



TSPRA update

a newsletter from the **texas school public relations association**

Judy Farmer to succeed Todd as TSPRA executive director

Following an extensive search, the Executive Committee of the **Texas School Public Relations Association (TSPRA)** has selected **Judy Farmer** as its new executive director. She will succeed **Annell Todd**, who is retiring as TSPRA Executive Director at the end of April. Todd, who owns *Texas School Business*, will continue to publish the magazine.

Having served as executive director for the **Texas Association of Partners in Education** for the last four years, Farmer, brings to the position experience in both education and association management. Prior to her position with PARTNERS IN EDUCATION, she served as program coordinator for the **Texas Association of School Boards' Parent Learning Network**. She has also served as an elected local school board member.

"Making public education in Texas better has been both a personal and professional goal for more than 25 years," said Farmer. "I am excited and honored by my selection as the new executive director for TSPRA."

TSPRA President **Pascual Gonzalez**, Northside ISD, said, "Our association has thrived under the direction of Annell Todd for the last 16 years, and while we regret losing her expertise, we are confident that Judy Farmer will provide outstanding leadership with her experience and enthusiasm. The executive committee chose Judy from a field of out-

standing applicants, and we are excited about TSPRA's future with Judy Farmer heading our state office in Austin."

Todd also had praise for Farmer. "Judy's association management experience and her visibility within the Austin education community, as well as statewide, are important assets. I am delighted with her selection and know that TSPRA will continue its legacy of excellence under her direction."

Farmer holds a master's degree in Clinical Psychology from **Texas A&M in Corpus Christi** and her bachelor's degree from **Dunbarton College** in Washington, D. C. She is also accredited in the management of nonprofit organizations.

"I look forward to working with the TSPRA board and its 500 members as we continue to improve communications between Texans and their public schools-providing a positive climate for continued academic success of our students."

The Texas School Public Relations Association is a professional organization dedicated to promoting public schools through effective communications. With more than 500 members, TSPRA is comprised primarily of public information officers and communications directors serving the school districts and educational associations and agencies in Texas. It is also a Blue Ribbon Chapter of the **National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA)**.



Judy Farmer,
new TSPRA Executive Director

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President's Perspective

The following is TSPRA President Pascual Gonzalez's speech that was presented at the installation luncheon at the annual conference.

Today I am declaring that **TSPRA is the Spirit of Texas.**

*We are fearless and determined,
We are collaborators and visionaries.
We love, share and care.
We embody the Spirit of Texas.*

I can say this with great confidence because we have the pioneer spirit of the people who settled this great state. **Just like they were fearless** and determined to make new lives for themselves, so are we.

TSPRAnS are risk takers. We are fearless and **determined** when we need to get our message out. We are willing to step out in front of a crowd and lead change when necessary. We embody the Spirit of Texas.

Challenges:

This new TSPRA year will be challenged not just by the change of the **Executive Director**, but also by **Budget** constraints. I don't foresee costly initiatives coming from the new Executive Board for the new year.

What I do see is a lean machine that will examine all we do and make recommendations on how we may be able to better meet new needs and challenges.

I do see some premier initiatives continuing not only because they are the main revenue generators but because they serve a valuable purpose. Those include the very beneficial relationship with **Ammerman** who continues to provide us with expert professional development; the continuation of our **Texas Public Schools Week** campaign which also brings in substantial revenues and also helps keep our focus on Texas school children; and I see the **Star Awards** growing bigger and bigger as we recognize achievements in school public relations.

I do see a **Document Vault** that will be brimming with resources for our TSPRAnS as well as a revenue generator in the future.



I also see a new TSPRA **Website** that will provide us with the next level of interactivity and instant information and continue to position TSPRA as the "go-to" organization in Texas to get things done.

There is another challenge which must be addressed by all of you in this room. We must continue to grow **Leadership**.

Our organization is only as strong as the members who are willing to step forward.

Our voice is only as loud as the members who to choose to make a difference.

If you are interested in becoming more active in the organization, please let me know or volunteer when your Area vice presidents come calling.

A welcome challenge will be the partnership with the **Education Foundations** as we bring them under the TSPRA umbrella. Together we will become an even more effective powerhouse advocate for Children.

Please join me in thanking Cindy Randle, Chair of the Past President's Council for steering us through the waters of a new association.

And we must also thank Elaine Free from the foundation group for helping make this partnership a reality.

Telling Our Children's Stories:

In 2004-05, the presence and Spirit of TSPRA will be felt in education circles, at the state and at the local levels, because TSPRAnS care, love, share and collaborate with one goal in mind: **Telling our children's stories** to anyone who will listen.

I thank you for the honor of serving as your president and I invite your help, guidance, and your active participation in the organization.

Our organization's health depends on you.

Thank you so much. I look forward to working with each you.



*Pascual Gonzalez,
Northside ISD,
TSPRA President*

Award winners honored at conference

TSPRA Awards recognize and honor TSPRA members who have excelled in a variety of capacities — for their professional achievement, their overall value to the organization, their success as a “rookie” or newcomer to the field of school public relations, and for having an exceptionally “bright idea” to address a particular public relations challenge. Additionally, we recognize and honor a member of the media who has demonstrated fair and responsible reporting of public education issues.

PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENT:

Katherine Oates Cernosek has exhibited a consistent, creative, committed and professional approach to school public relations. Born to succeed in school PR, she is the daughter of two career educators, who provided her the opportunity to see first-hand the important difference that public education makes in the lives of all children.

Katherine began her career in school public relations (as well as) NSPRA and TSPRA 18 years ago, and has progressed professionally with each new opportunity that has come her way. As a past president and throughout the years, her leadership has left a positive mark on our organization. She has chaired the Marketing Committee, the Star Awards Committee, the Governmental Relations Committee and the Texas Public Schools Week committees as well as being a working member of countless others. She currently directs the large school-community relations program for Mesquite ISD, a district with more than 34,000 students. She has also served as communications director in Galena Park and Grand Prairie.

MOST VALUABLE MEMBER:

TSPRAnS often brag that our strength is in our members. We tell professionals new to school PR that our members will help them get through any PR challenge or crisis. Our Most Valuable TSPRAn this year is a perfect example of that strength. A long-time member of our organization, **Shirley Brothers** is well known for her willingness to help where needed and to mentor others. She has served for 18 years as public relations coordinator for Alvin ISD, working for three superintendents



Kirk Lewis, center, congratulates the 2004 Chapter Award recipients: Most Valuable Member Shirley Brothers, Alvin ISD; Rookie of the Year Tisha Heskett, Little Elm ISD; Professional Achievement Award winner Katherine Oates Cernosek, Mesquite ISD; and Bright Idea Award winner Liz Johnson, Klein ISD.

and successfully passing four school bond elections. Prior to working in school PR, she was a special education teacher and Teacher of the Year in her district.

Shirley has been a member of TSPRA and NSPRA since 1985 and has attended the TSPRA conference every year since. She has also chaired and served on numerous committees.

ROOKIE OF THE YEAR:

Tisha Heskett, Little Elm ISD, started in school PR in a position that began as part-time, but after a year of her remarkable efforts, the district realized they couldn't do without her and made the position full-time. In one short year, this rookie worked to increase funding for the education, outlined a plan for the district's first school business partnership and Adopt a School program; developed policy to address intra-district transfers and rezoning; helped develop the district's crisis management plan, and helped design the district website. When her superintendent made a last-minute decision to retire, the school board asked her to work with TASB to coordinate the search for a new superintendent. And— at the beginning of this school year - she was barraged with the media after two students were killed in a car accident returning from homecoming.

This inspiring newcomer managed to address all these issues in just a little over one year! She attributes her survival to the support and direction she

has received from her TSPRA friends and TSPRA conference.

BRIGHT IDEA AWARD:

Liz Johnson, assistant superintendent for community relations for the Klein ISD, received her award for “Freedom Trek,” a multi-faceted event designed to celebrate student heritage, culture, and diversity—and remind everyone that each of us reflects a unique and valuable history as a part of the school district.

This award recognizes a TSPRAn for an outstanding idea or strategy, special project or program, designed to promote public education in Texas.

MEDIA AWARD:

Brad Watson, a news anchor and education reporter for WFAA TV news in Dallas, received this year's media award. Watson, a veteran journalist who has covered news in the Dallas/Fort Worth area since 1979, currently covers education. TSPRAnS who nominated him said that he is thorough in his research and mindful of the power of the news. He is currently providing extensive coverage of the Governor's plans for calling a special session to address public school funding. Rachel Cruthirds accepted the award on behalf of Watson.

Mary Ann Simpson, APR, Fort Bend ISD, chaired this year's awards committee. Other members were **Mary Gorden**, Plano ISD, **Tim Carroll**, Allen ISD, **M J McDaniel**, Weatherford ISD, **David Ochoa**, Harlandale ISD, and **Karen Collier**, Humble ISD.

Star Awards Banquet



TSPRA's highest honor, the Platinum Award, went to Leadership Katy ISD 2003, submitted by Kris Taylor and Janet Theis. Accepting the award (l-r) are Kris Taylor, Steve Stanford and Bill Purtee, all of Katy ISD's communications department.



TSPRA presented six crystal commendation awards at the Star Awards banquet. Pictured above with their awards are: (l-r) Suzie Czeschin, Harlingen CISD; Liz Wright and Mark Thomas, Birdville ISD; Kristen Escovedo, Eagle Mountain-Saginaw ISD; Cindy Randle, Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD; Sharon Cox, Denton ISD; and Verone Travis, Gina Friedman and Robin McClure, Grapevine-Colleyville ISD.



Pictured above and right are some of the 2003 Star Awards Best of Category winners in the print, electronic and video categories.



Retiring TSPRA Executive Director Annell Todd, center, is serenaded by TSPRA Administrative Assistant Janet Crock and Star Award Banquet Emcee Riney Jordan. Jordan wrote special lyrics to the song "Our Love Is Here to Stay" thanking Todd for her service to the association.

Some 300 TSPRAns gathered in Austin for the annual conference Feb. 18-20 at the Hyatt Regency Austin to learn how to better "make them hear you." Commissioner Shirley Neeley and 2003 Key Communicator Carolyn Boyle spoke at the general sessions. Other highlights included personal achievement awards, a reception for Annell Todd, who is retiring as TSPRA executive director, and installation of new officers. The conference closed with the annual STAR Awards Banquet where outstanding communications programs and projects are recognized.

Annual Conference held in Austin



Kirk Lewis, left, receives his TSPRA presidential ring from annual conference sponsor Brady Hull of Brady Hull & Associates.



Kirk Lewis received a pair of glass bookends engraved with the Texas State seal, in recognition for his service as TSPRA president.



2004-2005 TSPRA President Pascual Gonzalez, Northside ISD, outlines his goals at the Installation Luncheon.



Presenting on "Combining Forces to Make Them Hear You" are (l-r) Margaret Gurecky, Lewisville ISD; Sharon Cox, Denton ISD; Supt. Ray Braswell, Denton ISD; Supt. James Monaco, Aubrey ISD; Rick Woolfolk, Denton trustee; and Annette Fuller, Denton Record-Chronicle.



New 2004-2005 officers, seated in front, were installed at the Installation Luncheon held at the Hyatt Regency Austin, Feb. 19.



Lynn Townsend, right, Harris Co. Dept. of Education, supplies Lynn Kaylor, Flour Bluff ISD, with information at the HCDE Printing Services booth.



TSPRAnS from Region 4 greeted Commissioner of Education Shirley Neeley with cheers and pompoms. Neeley addressed TSPRAnS at the Third General Session.



TSPRA's new parliamentarian, Staci Stanfield of Galena Park ISD, introduced Commissioner Neeley, who formerly served as superintendent of Galena Park ISD.



TSPRAnS pick up great ideas at the conference Publications Exchange.



Skip Watson, right, Lubbock ISD, thanks Attorney Chris Elizalde, Walsh Anderson Underwood Schultz & Aldridge, for her post conference presentation on legal issues.



TSPRA President Elect Candace Ahlfinger, Waxahachie ISD, made presentations to TSPRA retirees.



Over 80 new members and TSPRA leaders attended this year's New Member Luncheon.

Annell Todd honored at reception



Annell's daughters, from left, Sarah Scott, Leigh Hodges and Laura Patterson, right, were present at the reception honoring their mother.



Past President Katherine Cernosek, Mesquite ISD, and President Kirk Lewis, Pasadena ISD, presided at Annell Todd's reception.



Annell holds the framed poem Past President Lynda Queen, left, Region 16 ESC, wrote and read for her.



Cindy Randle, left, Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD, presents Annell with a map showing the many cruises she can take with the money donated by TSPRANS.

Dear TSPRANS,

The honor and generosity bestowed upon me during my final TSPRA Conference as your executive director overwhelmed me. I have attended many farewell functions during my long career as an association executive and as publisher of *Texas School Business* magazine, and the reception, gifts and tributes from TSPRA's members and sponsors topped the list of all-time great send-offs. To quote one of my association colleagues here in Austin, "What a classy shindig!"

The Waterford bowl with its engraved stand sparkles atop my china cabinet at home (safely out of reach of grandchildren), and I can't wait to take my cruise. Besides these and other tangible gifts I received, the words you spoke and wrote and sang (Riney and Janet) and read (Lynda) to me validated my last 16 years and again reminded me why I have loved my work with TSPRA.

Thank you for making me feel like a "goddess" (I even liked wearing the tiara, Katherine!).

Keep the spirit of TSPRA alive and keep "making them hear you."

Annell



Riney and Karen Jordan express their best wishes to Annell.



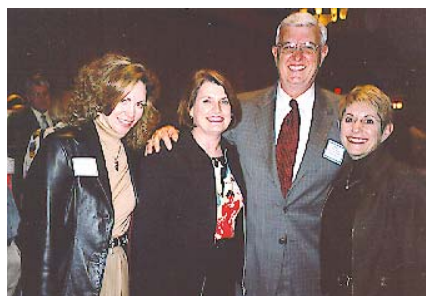
Friends, family, TSPRA members, and education leaders from associations, TEA and education service centers, came out to the reception honoring retiring Executive Director Annell Todd.



Amy Jones and Cathy Giardina, both of Alief ISD, with Beth Rickert, La Porte ISD, at the reception.



Congratulating Annell Todd, center, on her retirement are Amy Williams, left, Harris Co. Dept. of Ed., and Mary Ann Simpson, Ft. Bend ISD.



Riney Jordan greets, from left, Mary Gorden, Jane Wyen and Carole Greisdorf, all from Plano ISD.



TASBO Exec. Dir. Gwen Santiago, left, and Amy Jones, right, O'Connell Robertson Architects, wish Annell Todd "all the best" as she retires.

Meet the new TSPRA board members

TSPRA's president-elect, **Candace Ahlfinger** is the director of public relations in Waxahachie ISD, where she has served for the last 10 years. She directed Partners in Education the first year with the district and moved into PR the following year. Before joining Waxahachie ISD, Candace taught for Navarro College in Corsicana. As President-elect, Candace continues her service on the TSPRA Executive Committee after completing a two-year term as the North Texas Area Vice President. An active member of TSPRA for a decade, she has chaired and served on numerous committees and is the recipient of Star Awards including Best of Category and a Crystal Commendation. Candace and her husband, Randy, have a daughter, 22, who is a recent graduate of Syracuse University, and a son, 19, who is a student at Rice University.

San Antonio Region's new Vice President is **Brad Domitrovich**. Brad is the communications specialist in Bandera ISD. He has served in the district for nine years and in his present position for two and a half years. Before working at Bandera ISD, Brad was a self employed marketing consultant for eight years, and was in corporate marketing at Scott Paper Company for eight years. He is married to Gina and they have two daughters, Candace who is 27 and Catiana who is six.

The new Vice President of the Far West Region is **Bonny Schulenburg**. Bonny, a graduate of the University of Texas at El Paso, is the community relations specialist in Ysleta ISD. Bonny, whose duties include community relations for the Ysleta Education Foundation, Partners In Education, and district events, has been with YISD for nine years. She has received TSPRA Star Awards, PRSA-Rio Grande Chapter Ria Awards, and was named Grand Marshall of Eastwood High School's homecoming parade in 1999. She is treasurer of PRSA-Rio Grande Chapter and media coordinator for the Senior All Star Football Classic.

The new Vice President of the Gulf Coast Region is **Suzie R. Czeschin**. Suzie has served as the public information officer for Harlingen CISD for 20 years. A commercial artist and journalist, Suzie has also worked as managing



Newly installed TSPRA Officers are (l-r): At-Large VP Renae Murphy, Wichita Falls; North Central VP Rachel Cruthirds, Carrollton-Farmers Branch; San Antonio Region VP Brad Domitrovich, Bandera; Parliamentarian Staci Stanfield, Galena Park; Houston/Beaumont VP Christy Willman, Lamar; and Far West VP Bonny Schulenburg, Ysleta. Also installed, but not pictured, was Gulf Coast VP Suzie Czeschin, Harlingen CISD.

editor for a weekly newspaper, a commercial artist for a printing company, and a free lance commercial artist. She is a graduate of the University of Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma, where she received her bachelor of arts degree. She is a native of St. Louis, Missouri. She and her husband, Don and two sons, relocated to Texas in 1969.



Suzie R. Czeschin, VP Gulf Coast, Harlingen CISD

Christy Willman, Vice President of the Houston/Beaumont Region, has been Lamar CISD's director of communications since 1995 and has been involved in education since 1976 as a teacher. She taught first and second grade for 13 years in the Cypress-Fairbanks, Austin, and Lamar school districts. Willman, active in many community organizations, was a 2003 finalist for Fort Bend County Woman of the Year. Christy and her husband, Larry Willman, live in Rosenberg. They have four children, a U.S. Marine, two graduates of Southwest Texas and a senior at Indiana University.

The new Vice President of the North Central is **Rachel Cruthirds**. Rachel is the assistant director of public information in Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD.

Rachel has served in the district for three years. Before C-FB, Rachel was the director of student publications at Tarleton State University in Stephenville.

The new Vice President At-Large is **Renae Gonzalez-Murphy**. Renae is the public information officer in Wichita Falls ISD. She has served in the district for seven years and in her present position for five years. Renae was named TSPRA Rookie of the Year in 2000. She is married to Steve Murphy and the mom of two boys, Austin, ten years old, and Zack, seven years old.

A native Texan, **Staci Stanfield** serves as the parliamentarian for the TSPRA executive board. According to Staci, school public relations is a natural fit for her. After receiving a Bachelor of Arts in Speech Communications from Southwest Texas State University, Staci pursued a career in broadcast journalism and worked as an anchor, reporter and producer at various television stations in Texas. After nearly eight years in the media, she began looking for a new challenge. Working as a communications consultant with Houston-area ISDs lead to a new position with Galena Park ISD, where she has been the director of communications for two years. Her enthusiasm for media and passion for education provide the foundation for serving the community in both her work and various community organizations.

News Flash

► **Melissa Tortorici** is now director of communications in Texas City ISD. Previously she was communications administrator in La Marque ISD. Melissa's son Mitchell James, born July 15, 2003, attended his first TSPRA conference this past February ... ► **Karla Oliver**, formerly with Duncanville ISD, is the new director of communications for Highland Park ISD ... ► In El Paso ISD, **Luis Villalobos** now serves as executive director to his superintendent Charles Tafoya ... ► **Amy L. Williams**, Harris Co. Dept. of Ed., is a May candidate for the degree of Doctor of Jurisprudence from South Texas College of Law in Houston. Amy will sit for the Texas State Bar exam in July ... ► **Terry Morawski**, Mansfield ISD, has written a play, "The Mercy Street Boys", that is being produced at the Main Street Theatre, Mansfield. Tickets are available for this 2003 Playwriting Festival 2-Act Play Winner. Contact Terry at 817-473-5376 or terrymorawski@hotmail.com ... ► **Carole Greisdorf**, Plano ISD, is the 2003 recipient of the Plano Chamber of Commerce Athena Award for her professional accomplishments and service to a business, her profession and the community ... ► The Garland ISD Council of PTAs dedicated their 2003-04 yearbook to **Judy Kriehn** a couple of months ago ... ► New TSPRAn **Rosalyn Mallard**, Tyler ISD, is expecting a baby boy July 4th. Rosalyn was also honored

as TISD's Support Staff of the month. She attended her first TSPRA Conference this past February and really enjoyed it ... ► **Melissa Tipton**, Midway ISD, and her husband Trey welcomed their first child, a girl. Madelyn Rae was born December 1, 2003 ... ► Congratulations to **Lauren Layfield**, Carroll ISD, who was married December 13, 2003 to Josh Becera ... ► Laredo ISD's communications department recently relocated to 1604 Houston Street. **Marco Alvarado** is working on his master's with Seton Hall University and **Ronnie Cantu** has begun work on her masters at TAMU ... ► **Deborah Canterbury**, Region 10 ESC, is now a member of the alternative certification department at Region 10 - Teacher Preparation and Certification ... ► **Todd Martin**, Killeen ISD, welcomed a new daughter Macy to his family on Nov. 30, 2003 ...

► Former TSPRA Past President **Chuck Hornung** will address the annual meeting of the New Mexico Historical Society in April concerning his new book on the New Mexico Territorial Mounted Police ... ► **Tom Simpson** in Marlin ISD is now handling the added duties of payroll for his district ...

Dear TSPRA Friends,

Thank you so much for the honor of being named Most Valuable TSPRA Member this year. I am truly humbled by the award. There are so many of you who do so many wonderful things that what little I do and have done seems small. I don't think I volunteered for all the things Mary Ann Simpson said I did, I think I just said yes when asked to serve. That's the spirit of TSPRA and is what I love about our organization. We all say yes when asked to serve.

Thanks my friends,

Shirley Brothers

UPDATE featured in textbook

TSPRA's *UPDATE Newsletter* is featured in a new textbook "Public Relations Writing Form and Style" by Jim Haynes, APR. The picture (right) is a copy of page 341 in Chapter 17 on newsletters. The caption reads: *Newsletters such as this one provide regular information to members of all kinds of organizations including professional and trade associations, schools and universities, religious organizations and health care institutions. Many organizations, including the Texas School Public Relations Association, have discontinued printing their newsletters on paper and - instead - make them available via email and/or on their Web site.*



Retirees

TSPRA congratulates the following members who retired or will retire between March 2003 through May 2004. (If we've missed someone please let us know.)

Linda Adkins
Janet Cline
Sherilyn Conn
Chris Garcia
Vera Porter
Charlene Robertson
Elaine Stoermer
Annell Todd

Mark Your Calendars!
Texas Public Schools Week
2005 will be celebrated
Feb. 28 - March 4.
(No testing scheduled for that week)



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