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# → ← Connecting → ←

News from Staff Connection

Vol. 1, No. 3

August, 1990

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You are invited to an

## INTERNATIONAL POTLUCK PICNIC

sponsored by Staff Connection

**Friday, August 17 from 4:30 on  
at the Field House (near tennis courts)  
Rain or Shine**

- This is our first effort in providing what many staff have asked for—a chance to socialize with colleagues informally. Please come.
- Please bring a dish to share with others (ethnic dishes are encouraged), and your own utensils.



————— Please cut and return this part —————

PLEASE R.S.V.P., *whether or not you plan to attend*, by returning this form to Susan Smith in the Registrar's Office, College Hall.

Staff Connection encourages you to come and urge your co-workers to join you.

Yes, I can come. I'll bring:

- |                                    |                                    |                                  |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> salad     | <input type="checkbox"/> drinks    | <input type="checkbox"/> dessert |
| <input type="checkbox"/> main dish | <input type="checkbox"/> appetizer | <input type="checkbox"/> _____   |

No, I can't come.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Extension \_\_\_\_\_

## Open Forum

This newsletter offers a place for staff to share their concerns and opinions with other staff members. If you've ever felt that no one was listening to you, take some time now to write a brief letter to Open Forum, and send it to Mary Lou Wittig at Lilly Hall. Staff Connection members will make every effort to publish answers to questions sent to Open Forum in the following newsletter.

- **Letter Policy:** All letters must be submitted with your name, but you may request that your name be withheld. Please note that opinions are those of the authors and not necessarily those of Staff Connection itself.

### *To the readers:*

Last fall the staff and faculty received letters about a walk-a-thon for exercise purposes. It stated the time for staff as 1 p.m. When I inquired about this, I was told it was only for faculty members. I think who ever is writing these memos should inquire about work schedules first. It's very upsetting to find out later that the housekeepers and Food Service staff weren't allowed to participate in this program at all. I think we all are working for a purpose and should work together on a project for exercise in the work area also. Thank you.  
-Name withheld by request

*[NOTE: Please see "Shape Up This Fall" article in this issue, which responds to this writer's concern]*

### *To the readers:*

I am writing at the request of the Library Staff Association's Personnel Policy and Advisory Committee (PPAC). We have just completed work on an issue which we believe is of potential interest to other staff members of the college.

At the annual staff coffee hour, two of the library's retirees were not recognized for their combined 60 years of service to the college. Especially distressing was the embarrassment and anger of one of these staff members who had come to the celebration anticipating to be so honored. PPAC investigated the issue of honoring staff leaving the college with Edward Hennessy of Personnel Services. Apparently, it has been the custom to recognize only those staff leaving the college after May 1 at the annual coffee hour. Since, upon reflection, the unfairness of such a policy to long-term employees was evident, Mr. Hennessy speedily agreed that a change in policy was in order. Beginning in 1991, all retirees (not to be confused with staff who depart for other reasons) will be honored regardless of their dates of departure.  
—Bruce Sajdak

### *To the readers:*

I'd like to raise an issue that seems to me to be grossly discriminatory, namely the disparity between administrative and clerical staff maternity leave benefits. As the policy is written, all women on campus are given 8 weeks maternity leave. However, women on the administrative staff are paid, while clerical staff are expected to use their vacation, personal days and sick days, and do not receive paid maternity leave. If anything, clerical workers can less afford to take unpaid leave than their (usually) higher-paid colleagues. Before any staff member takes offense, I am not pitting one group of workers against another, but simply pointing out the unfairness of the policy. A broader issue, of course, is providing identical benefit packages to all Smith staff, including sick and vacation days. Even broader is a paternity leave for Smith staff. Why do the trustees think discrimination should be corrected for admissions and hiring policies, but not for employees? Until they correct the blatant discrimination in our own personnel policies, how can we, as an institution, bring about the kind of positive change we're attempting with the Smith Design?  
-Name withheld by request

*[NOTE: see Child Care News in this issue]*

### *To the readers:*

The Staff Connection Steering Committee would like to thank the Office of Personnel Services for instituting the staff training and development series this year.

The series offered a wide variety of classes, given by both Smith staff/faculty and by professional presenters. Some of us were also pleased that the seminars provided a way for staff to connect with each other. We came face to face for the first time with people we knew only by name or as a voice on the phone.

It was obvious from the attendance and the feedback that the series was a success and that Smith staff respond well to new ideas and challenges. We look forward to the next season.

—Staff Connection Steering Committee

## Mimi Lempart & Hospice Knitting

Hospice is an organization committed to improving the circumstances of people with life-threatening illnesses and their families. The hospice philosophy of care is incorporated in the Hospice of Hampshire County which oversees several volunteer programs. People can choose to be a direct care volunteer, a bereavement volunteer, or an office volunteer in the hospice office, which is located behind the Cooley Dickinson Hospital in the McCallum Building. As a direct care volunteer, participants work with patients and their families by shopping, reading, and "just being there" to listen. Training sessions are offered each spring and fall.

It was while working as a direct care volunteer that Mimi Lempart got the inspiration for hospice handknits. Mimi, who works in the Hillyer Art Library at Smith, would take her knitting along with her when she went to spend time with her patient. She found that she got a lot of knitting done while making her visits and thought that perhaps others who knit might be willing to knit garments to sell in the hospice shop.

Mimi arranged donations of yarn from yarn companies as well as local yarn shops. Webs in Amherst has been especially generous, according to Mimi. With a supply of yarn available, Mimi began to look for volunteer knitters. In the three years that the project has been going on, 75 sweaters and dozens of hats and mittens have been knitted by volunteers and placed for sale in the hospice shop, now located at 25 Market St.

Mimi pairs up yarn and an appropriate pattern and distributes them to the volunteer knitters. Knitters may work as slowly or quickly as they like on their projects. After the garment has been completed, Mimi washes and blocks it. A "hospice handknits" label is attached to the item as well as a tag listing the yarn donor and the volunteer knitter.

After taking the 32-hour training course to be a direct care volunteer, Mimi worked with Hospice in that capacity for over four years. In June, she finished a program at the Stillpoint Center in Hatfield which prepared her to be a volunteer massage therapist. Only a week after her graduation from this program, Mimi was assigned her first client!

Mimi would be glad to talk to Smith staff about hospice and her experiences with the organization. She would also be glad to talk with people about donations of yarn or volunteering to knit. She can be reached at extension 2944.

—Katherine Gannett

## Efforts for Equity Continue

Beginning last fall, some of those Smith College staff who had previously attended an Equity Institute workshop participated in a year-long Training for Trainers program so they could continue the work begun on campus by Equity Institute around issues of oppression and diversity. Carol Weinberg reports:

Those of us who participated in Equity Institute's Training for Trainers seminar during the 1989-90 school year have set some goals for this upcoming school year. We will be focusing our attention in two directions:

1. We intend to offer and conduct, during fall semester, a ten-session seminar on multi-cultural organizational development, similar to the seminars run by Equity Institute. This seminar will be coordinated by Annie Mara, Billie Bozone, Katherine Gannett, Mary Lou Wittig and Kerrie Harthan, with Annie and Billie facilitating the fall semester seminar.

This seminar will be open to applications from the entire Smith community and we hope it will continue to educate additional staff, students and faculty; will encourage on-going change efforts; and will expand the potential future pool of trainers on campus. Please watch for information which will be coming out, by mail, shortly.

2. We also intend to develop and make available to various constituencies on campus, workshops on one topic each semester. The topic for fall semester will be classism. This project will be coordinated by Carol Weinberg, working with other trainers to develop and facilitate the workshops. If other faculty and staff with an interest in oppression issues and any experience in group facilitation are interested in working with us, please contact Carol at ext. 4940.

We have all enjoyed not only what we have been learning but also the opportunity to work with one another on concerns to which we feel a strong commitment. We know that there are others of you who feel as we do, and we hope you'll join us.

—Carol Weinberg

## Shape Up This Fall

All employees are welcome to join the exercise classes sponsored by the Department of Exercise and Sport Studies.

This year, pending final budget approval, conditioning exercise (aerobics) classes will be held four days each week instead of two. Local aerobics instructor Tana Aurland will teach Mondays and Wednesdays and ESS graduate student Jill LaPointe will teach Tuesdays and Thursdays. All classes are held at noon in Scott Gym.

For those whose schedules don't allow a noon class or who simply prefer the "independent study" approach to exercise, there's the Century Club. Participants choose their own groups and times to exercise, and accumulate miles by swimming, cycling, running, walking, etc. Those who hit the 100-mile mark receive T-shirts at the end of the semester.

Coordinator Barbara Brehm-Curtis says all Smith employees should receive a letter giving registration details by the first week of September. If you do not receive one, call her at x 3978. She notes, in response to a Staff Connection inquiry, that all employees have always been welcome at these classes, and that classes at times other than noon (after work, early morning) have been offered in the past but had not attracted enough participants to continue. She welcomes your comments on how the employee exercise program can better meet your needs.

-Emily Weir

## Lunch Bunch

An ever-changing group of staff meets for lunch monthly to meet new people and chat over a meal. If you would like to be notified about Lunch Bunch gatherings, send your name to Emily Harrison Weir, Pierce Hall 28.

## Gardening Group Update

This spring the Gardening Group met for the first time. Dick Munson, director of Botanical Gardens at Smith, spoke about preparing gardens for the summer. He also answered all kinds of questions. The group is informal and any member of the Smith community is very welcome to attend. We hope to meet several times a year to exchange ideas, information and trade extra plant stock. Please call me if you're interested, extension 2756.

—Tiertza-leah Schwartz

## Softball Update

Carol Weinberg plays a mean first base and Jim Montgomery's a dynamite pitcher.... The city's co-ed softball season is well under way, and what the Smith team lacks in victories, it makes up in spirit and hard work. Our record? Let's just say we've won a couple and lost a bunch. But we're really having fun.

As of July 15, the roster included—in no particular order—Beverly Cotnoir (CDO) and her husband, Norm; Shelly Cotnoir (financial aid); Carol Weinberg (dean's office); Steve Williams (biology); Jim Montgomery (Neilson Library), Ann Nichols (CDO) and her husband, Wes; Chuck Johnson (treasurer's office); Paulette Peckol (biology) and her husband, Ron; Marc Strauss (dance); Andy Zimbalist (economics); Felicity Mbanefo (affirmative action); Susan Smith (registrar's office); Dan Rist (theatre), Alfonso Procaccini (Italian); Richard Millington (English) and his wife, Stephanie; Nancy Blanchard '90 (former varsity player); and yours truly.

We're already thinking about next season (T-shirts are a must, we've decided!). Anyone interested in playing then should contact me at x 2190 or Bev Cotnoir at x 2579.

— Debbie Bradley, co-manager/catcher/outfielder/  
second base/news director

## Childcare News

Last spring, the Childcare Committee sent out roughly 1800 questionnaires to Smith staff. The returns are now in the hands of the consultants, Workplace Connections. The returns numbered 850, 228 of which included comments. The committee expects the results back from the consultants by early August. They will submit their report in mid-August.

Although there was a disappointing turnout for the focus group sessions, these categories were represented: Ada Comstock Scholars, service staff, clerical staff, administrative staff, and faculty. One possible reason for the poor attendance at the focus group sessions may have been that they were held during the public school vacation week.

Some preliminary findings include:

The need to reassess the role of the infant center since its primary function right now is research rather than childcare.

Rethinking the schedule of the daycare facilities attached to Smith so that their timing coincides with schedules other than the academic year.

A clear statement should be made that we need to focus on the enrichment of the quality of life for staff members and their families and the role that childcare can play in it.

The need to realize that the change in opening times of the Northampton schools will have an impact on how Smith families need to arrange their daily schedules at work.

The realization must be made that full-year and full-day programs are necessary.

Gaps exist in the age ranges for which childcare at Smith and in the surrounding communities is available.

There is a mixed message being sent by the childcare situation at Smith, which is a women's institution.

The affordability of childcare where it is available.

The need for the inclusion of a childcare component in benefits packages. Possibilities include paid parental leave, family health benefits, sliding fee scale arrangement and flexible scheduling.

The campus childcare committee expects to have further results available soon.

—Katherine Garnett

## Survey Results

The last issue of *Connections* contained a survey about what Staff Connection (SC) should do and become. Here's a summary of what respondents said.

- You were split nearly evenly about whether SC should be primarily an advocacy or social organization.

- Most of you favored monthly SC meetings, which should include discussions, strategy-planning sessions and/or workshops.

- Child care (and associated issues such as paid parental leave and using sick time to tend sick children) was the most frequently named topic needing immediate action. Other issues mentioned by several people included:

- working for better pay and benefits

- organizing a union

- reducing the disparity in status, pay, and benefits between categories of employees

- Additional suggestions for action included:

- improve communications by having staff liaisons on more committees and reporting results

- publish the newsletter more frequently

- sponsor more all-staff activities

- The most common answers to "What's *worst* about Staff Connection?" were:

- its appearance as a negative "gripe group"

- its social character and lack of real power to change work conditions

- The most common answers to "What's *best* about Staff Connection?" were:

- its existence as an independent group

- that it addresses real concerns of staff and raises significant issues

- the newsletter

- the opportunity it provides for staff to talk together

## Staff Connection's Goals

During the spring and summer the Staff Connection Steering Committee has been identifying and developing goals for future action, using input from those present at the last all-campus meeting as well as responses to the survey published in the last newsletter. The goals and a few ideas for their development are as follows:

### Short-Term Goals

1. Continuing *Connecting*
2. Increase activity by Staff Connection interest groups
3. Promote successful all-staff event
4. Increase number of people involved with Staff Connection
5. Increased advocacy for Smith College staff
6. Development of relationship with Office of Personnel Services

### Long-Term Ideas

1. Improve communication among Smith staff
  2. Provide clearing house/hotline for staff issues
  3. Sponsor panels and guest speakers
  4. Institute regular staff meetings with college administration
  5. Study comparable staff groups at other colleges
  6. Challenge existing college policies detrimental to staff
- Chrissie Bell

## Hillyer Staff Lounge

Recently, the college considered turning the staff lounge in Hillyer Hall into studio space for the art department. The department requested that the lounge be used to give painting students more room for independent projects, since that space was particularly bright with natural sunlight. Unfortunately, the lounge was in high demand from the staff for the same reason. A committee of staff members and department faculty was formed to resolve the situation.

After reviewing an alternate lounge site in Graham Hall, staff members felt the space offered provided had neither adequate light nor the opportunity for relaxation that Hillyer lounge did. After the Space Allocation Committee reviewed the situation, it was decided that, after asbestos removal, Hillyer Hall lounge would remain a staff lounge. This was because the Graham Hall space did not meet safety requirements. While the lounge is not exclusively for staff use, the decision to retain the Hillyer space as a lounge was felt to be significant because that needs and concerns of staff members took precedence over the growing need for new instructional space.

—Susan Smith

## Who Ya Gonna Call?

Several people responding to the survey in the last newsletter said they didn't know who to call for information about Staff Connection. S.C. is organized by a steering committee of staff members, whose names appear below. Call any of those people for more information, to give ideas, or to volunteer for a project or join a group. We don't promise to have the answers to all your questions, but we'll try to find out for you if we don't know.

## Leadership Opportunity

Staff Connection's steering committee is looking for additional members. If you are interested in guiding the future activities of your organization, call Chrissie Bell at x 2500 or Mary Lou Wittig at x 7978. The group is especially interested in adding men, people of color, and members of clerical and service staff to the committee.

## What Staff Connection Is

Staff Connection is an organization open to all Smith employees (except those who hold faculty rank). A steering committee coordinates the group's work based on ideas from all staff members. The group is sponsored by the Committee on Community Policy.

Our mission is to provide an opportunity for Smith staff to get involved in decreasing isolation on campus through better communication, helping one another feel more connected to the Smith community, and improving the quality of work life.

Current steering committee members are:

Chrissie Bell, Admission, x 2500  
Nan Clark, Housekeeping, x 2400  
Katherine Gannett, Library, x2915  
Scott Girard, Physical Plant, x2400  
Louise Mold, School for Social Work, x7967  
Susan Smith, Registrar's Office, x 2550  
Mary Lou Wittig, School for Social Work, x 7978