities have absolute clarity on what is needed and we are gearing up to take action to do just that.

With an AFT grant we will hire field representatives (see article on pg. 6) to reach out to get members involved – everyone loves a phone bank, right? Love it or not, it must be done if we want a State Senate that functions and supports working people like you and I. Please be ready to say “YES, I can help!” when asked.

This was our first Solidarity Event; our second will be in 2016. What it looks like will depend on you! We will select a local(s) interested in hosting events that will build solidarity within AFT, the labor community, and the local community. I invite you to be open to possibilities, talk about them within your local, and then let us know if you'd like to consider your town as a location. In the meantime, we have many books to distribute to kids who need them. If you'd like to hold a local event, talk with your local president and we will support your efforts.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to all who participated in making our Solidarity Event a success – from staff, to local leaders, to member volunteers, to community organizations, to those who contributed money – thank you, thank you, thank you!

Contingent Faculty Conference Features UI and National Organizing Efforts

by Tracey Whitten, Internal Organizer

About 25 faculty attended the third annual conference for contingent faculty. For the first time, WEA contingent faculty members also joined them. It was a great way to build a connection across our unions as we deal with the same issues across the state.

The conference, planned with assistance from the Contingent Faculty Issues Committee, consisted of two half-day workshops, the first focused sharply on unemployment benefit issues, including the definition of reasonable assurance of employment.

Executive Director **Marc Lampson**

and Hearings Attorney **John Tirkpak** from the Unemployment Law Project, along with WEA Lobbyist **Wendy Rader-Konofolski**, presented the background of our state's unemployment insurance law

for contingent faculty. They offered nuts-and-bolts advice about how to file and the process for appeals. The main message: don't give up!

The staff from the Unemployment Law Project made clear that they are available for ongoing support to help members get through this process. The group came up with some ideas about ways to not only support members who are applying, but also in pressuring the college administrations not to contest a faculty member's right to unemployment.

The second half of the day was spent on organizing contingent faculty, and we learned about some strategies from other AFT locals. **Alyssa Piccard**, associate director of the AFT Higher Ed Department, shared the story of San Francisco City College Local 2121. Two years ago the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges filed a report against the college that ultimately determined they would have to close their doors. This sparked a robust organizing campaign that would go on to unite students, Local 2121, other unions, and the community at large in the fight for their college.



Many members left this year's conference feeling inspired with new tips to boost their own membership numbers and with a renewed sense of urgency around tackling the issues.

If you want to learn more about these topics or how to get more involved in our statewide Contingent Faculty Issues Committee, please contact **Tracey Whitten**, AFT Washington Internal Organizer, at 206-432-8076 or twhitten@aftwa.org.

Photo by Dorothy Gibson

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Long-time union activist will be missed

Karen Toreson, a true friend of education, lost her ongoing battle with cancer on Sunday, March 30, 2014. A graduate of Eastern Washington University (EWU), Karen worked in education for 47 years, most recently teaching Business Technology as a tenured faculty member at Shoreline Community College. She started her teaching career teaching high school Business Education in Spokane and Seattle. After getting her Masters from EWU in 1973, she began teaching at the community college level. During her career she taught at Chemeketa Community College in Salem, Oregon; Bellingham Vocational Technical Institute; Edmonds Community College; and Everett Community College.



Photo from Shoreline CCCT

During her 27 years at Shoreline, Karen was the first faculty in her area to teach an online course and was instrumental in getting the Business Technology program online.

Karen was also passionate about her union. She served in a variety of positions including local president for six years beginning in 2002 and at the state level on the AFT Washington Executive Board from 2005-2013.

Karen had a winning smile, a generous spirit, a quiet determination, and a passion for life. She will be missed.

Mark Your Calendar!

AFT NW Leadership Training Forum

July 31 - August 4, 2014

Vancouver Hilton, Vancouver, WA

Register on line at <https://leadernet.aft.org/webform/2014-aft-northwest-leadership-forum>. Registration and hotel reservations are **due July 17th**