

Newsletter of the LCHR

Louisiana Council on Human Relations

James D. Wilson, Jr., Editor

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Patricia Kennedy Rickels, Ph.D.
February 12, 1927 - October 15, 2009

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Civil Rights Icon Pat Rickels Dies at Age 82

Human rights activist Dr. Patricia Kennedy Rickels, passed away at her home in Lafayette, Louisiana, on September 15, 2009. She was 82 years old. Beloved teacher, mentor, colleague, and friend to many generations, Dr. Rickels served the University of Louisiana at Lafayette for fifty years as Professor of English and Director of the Honors Program before her retirement in the Spring of 2007. She had a distinguished record of service, teaching, scholarship, and administration. An innovative and imaginative teacher, she was truly outstanding on all levels of instruction. She was also a highly regarded scholar in the fields of folklore and African American literature. Known affectionately as Dr. Pat, her generosity to students, personally, academically, and at times financially, is legendary.

A native of Kemmerer, Wyoming, she was born on February 12, 1927. She grew up in Montana, Alaska, and the Panama Canal Zone. She received a B.A. from University of Washington in Seattle in 1948, an M.A. from Louisiana State University in 1951, and a Ph.D. in English from LSU in 1961. She also did post-doctoral work at Southern University in 1967-68 in Black history and literature. In 1957, she came to UL Lafayette, formerly SLI, as an Instructor in English, and in 1958 she married her colleague, Dr. Milton Rickels. They were inseparable soulmates and collaborators until his death in 1998. A great sorrow in their lives was the loss of their son and only child, Gordon Rickels, who was killed in an automobile accident in Oregon in 1983.

Beginning in the 1960s, Rickels was deeply involved in civil rights, and she continued her involvement in the struggle for racial justice throughout her life. She was an early member of the Louisiana Council on Human Relations, joining in 1965; she served as the LCHR Vice President from 1973 to 1980 and as its Corresponding Secretary from 1983 until her final illness. She received the LCHR's Lafayette Chapter Humanitarian of the Year award in 1975 and the LCHR's Oliver-Sigur Humanitarian Award in 2008.

Dr. Rickels was one of the project directors for a 1979 oral history collection of taped interviews with

civil rights leaders, resulting in “No Gains Without Pains: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement in Louisiana,” part of the Carlton O. James Oral History Collection in Dupré Library.

As a scholar, Dr. Rickels established a national reputation in the fields of American folklore and African American literature. She was the co-author with Dr. Milton of two books, *Richard Wright* (1970) and *Seba Smith* (1977). She was also the editor of *1776-1976: 200 Years of Life and Change in Louisiana* (1977).

Her published articles and essays include “‘The Sound of My People Talking’: Folk Humor in A Gathering of Old Men” (1993, co-authored with Dr. Milton), “Martin Luther King as Folk Hero,” “The Folklore of Acadiana,” and “Memories of Lead Belly” (1968). Her article “Some Accounts of Witch Riding,” first published in *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany* in 1961 and later republished in two anthologies, is often cited as a seminal article in folk belief.

Dr. Rickels was the Louisiana collector for the *Dictionary of American Popular Beliefs and Superstitions* project at UCLA. In 1956, she was a founding member of the Louisiana Folklore Society, and she served the society in many roles, including President and Editor of *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany*. In 1994, she and Dr. Milton Rickels were honored jointly with the Louisiana Folklore Society Honor Award presented for “outstanding dedication and research in Louisiana folklife.” She taught the first course in folklore in the state of Louisiana in 1964, a time when few universities had any courses in folklore. In 1968, she taught the first Black literature course at UL Lafayette.

As a teacher, Dr. Rickels inspired generations of students, sometimes shocking and entertaining them as well with her wit. She loved the works of Emerson and Thoreau and followed their teachings as few others have, passing their wisdom on to her students. She taught multicultural texts long before the term multiculturalism was used.

In 1970, Dr. Rickels was one of the three co-creators of the University Honors Program, and she served as Director of the program from 1979 to her retirement in 2007. In 2003, the home of the Honors Program, Judice Hall, was renamed Judice-Rickels Hall, in

honor of Dr. Milton Rickels. It now honors Dr. Pat as well. The *College Board Review* profiled Dr. Pat and her work with the Honors Program in its Fall 2001 issue with an article by Kathleen Thames entitled “Down on the Bayou: Dr. Pat Honors Us All in Lafayette.” The article noted: “She has also been a matchmaker, a banker, a shoulder to cry on for students during three decades of change.”

Elaine Bernard, her administrative assistant in the Honors Program for over 23 years, praised Dr. Rickels relationship with students: “She was a philanthropist and not just to Honors students. She was known to pay tuition, rent, doctor bills, etc. She was the most generous person.”

UL Lafayette Provost Steve Landry said, “She was an administrator and leader on campus whose dedication to her program was entirely grounded in the individual students in her program. She had the capacity to shepherd and mentor students who sought direction and helped them discover their intellectual and personal passions.”

Other important honors Dr Rickels received during her career include the Amoco Foundation Award for Distinguished Undergraduate Teaching in 1980. She was a member of Phi Beta Kappa, University of Washington, and a Danforth Fellow. She also served on the Academic Development Board of Holy Rosary Institute.

The 1990 Humanist of the Year Award was presented jointly to Drs. Pat and Milton Rickels by the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities. In presenting the award, the LEH stated that the Rickels “are known throughout Louisiana as an inseparable pair in their contributions to the humanities. They impart to their students significant lessons in tolerance and respect for the ideas of others, the importance of self-worth, and the value of human dignity. The Rickels inspire all whose lives they touch to cherish humanity of whatever color, creed, or class. They help people appreciate what it means to be a human being.”

One of the last projects Dr. Pat participated in was a documentary on her former colleague and dear friend John Kennedy Toole, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *A Confederacy of Dunces*. Film producer Joseph Sanford said: “It would not be a film

without her. Without her participation we could not have made this film. She brought a really powerful personal love and intellectual insight into the story of Ken Toole. She is articulate, funny, beautiful-so Pat.” *John Kennedy Toole: The Omega Point* will be dedicated to her with a special dedication at the end of the film to the memory of Dr. Pat Rickels.

She is survived by a brother, Ed Kennedy; nephews, Wes and Robert Kennedy; niece, Joyce Kennedy; and aunt, Francis Etzwiler. She is also survived by all the UL Lafayette Honors Programs students whose lives she touched and will continue to affect and by all the people who loved her and were with her to the end. Dr. Rickels was preceded in death by her parents, Charlotte and Wes Kennedy; her husband, Dr. Milton Rickels; her son, Gordon Rickels; and a brother, Al Kennedy.

The family requests that contributions be made to the Gordon Rickels Endowed Honors Scholarship Fund, UL Lafayette Foundation, 705 E. St. Mary Blvd, Lafayette, LA 70503.

Activities of the LCHR Board

The state board of directors of the Louisiana Council on Human Relations met at the University Presbyterian Church in Baton Rouge on July 18. The Board set up a committee to review the status of the LCHR’s various position papers and authorized the transfer of the materials contained in the LCHR archive to the Amistad Research Center at New Orleans for permanent housing. Board Member Anthony Navarre called attention to the issue of police brutality in Louisiana and suggested that the LCHR host a series of public forums on the issue. Navarre was authorized by the Board to explore the issue and report back at the next quarterly board meeting. The final matter of business conducted was the election of officers; the results of which are: Joseph Dennis, President; Thelma Deamer, Vice President; Richard Haymaker, Membership Secretary; John Mikell, Treasurer; as no one agreed to accept the nomination for Corresponding Secretary, longtime board member Paul Burns agreed to serve in that position in the interim until the conclusion of the next quarterly board meeting.

Group gives La. ‘F’ based on education, health care

Louisiana has been given a failing grade by a national nonprofit group that grades states on the financial security of its residents. The Corporation for Enterprise Development gave Louisiana an “F” and said that it is falling behind in key education and health-care measures, despite showing strength in some financial asset indicators.

Louisiana got an “F” in the healthcare and education categories; a “D” in financial assets and income; and a “C” in the categories of business and jobs and housing and homeownership. “Louisiana is failing in education, ranking 50th in two-year college degree attainment and 48th in both four-year college degree attainment and high school degree attainment, 48th in 8th-grade reading proficiency and 46th in 8th-grade math proficiency,” the group said. “The state also is struggling in key areas of health care, ranking 49th in health insurance coverage for low-income parents and 48th in both overall health insurance coverage and employees insured by their employer.”

Despite the “D” in the financial assets and income category, the group noted Louisiana shows “capacity for significant economic improvement by performing well in key measures. The state ranks first in net worth by gender, fifth in median credit card debt, seventh in net worth by race and ninth in asset poverty by race.”

States that earned an “A” include Hawaii, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Vermont, Washington, and Wyoming. The 2009-2010 Assets & Opportunity Scorecard is online at <http://scorecard.cfed.org>.

REMINDER:
LCHR Board of Directors
Quarterly Meeting
October 10, 10am
Joe Dennis’ House
1709 E. Simcoe Street
Lafayette, La.



The Impossible

by Brad Pollock

1/20/2009

The Impossible

The Cannot Be

The Never Will

The Not In Our Lifetime

Is Happening Today!

WE Live In a Quantum Universe

All Things Are Possible, Anything Is Possible!

Barrack Hussein (No I am not Insane) Obama

Is Being Inaugurated AS President of The United States

Of America Today! **No Way!**

Yes Way! Treading a path through the blood of the Slaughtered

By Way of the hulls of Slave Ships! By Way of the Underground

Railroad! By Way of Selma and Montgomery

By Way of Mau Mau and Nkrumah and W.E.B. And Ida B. and

The Statute of Liberty — But It Cannot Be —

But It Is! It T' is IS IS IS! It Is! By the Gates of Heaven It Is!

Mr. Too Cool From Honolulu and Harvard Law School

And My Pride — South Side! Too Cool Stepping into Pennsylvania Avenue!

Hi Five! No Jive! Fist Bump! Play the Trump!

The Hearts of Millions of Souls Go Thump!

This is a day of triumph and hope for all mankind!

We can dream the impossible dream and make it so!

Make It So! Make It So! Make It So!

Mom I wish you were here to see this day!

Oh dad, Grandma, I wish you were here!

Nanny and Pops I wish you were here!

But you are here because I am here!

Can the Good Guys Win? Oh Yes We Can!!!

All Things Are Possible! With Us All Things Are Possible!

We Did This! All Things Are Possible! All Things Are Possible!

All Things Are Possible! **Except** Holding Back

The Tears!

Those who are afraid of Change! Be Afraid! Be Very Afraid!

This Is Only The Beginning!

We Put A Black Man In The White House! *Hot JA Dog Gone Hot Dam! Wow!!!*

An't No Stopping US Now! Got's To Keep On Trucking Baby!

GIVE US FREE!!! IT SHALL BE!!!

All Things Are Possible! ALL THINGS!

Newsletter of the BRCHR

Baton Rouge Council on Human Relations

Tamikia Y. Jones, Assistant Editor

Volume 44, Issue 4

Roles Reversed as Assistant DA Files Federal Civil Rights Suit

Prem Burns, a white East Baton Rouge assistant district attorney, claims in a civil rights suit filed in federal district court in August that a Sorrento, La. police officer falsely arrested and beat her in August 2008.

An FBI spokeswoman, meanwhile, confirmed that U.S. Department of Justice officials are looking into the allegations. Burns was arrested for driving while intoxicated on I-10 by Officer Terry Albright.

The next month, Burns acknowledged drinking four glasses of wine prior to her arrest. She entered a pre-trial intervention program in Ascension Parish, paid a fine of \$1,500 and was ordered to perform 32 hours of community service at her church. Those actions permitted her to avoid a DWI conviction. "She pleaded guilty to DWI," Sorrento Police Chief Earl Theriot said. "So she wasn't falsely arrested."

Burns also alleges in the suit that officer Albright yanked her from her vehicle and "repeatedly beat her head against the hood of her car." Burns said she was thrown to the pavement, dragged several feet, and suffered two black eyes, cuts to her left elbow, hand and knee, and bruises on her arms and chest.

In his report of last year's arrest, Albright said he pulled Burns from her car after she refused to exit the vehicle. He said she then fell to the pavement. The officer also wrote that Burns had weaved across the center line of I-10 as she drove 40 mph in a 70-mph zone before he stopped her. Albright was suspended after the arrest, and subsequently resigned from the Sorrento police force.

Burns said last year that Albright stopped beating her when he noticed a man watching them. She says in her lawsuit that the witness later came forward "to state that Albright beat Burns without provocation."

Baton Rouge Transit Discussed

Baton Rouge may not be synonymous with public transit today, but the city has the basic structure necessary to support a modest system that would be used by people of different income levels. First, the city must commit to making transit development a priority and shed its negative association with buses. That was the message from a transportation panel at the Center for Planning Excellence's Smart Growth Summit, which wrapped up a two-day series of panels. John Fregonese, a planning consultant with experience in Portland, Ore., Chicago and Salt Lake City, said Baton Rouge has about 4 million boardings a year, though it has the potential to grow to be 10 times that number because it has several well-traveled corridors that would act as the "bones" of a system.

"Transit is not taken seriously here," he said. "We have done a very poor job in this region with transit," agreed state Transportation Secretary William D. Ankner.

He pointed out that many of the bus stations don't have benches, coverings or bus schedules. Ankner, who has also worked in the northeast, said other cities don't associate public transportation with poverty, rather as a smart way to get around. "We have almost a disdain, which is amazing for me, in the South with buses," he said.

Fregonese said he's begun to cringe a little with all the talk of light rail in places that don't even have strong ridership in buses. He said that even in the cities known for their subways and light rail systems, bus ridership dominates. One key for making buses more attractive is to ensure using them means time savings. Ankner said he was disappointed the decision-making process for the widening of Interstate 12 took place before he arrived, because hot lanes for buses that could save commuters time would have been a wise addition. He said he was disappointed

at the lack of concern about the demise of LA Swift — the post-Hurricane Katrina bus program between Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

Kate Rube, federal policy director for Smart Growth America, said being forced to commute in a sprawling city, forces families to spend a greater portion on transportation, which combined with housing eats up a lot of the family budget.

But Rube and Ankner said this is a great time for public transit because people are opening up to the idea. Ridership nationally hit its highest levels since 1956, Rube said.

Unfortunately, federal funding doesn't set a very good example, allocating less than 20 percent of transportation funding for transit, about half of what people say they would spend when asked in surveys, Rube said. "Right now we don't have the choices," Ankner said. "When gas prices went up a year ago, we as a state didn't have options." Fregonese said no city can thrive and be sustainable that is not built at the human scale. Baton Rouge, he said, must rid itself of its suburban mentality if it wants to capture the growth that's spilling out into neighboring parishes.

B.R. Crime . . . A Daunting Issue

On the same day a group of people met to discuss crime in the capital city area, East Baton Rouge Parish recorded its 59th killing. A 30-year-old Denham Springs man was gunned down around 2 a.m. in the 1800 block of Marque Ann Drive, authorities said. Hours later, the League of Women Voters of Baton Rouge hosted its Lunch with the League. This month's topic: crime in the Baton Rouge area. Jean Armstrong, the league's first vice president, said the organization chose the topic after hearing about the release of a video called "Thuggin It & Lovin It." The video, in which people brandish guns, drugs and cash, purportedly portrays life in certain Baton Rouge and Port Allen neighborhoods.

"Based on the video, we felt the community needed to have a dialog about crime," Armstrong said. "What we are hoping to do is encourage citizens to speak up and reinforce fighting crime as a community effort."

Baton Rouge Police Chief Jeff LeDuff was one of six speakers at the meeting and said that, for the

first time in five years, crime is on the rise in Baton Rouge. Overall crime, which includes violent crime and property crime, is up 7 percent from last year, LeDuff said. Violent crime is up 16 percent. But, the chief said, Baton Rouge is not "on fire" like some believe it to be. Of the 38 homicides committed during the first six months of this year, only four are considered traditional murders where the victim does not know his assailant and the assailant doesn't know his victim, LeDuff said. "The majority of what we see is dope and gun related," he said.

East Baton Rouge Parish District Attorney Hillar Moore also spoke at the meeting and said he is convinced that crime will not decline until the parish reduces its number of school dropouts and truants. "If kids are in school, they aren't committing crimes," he said. "Instead, they are learning, they are graduating, they are getting jobs."

Moore and East Baton Rouge Parish Mayor-President Kip Holden are working on opening a center that would help consolidate a fragmented system that struggles to keep children in school. The one-stop-shop would identify truants, pinpoint the cause of their truancy and work to address it, Moore said.

East Baton Rouge Sheriff Sid Gautreaux, who also spoke at the meeting, said he supports Moore and Holden's efforts but believes the parish also needs more jail space. Gautreaux said his office works hard to make do with the existing space at Parish Prison and has tried to make the jail a place where prisoners can be reformed. He said there are more people living in the Baton Rouge area and that means more crime; therefore, the parish needs additional jail space to maintain residents' quality of life.

Voters might get their chance to decide on whether the parish will get a new jail if a \$900 million capital improvements bond proposal is put on the Nov. 14 ballot. Metro Council members have yet to approve Holden's request to put the proposal, which would require additional sales and property taxes, on the ballot.

The LCHR / BRCHR is Online at:
www.brchr.org

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