

Custodians' Uphill Battle Continues

continued ▲ from Front

associate memberships with sister SEIU Local 503 to succeed in the legal battle to overturn the district outsource.

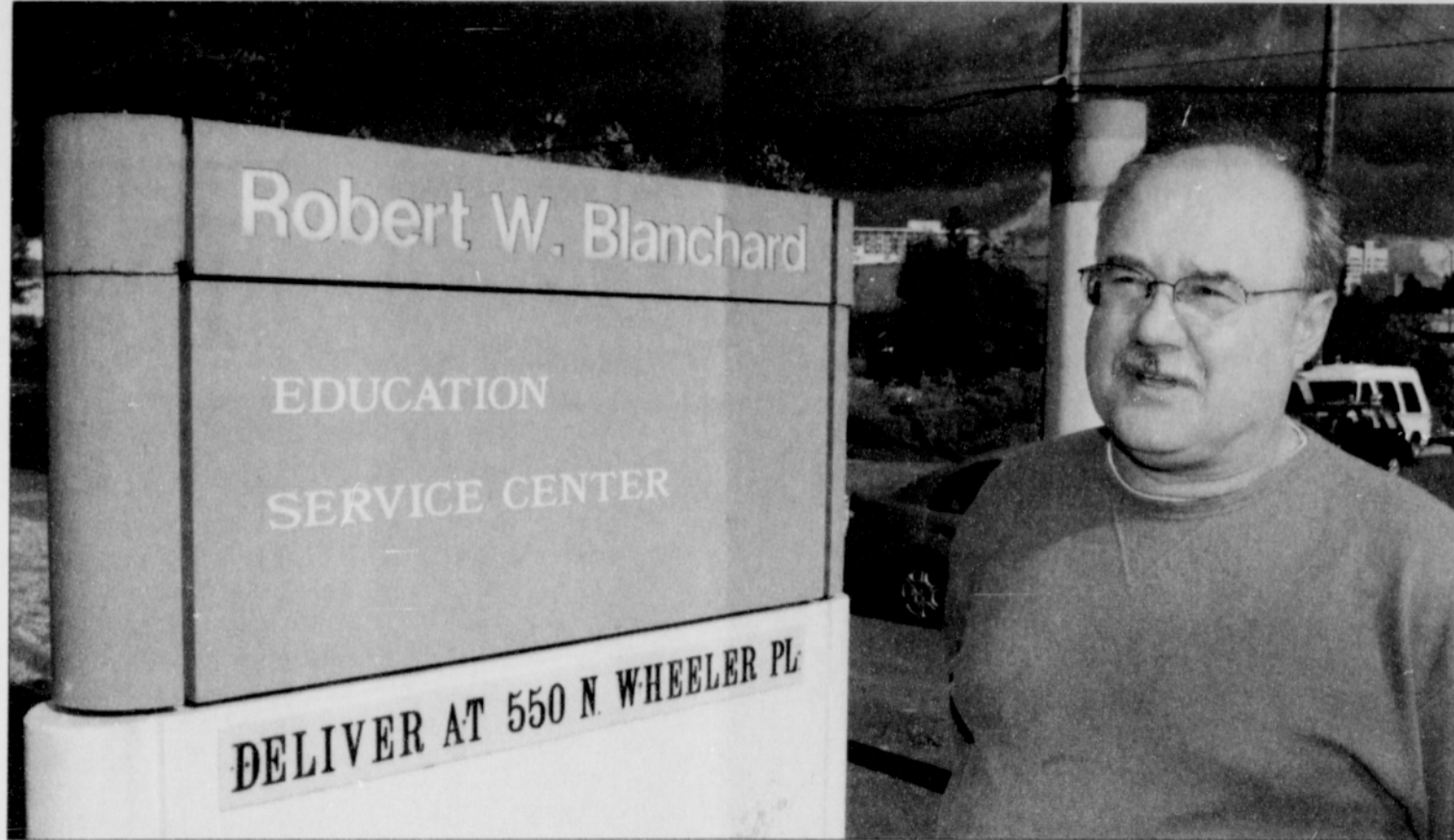
Birdie Kirk is one of the returning custodians and a member of the steering committee.

Before the lay offs, Kirk, 53, worked at Buckman Elementary, an arts magnet school in southeast Portland.

Her career with the school district started in 1978 with basic duties like sweeping floors and cleaning the inside of boilers. She steadily worked her way up to become head custodian at Buckman, where retirement was just a few sweet years away.

Kirk said she'll return to Portland on Monday because she enjoyed her job, but also because by age 55 she'll collect her pension. She also recognized custodian work as her true calling, after exploring a career in computers and office work during her transition from Buckman.

"I was working on a computer one day and [coworkers] were moving some things in a warehouse," she said. "I told



Steve Armony, outside Portland Public School District's main offices in north Portland. Armony was head Custodian at Franklin High School before the district contracted his job to Portland Habilitation Center in 2002. He retired out of the Beaverton School District, but heads a steering committee of custodians dedicated to receiving the same pay and benefits as before their layoffs.

them I could help, and realized I needed to get back to being a movable person."

She found a \$25,000-a-year custodial job at the Estacada School District, quite a pay cut

from the \$45,000 salary she was earning in Portland.

But there are advantages to

working in Estacada, Kirk said. For one, her supervisors talk with the custodians on a regular basis.

In Portland, she wasn't sure school staff understood what a custodian was.

"When we left [Portland schools], Kirk said, "we were called back by our principals who asked us 'where do you find this, how do you do this'. It was something they weren't really prepared for."

The School Board's next step in the transitioning process comes later this month when they will review custodian staffing recommendations. The number will probably be between 250 and 270, according to Jim Christeson, the project manager hired by the district to smooth the return-to-work process.

The district will also review budget packages ranging from \$16 to \$19 million for the 2006-2007 school year, covering staffing, a transition contract with PHC, the district's internal management and supplies and equipment. The figure is \$4 to \$7 million higher than what was originally budgeted.

"At this point we're very close," Christeson said, "but there are so many lawyers it will make your head spin."

Ask Deanna!

Real People,
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column
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subjects!



Dear Deanna!

I had a friend that was lonely and unhappy, so I decided to help her. I asked her to be my roommate and introduced her to my crowd. She later told our mutual friends about my personal business and she became best friends with them. They told lies about me around campus, my grades deteriorated and I lost my friends. I have wanted to get back at her for backstabbing me. How do I repair a ruined reputation and deal with these vicious two-faced people? --Totally Ruined; On-Line Reader

Dear Ruined:

Consider yourself lucky that your so-called friends have been revealed as wolves. These weren't your friends to begin with and you shouldn't let them see you stress. Hold your head high, get a life and find a new set of friends with high values and morals. The two-faced people are beneath you and you should separate yourself. Get a tutor to help pull your grades up, and stick with people that have common interests. Stay positive, smile and keep it moving.

Dear Deanna!

My girlfriend is sending mixed signals about our relationship. At times, she makes me feel as if I'm the only one for her and other times she makes me feel as if she doesn't want me. As long as I'm spending money and things go her way she's happy. When things aren't rosy or I have an issue or need attention, she acts funny. I'm beginning to feel like she's using me but don't know how to approach her. How do I ask where I stand in this relationship? --Wayne; Altus, OK

Dear Wayne:

You're being used and have allowed yourself to become a financial sponsor. If you can't pull the money away and still get the girl, you have your answer. She doesn't give a damn about you and her emotions are tied to your money and what she can get out of you. You can make an effort and let her know you're scaling back on the spending and ask to have your needs met. If she agrees to work on this, then stick with it. If not, pack your bags and exit stage left.

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