

Feature Photo

“Ferris Wheel”

Jane Diener

The Messenger, Northview High School



Judge's Comments:

- * Good level of control, well composed.
- * A dynamic image that draws the reader in.
- * Clean composition in a setting that could easily contribute to cluttered image.

Feature Profile

“Cleaning ‘Round the Clock”

Bryan Barks

Odyssey Newsmagazine, Clarke Central High School

February 2007

Features

February 2007

Cleaning ‘round the clock

From dead opossums in the ceiling to debris stuffed under desks, second shift custodian “Miss Emma” Brown has seen everything that happens at Clarke Central High School. But still, she manages to smile.

Story and Layout
Bryan Barks
Features Writer



Photo by Holly Davis

Above: MISS EMMA BROWN, CCIS. Miss Emma Brown smiles up at the afternoon to begin cleaning. By working quickly, she is able to finish the entire building in 10 hours.

Bleat flickering fluorescent lights, Clarke Central High School custodian Emma Brown mops the bathroom floor, sticky with urine, her watch strikes midnight as she peels a used condom from the sink.

Each night, Brown, affectionately referred to as “Miss Emma,” walks through the halls of CCIS, cleaning bathrooms, offices and classrooms. An employee of the Clarke County School District for thirteen years, Miss Emma is one of seven custodians expected to arrive for work at 2 p.m. and leave the school after midnight. “I go to bed after 12, get up about 11:30 (p.m.), and it’s like my day is gone,” said Miss Emma. “I have to get ready for work – for the night shift. I don’t like it, but I have to deal with it. I know I have to work to make a living.”

In previous years, Miss Emma worked the day shift, but in August 2006, she was directed to rearrange her schedule in order to work the night shift. “The day shift job was – oh man, I loved it. Morning shift was my best time for working,” she said. “I

really wasn’t my choice to take on the night shift.”

Since her transition to the night shift, Miss Emma has found it difficult to work and make time for her husband and 14-year-old son, Antonio. “I’ve really had to give up spending time with [Antonio]. I’ve had to give up helping him with his homework, talking to him, you know, just being a mother,” said Miss Emma. “I don’t get to sit down for dinner with my family anymore. I feel like I should be there for my son, but I just can’t be.”

Miss Emma’s husband, Herbert Brown, works a 12-hour shift as an operator for Cenward Plastic, leaving Antonio home alone for a large portion of the day. “I call Antonio during the day to make sure he’s OK, but I don’t get to just spend time with him. When I come home, he’s already asleep,” said Miss Emma.

Miss Emma does not see much of her son on school nights, but she always thinks of him. She carries a photo of him in her purse while she works, and when she returns home, she checks on him before going to sleep. “I’ll just peek into his room and say a

prayer for him. I’ll say, ‘Lord, thank you for watching over my baby.’”

Even with her difficult schedule, Miss Emma makes a conscious effort to spend time with her son whenever possible. “I’ll wake up at 6(a.m.) before he goes to school just to talk to him. I sit up in bed and listen to him talk about school,” she said.

Weekends also provide a time for Miss Emma to spend time with her son. When she has time off, she plans activities she thinks her son will enjoy. “He’s an outdoor person, so we play Frisbee as a family. Sometimes we get out there and rain one another. Other times we’ll just go for a long country drive,” she said. “I haven’t gotten to see my family much this year, so when I can see them, we have a good time.”

Miss Emma spends more than eight hours a day at CCIS, but for the majority of her shift, she is alone. At times, the empty building leaves Miss Emma with an overwhelming sense of loneliness. “In the beginning, I really felt isolated. I felt like I didn’t want to come into work,” she said. “Without the students, the building is so quiet. I miss all the students – really I do. I always love to see them smile, and I always like to approach people with a smile. I sort of miss that.”

Head custodian Joanne Long finds Miss Emma’s connection with the students touching. “She’s really friendly towards the students – she talks to them, tries to guide them in the right way. She loves giving the young people good advice,” said Long.

Although she does not get to spend as much time with students as she once did, Miss Emma appreciates the time she has to talk to students and teachers before they leave for the afternoon. “I have really gotten to watch the students over the years. I think the boys and girls are beautiful people,” she said. “Talking to them makes my day.”

Still, Miss Emma feels relieved when the building is clean and she can go home. “My favorite part of my job is clocking out. Being a custodian is an exhausting job. You do a lot of walking. You do a lot of pushing carts, sweeping stairways, picking up paper an

“I have really gotten to watch the students over the years. I think the boys and girls are beautiful people.”



Above: MISS EMMA BROWN. Miss Emma mops the hallway between a night and day shift when she is completing tasks most people do not enjoy. Miss Emma has a smile on her face.

the commode, off the floors. We find dirty condoms in the gym and stairways, to me, that’s filthy,” said Miss Emma. “Kids need to know that this is not a motel. We have to see these things every day.”

Even with the challenges that are presented to her on a daily basis, Miss Emma knows that without the services of the custodial staff, CCIS would not be a functional learning environment. “If all the custodians happened to take a day off – oh boy, it would be the biggest mess you’ve ever seen! The tables wouldn’t be clean, trash not pulled. Dr. Essam would go up on top of the roof!” she said, laughing.

Despite some students’ lack of respect for the custodial staff, most are thankful for what Miss Emma does. “Even though some students don’t show their appreciation in a lot of ways, I know people like to come in and smell a clean bathroom, and the teachers like to have a clean room,” she said. “Teachers sometimes stop us in the hall and say, ‘Thank you for cleaning my room,’ or ‘your building looks real good.’ When that happens, it makes me really want to work on and do a little better.”

Regardless of the sometimes grueling nature of her job, Miss Emma gets through the night with her sense of humor. “If you watched us during the night shift you’d see a lot of work get done. But you’d also see a lot of laughs, cracking jokes, smiling. You’d see us pulling together. And you’d see a very clean building,” she said.

With only seven people in the building during the night shift, the slightest noise can be startling – and hilarious. “We accidentally brighten each other a lot. One time, me and some other custodians were taking out the trash when we heard a noise. We all halted and took off running – we didn’t even take time to look back!” laughed Miss Emma. “When we get back to the building, we were all out of breath and laughing so hard.”

During long nights, Miss Emma’s colleagues find her cheerful attitude encouraging. “It’s a good feeling when you see Emma,” said Long. “She always has something good to say and the other custodians respect what she says. She is really a good worker to have on staff!”

Although initially, switching to the night shift was difficult for Miss Emma, she has found ways to appreciate the isolated nature of her job, including self-reflection and prayer. “When I’m working by myself, it gives me time to pray, to talk to God. I really have to stay close to God. I have to ask him to pull me through,” said Miss Emma. “To me, God is a spirit, but I know He can hear. He can hear me cry, worry ... without God’s strength I could not make it through this job or through my life.”

— Emma Brown,
second-shift custodian

the ground,” said Miss Emma. “People just don’t realize how tired it makes you.”

While most students acknowledge the presence of the custodial staff, Miss Emma feels that many people do not understand how difficult her job can be. “People don’t realize that we really have to get out here and work after they’ve messed up [the building],” she said. “To me, they don’t know until they become a custodian what we have to do and what we have to look at when we come into this building.”

Being a custodian allows Miss Emma to have an all-encompassing perspective of CCIS – a perspective which, at times, she wishes she did not have. “The custodians find it all. We see everything that happens in the building,” she said. “One year we found a dead opossum up in the ceiling. It had a smell that nobody could figure out where it was coming from. The more we sprayed air freshener, the more it smelled. We had to call the maintenance man to come find it. I couldn’t take it. I just turned around and left.”

Animals are not the only surprises awaiting unsuspecting custodians. “We find students having sex in the building. We have to walk in the bathroom and pull students off

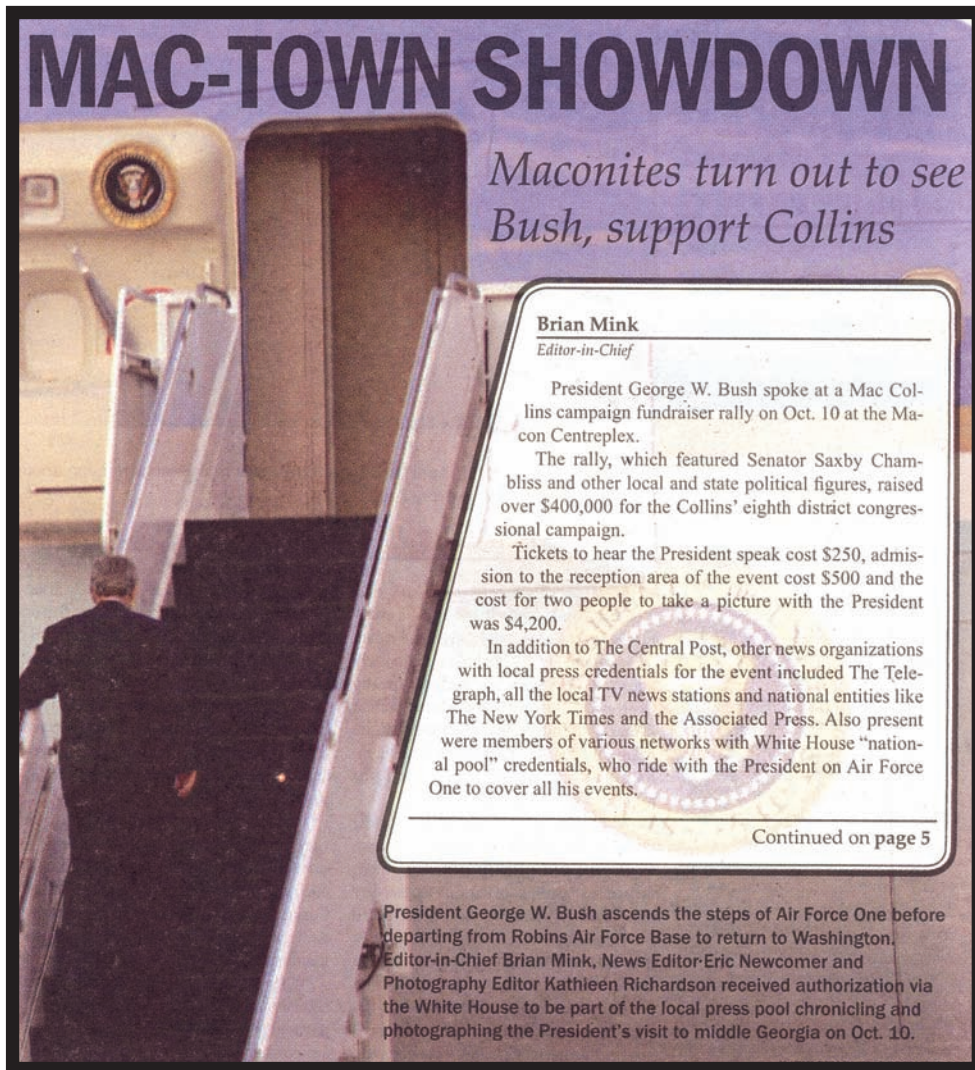
Judge’s Comments:

* “Cleaning ‘round the clock” profiles an interesting subject: a janitor. Her story is told with colorful detail, including mopping sticky urine from floors. But the story goes beyond her work life, which is what makes it a strong profile. Writer Bryan Barks also paints a picture of the subject’s home life and her family struggles. These details and insights- which nearly draw the reader in- set the story apart, especially considering the subject matter- great profiles look at more than the star athlete or a student. They remind us everyone has a story to share.

Headline Writing

Brian Mink

The Central Post, Central High School



MAC-TOWN SHOWDOWN

Maconites turn out to see Bush, support Collins

Brian Mink
Editor-in-Chief

President George W. Bush spoke at a Mac Collins campaign fundraiser rally on Oct. 10 at the Macon Centreplex.

The rally, which featured Senator Saxby Chambliss and other local and state political figures, raised over \$400,000 for the Collins' eighth district congressional campaign.

Tickets to hear the President speak cost \$250, admission to the reception area of the event cost \$500 and the cost for two people to take a picture with the President was \$4,200.

In addition to The Central Post, other news organizations with local press credentials for the event included The Telegraph, all the local TV news stations and national entities like The New York Times and the Associated Press. Also present were members of various networks with White House "national pool" credentials, who ride with the President on Air Force One to cover all his events.

Continued on page 5

President George W. Bush ascends the steps of Air Force One before departing from Robins Air Force Base to return to Washington. Editor-in-Chief Brian Mink, News Editor Eric Newcomer and Photography Editor Kathleen Richardson received authorization via the White House to be part of the local press pool chronicling and photographing the President's visit to middle Georgia on Oct. 10.

Judge's Comments:

* Three very creative headlines that played on words but still effectively described content of story.

House Editorials

“Soft Drink Expelled From Schools”

Warrior’s Word, Southwest Georgia Academy

Soft drinks expelled from schools

The crime: encouraging unhealthy habits and causing obesity in children and young adults. The alleged criminals: school vending machines. Schools all over the country, including our own, are witnessing the removal

of all soft drinks from their campuses. The state of Connecticut has already completely banned all soft drinks, including sports drinks like Powerade; New York and California have enforced similar measures.

These actions began after three major beverage companies voluntarily agreed to remove all soft drinks from schools because of recommendations by committees on school health, pressure from state legislatures, and the growing threat of lawsuits. Under this new plan, soft drinks are to be completely removed from schools by 2009 and are to be replaced with fruit juice, water, and milk options.

The overall goal of this change is to increase milk and therefore calcium consumption, to do away with a major contributor to dental cavities and enamel erosion, and most importantly to reduce

caloric intake to help in lowering obesity rates in children.

In recent decades, the percentage of overweight children has done nothing but steadily increase. Approximately one in every six children in the U.S. is overweight, and one in every three is at risk for becoming overweight. Obesity can and does lead to chronic illnesses such as asthma, type two diabetes, orthopedic complications, and more importantly, heart disease and hypertension.

But will these measures make the intended difference? Restricting what students can get their hands on at school won't improve the damage that is done at home. Good eating (and drinking) habits have to be taught to children at home. Moreover, calories come from more than just sodas. What about the types and amounts of food that students consume at lunch and breakfast?

Perhaps the real culprit in this matter is nothing more than physical inactivity. The fault is not to be found with vending machines. The actions against soft drinks appear to be no more than an easy way out for politicians eager to make the claim that they have done something to reduce the incidence of obesity in children.

Numerous tests have been conducted to examine the effects of soft drinks on children, all with varying results. Not much can be assured about this new plan. However, one thing is for sure. Students at school who want to enjoy a Coke will now have to go elsewhere.

Judge's Comments:

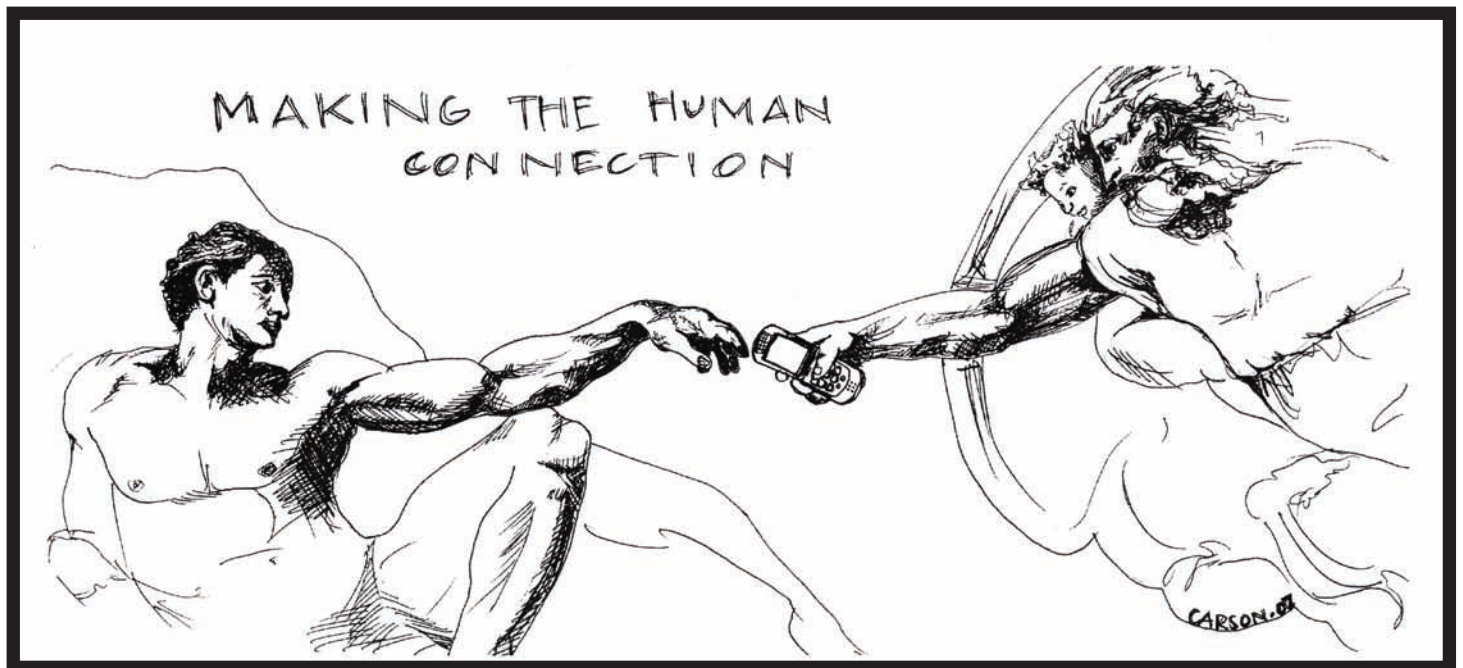
*** The editorial immediately kicks off with a strongly organized, rhythmic beat: “the crime.... The alleged criminals.” This theme is also found later in the piece when there is discussion of lawsuits and pressures on legislators — beautifully done! The body of the editorial adequately describes what is happening, the reasoning behind these decisions and why the editorial board disagrees with them. The staff offers its own opinions/conclusions and wraps up with a strong kicker at the end.**

Illustration

Carson Hale

“Technology Blocks Personal Contact”

Southerner, Grady High School



Judge's Comments:

- * Nice use and connection to illustrate story
- * Creative way to incorporate masterpiece into everyday life.

In-Depth News Story

“Outsourced Custodians Cause Teacher Complaints”

Emma Din

Southerner, Grady High School

Outsourced custodians cause teacher complaints

by Emma Din
Metal chairs were piled on top of two \$7,000
Mannings and two garneys. Medical
equipment sat on the floor and a file rack stood in
the hall with papers scattered. Two weeks after the
urniture was moved to clear the floor for washing,
however, the lab still awaited its cleaning and
couldn't be used for instruction.
Grady's Health Academy teacher, Ms. Sandra
Holt, was shocked to find the expensive health
lab in such disarray when she came back to
school after the winter break. Upset about her
own environment, Ms. Ukah questioned the
effectiveness of outsourcing custodial work.
“I feel like when people have a stake or
ownership in something, they take better care
of the building,” Ms. Ukah said. “But if you're
outsourced you're just here to move along, get
hired, done as quick as possible and get out. They



MR. CLEAN: Blakey Worthy, an outsourced GCA custodian, alternates dusting the halls and vacuuming the stairs. He doesn't feel like a part of Grady.
According to Mr. Jose McCall, the school's building engineer, GCA Services has been in charge of nighttime cleaning at Grady since April 2005. The company is a national provider of facility services.

“In the rooms, we sweep the classrooms daily; spot mop the classrooms daily; pull the trash; clean the desk tops once a week [and] dust computers twice a week,” said Jackie Holt, the GCA manager for Grady. “In the bathrooms we clean toilets, mop, deodorize and remove graffiti.”
According to Ms. Carrie MacBrien, Grady's Magnet coordinator, the outsourced custodial staff begins work at the end of the school day. During school hours, a set custodial staff employed by Grady takes care of day maintenance.
“First thing in the morning, we check the whole school,” said Ms. Genovese Williams, who has been a member of the daytime staff for 20 years. “A lot of things we get as they come, such as spills and [broken] glass. We check the bathrooms, clean outside after lunch [and] do minor cleaning.”

see CUSTODIANS page 9

CUSTODIANS face criticism, work against Grady grime

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because the heavy cleaning is done at night.”
Lately, an increasing number of Grady teachers have expressed concern about the quality of the nighttime cleaning staff's work.
“I end up with a lot of complaints that they didn't stock the toilet paper, put in paper towels, didn't empty a bin in a teacher's room, didn't mop places because there are smudges on the floor or didn't clean a toilet,” Principal Dr. Vincent Murray said.

As complaints have increased, criticisms about the concept of outsourcing cleaning have spread among the teachers.
“Having a contract custodial staff, rather than a dedicated one, is a terrible idea,” said an anonymous Grady teacher, who feels her room is only moderately swept and cleaned and is rarely mopped. “Contract workers have no reason to be vested.”

Employees of GCA Services, the outsourced cleaning company currently employed by Atlanta Public Schools, feel the claim is unjust. According to Holt, the company workers are dedicated to the building and the students.

“They care a great deal about the school,” Holt said. “I have people who provide services they don't get paid for. It's not about the company contract or benefits. The relationships are what makes them clean a little bit harder in a room.”

APS began outsourcing custodial work around eight years ago. According to Dr. Murray, the switch was made to increase efficiency and decrease financial costs. APS grants benefit packages to all school system workers.

Outsourced workers, however, receive benefits from the contract.

“The district is all about the students and student achievement,” Dr. Murray said. “They went for the cheaper plan that would save a lot more money. The savings are tremendous and the money [can] be diverted to instruction and important programs.”

Some teachers, however, think the cut in cost isn't worth the sacrifice of a clean facility.
“They've done the students a terrible disservice by cutting funds for a cleaner environment,” Ms. Ukah said.

The decision to switch from in-house cleaning to outsourcing involved various parties within the Facilities Services Division, members of the Human Resources Department and Finance Department and a school representative. Valerie Thomas, APS executive director of facilities, initiated the switch, according to APS resource manager, Anisa Bradford.

“The Facilities Services Division originally came up with the idea as a means of evaluating potential alternatives to delivering custodial services to schools, which could potentially overcome high employee turnover, inconsistent levels of service [and] high absenteeism at the time,” Thomas said.

In the past, members of Grady's night crew were hired at APS employees. They were individually known by many staff members and took care of special requests.
“The non-outsourced crew I knew personally. I could have informal conversations with them and make special requests and know it would be done,” Dr. Murray said. “With the present [outsourced] crew, I can still make requests, but they may or may not get done.”

With the in-house night crew, however, a few workers cleaned a large amount of space and often didn't cover the entire school.
“The current night crew is on the clock—they don't just have Grady, so they generally finish around 8 o'clock and go to the next job,” Dr. Murray said. “They cover the entire building [though] and guarantee a little of everything gets touched.”

Under Thomas, APS created a business proposal to pursue contract custodial services. The proposal addressed issues such as

increasing the level of operational efficiency and improving the consistency of services and the level of customer satisfaction. The original implementation began with a pilot program.

“We started out with a pilot program involving eight facilities and this has grown to over 45,” Thomas said.

Grady staff, however, has mixed feelings about this business plan. Yet according to a Sauslemer survey, some teachers have only had good experiences with the custodians.

“During the volleyball season, the guy who worked in the gym was very nice and seemed interested in how the girls were doing that season,” said Mr. Paul Nsakolun, the girls' volleyball coach. “He seemed to exemplify the staff members of the cleaning crew who were always polite when I spoke to them. Last year, a couple of them had Grady connections and always struck up friendly conversations when I was at school working late.”

Others, meanwhile, have had burns damaged or misplaced by the custodians and feel their rooms receive little cleaning.

“The worst is when they have to wax the floors,” said another anonymous teacher, who feels her room is poorly cleaned. “They have no respect for teachers' things and they never put things back as they found them when they are finished.”

Another teacher anonymously stated that after the winter break, he found items from his room in other classrooms. Though his floors were shiny, his trash cans were still full.

While Thomas acknowledges that schools have had some inconsistency issues, she remains a proponent of outsourcing. She believes the program is beneficial in terms of ensuring the daily availability of necessary resources.

According to Dr. Murray, the nighttime crew is very methodical and follows strict procedures for cleaning. They have an agenda and “everything is parceled out to two people on their staff.” Each custodian is assigned certain rooms and is allowed to spend a specific amount of time on each floor.

“You have human beings cleaning up behind human beings, which means there will be human error; things will be missed,” Holt said. “We don't purposely not do things.”

The custodians have complaints as well. They find toilet paper rolls in the toilet, bodily fluids on the floor, soap dispensers empty onto the floor and graffiti-covered walls. Students who hang around unsupervised after school also prevent them from cleaning.

“Your school's not going to be as clean as it could be because I'm baby-sitting, doing security and managing the cleaning—something will go without,” said Darrell Hutchinson, the leader of the GCA night crew. “[We're] expected to do more than we're hired to do.”

Due to complaints about unsatisfactory work, the previous three cleaning companies were fired. The school has experienced two issues Thomas hoped to overcome—high employee turnover and service inconsistency.

“When you start looking at it, it can be the company all the time,” Dr. Murray said. “The previous crews were always being faulted for what they weren't doing and the same thing is happening now. Cleaning is personal. No one can do it better than you.”

DO YOUR PART:

Grady's cleanliness isn't just the custodial staff's responsibility. Here's what you can do to help out:

- Keep trash cans by the doors.
- Always flush and don't jam the toilet.
- Don't write on the walls. If the custodial staff has to worry about cleaning walls, they won't have time to perform their normal tasks.
- Clean up after yourself—candy and gum aren't decoration.

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The Southerner surveyed 17 faculty members about their opinion of the custodial staff's effectiveness on a scale from one to five, five being the most effective.



Angela Sullivan

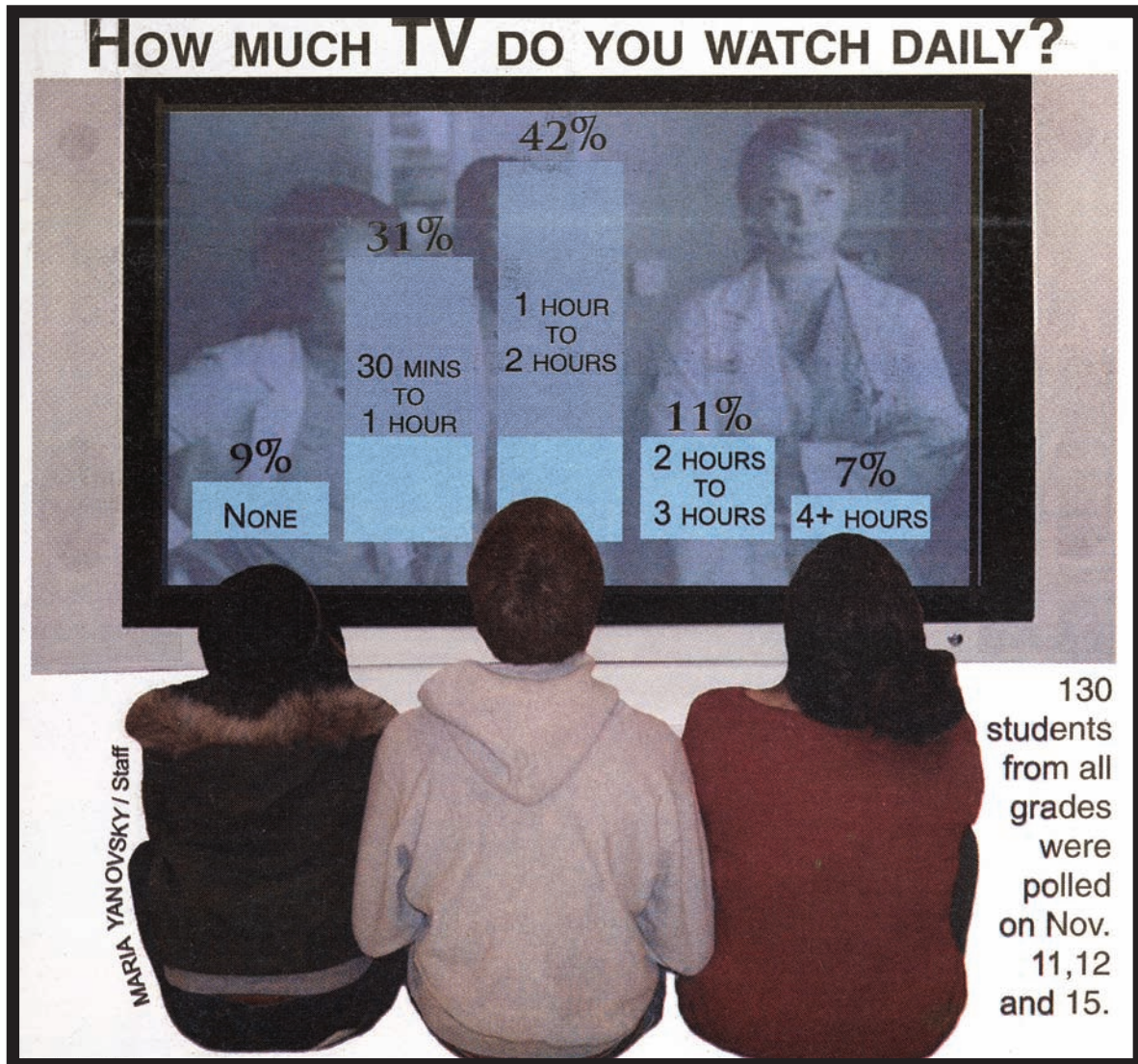
Judge's Comments:

* Thorough reporting. Emma used interviews with diverse sources to paint a complete picture of the problem: School district outsourced custodial services to save money and got poor performance. On its fourth cleaning company, the school district still receives complaints. Good job, Emma.

Information Graphic

Maria Yanovsky

The messenger, Northview High School



Judge's Comments:

- * Very creative.
- * Gives all information needed.