## **Just Say Thanks**

## Make sure you honor college support staff

By Tenia S. King

ith your big meeting starting in less than an hour, you stop by the school's conference room to check on the setup. However, the door's locked, and it takes 30 minutes to get the key. Then, with 15 minutes to go, you're stunned to find no chairs and

no food. You panic. But the truth is your group is partly responsible. The college support staff is fed up with the lack of respect they've been getting lately.

Student leaders may kneel to "important administrators," but rarely do they show much respect for custodians, secretaries, maintenance workers, food service providers, and other campus support personnel. Common problems involve campus leaders acting as

if they're

better than the staff, putting in requests at the last minute, and not picking up their own trash, posters, and fliers after campus events. Also, not planning ahead and needing everything "ASAP" can lead to hard feelings on the part of the college support staff. If campus leaders formed positive relationships with the staff early in the semester, the overall stress involved in programming events would be reduced considerably.

**Ways to Show Your Thanks** 

- Gifts. Certificates, mugs, T-shirts, pens, movie/concert tickets, and gift certificates
- Public Acknowledgements. Thank-you posters, award ceremonies, and staffers recognized in campus event programs
- Personal Gestures. Handwritten notes. cards, and thank-you e-mails to workers, not just management
- Awards. Plagues, letters to support-staff supervisors, and "staff member of the month" programs

## **Turn Workers Into Allies**

Simply put, the work of support staff can

us," says Rudy Gruenke, SGA president. "Without them, there would be no Elmhurst College. It gives the members of the SGA a chance to show just how appreciative we are for all that they do at the college." Six staffers were honored during the first ceremony in the Spring 2002 semester. "These are people who don't always get to be in the spotlight," Gruenke says. "They're truly heroes here for all they do. We're now taking the step to honor them appropriately."

## **Supporting the Support Staff**

At **Princeton University** in New Jersey, Undergraduate Student Government President Nina Langsam says the student body pools money to buy janitors holiday gifts and thank you gifts at the end of the year. In addition, the Ombuds office,

> campus center, and USG sponsor an "Unsung Heroes Award" and banquet. "Students submit short essays on why they think a certain staff member should receive the award,"

Langsam says.

At the University of Cincinnati, student leaders put up thank-you

posters in dorm hallways for housekeeping and maintenance workers. As a campuswide effort, students living in residence dorms sign their names on the posters. "It's great whenever you're shown appreciation and given accolades because your work is being noticed," says Justin Awls, Cincinnati's student body vice president.

**Recognition Nationwide** Each year, the National

Education Association presents the "Educational Support Personnel of the Year" award, in which the recipients earn \$10,000 and are honored at a gala dinner at the NEA annual Educational Personnel conference. "The most effective way to recognize school custodians, secretaries, food service workers, bus drivers, and others is by taking any action, large or small, that leads to increased respect for and appreciation of their daily contributions," says Melinda Anderson, NEA spokesperson. "School support personnel work behind the scenes on every college campus. They're often unheralded individuals who contribute in major ways to the lives of countless students."

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make or break campus events. "Often, when construction, clean-up, or cafeteria issues arise, many are quick to place blame on our support staff," says Ankit Patel, student body president at the University of South Carolina. "This is not to say a majority of

The Benefits of Recognition

students aren't

grateful for what they do,

university president.

but some type of recognition would be

appropriate." Patel says his cabinet has talked

about a worker/support staff appreciation day during their Unity Week events, a banquet,

and a possible "thank you" message from the

Expressing appreciation doesn't have to be complicated. At Elmhurst College in Illinois, support staff win the "Unsung Heroes Award." Recipients come to a Student Government Association meeting, and they get an official SGA "Unsung Heroes" coffee mug, a certificate, and an SGA pen. Also, their names are added to a plaque outside the SGA office, and complimentary letters are mailed to their supervisors. "The members of the SGA and the Public Relations committee take great pride in knowing that we have touched those who have touched so many of