

Classified Employees: An Often Overlooked Resource of the School Districts

By Sophie Braccini



Jim Joaquin (right) is praised by Human Resources Director Frank Acojido Photo Sophie Braccini

Jim Joaquin was hired by the Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) as a substitute custodian in 1971. Over the years, he worked his way up the ladder to a manager's position, made friends along the road and now retires with many memories and a few regrets about leaving the job and the people he loves. Joaquin is a fine example of those employees that are essential to the survival of our schools but who do not always receive the acknowledgement they deserve.

"I will miss Jim," said AUHSD Director of Human Resources Frank Acojido. "He was wonderful to work with, had a personable and positive attitude that made him a consensus builder who could reach out to all the levels of the hierarchy." Even though he became the supervisor of all the custodians in the Acalanes School district,

Jim would never hesitate to roll up his sleeves when help was needed. As the District's requests evolved, he responded by accepting different positions, such as gardener in the early days and food services lead manager later.

Chris Learned, AUHSD Assistant Superintendent, couldn't agree more, "I will miss Jim, he is a great person and was recognized by his peers as Classified Employee of the year in 1993." Learned knows the importance of well-trained maintenance personal. As the district is defining its needs in term of capital improvement, questions are being raised about the adequacy of maintenance power available in the District.

"It is true that proper maintenance is one of the factors that affect the condition of the school facilities," acknowledges Learned, "It is

critical to perform routine maintenance of all buildings systems in a timely manner. Lack of doing so would cause building systems to wear out much quicker than the normal expected life-cycle."

Some in the District are concerned that with the job suppressions that have taken place to respond to the budget crisis, the lack of maintenance of school facilities could become costly in the long term. "Classified staff receiving layoff notices ... will create a slowing down of routine maintenance," responded Learned, "but not to the point where I would feel that the taxpayers' investment is not being protected."

AUHSF Superintendent Jim Negri further addressed the issue by promising that if he can re-hire personnel when the budget is finally approved, the classified employees will be first on his list. "We haven't re-hired anybody after the May revised budget," says Negri, "we will wait for the final budget to be voted on over the summer."

The crisis over custodial services is spread all over the area's school districts. Joaquin plans on taking it easy for a while, but he knows he will have no problem finding a part time position if he wants one. "I have received calls from different schools for a part time job," he says, "they've had to lay off many employees and are scrambling to get sufficient service."