POLITICAL ANIMALS

Revolving Door Works Again
*He covered the sheriff, now he'll spin for him*

Richard Connelly

Alan Bernstein, the longtime political reporter for the *Houston Chronicle*, is quitting the paper to join the staff of Harris County Sheriff Adrian Garcia.

Bernstein ended his 29 years at the *Chron* May 15 and starts with Garcia at the end of the month.

"I got an unsolicited job offer and I investigated it," he tells Hair Balls. "I enjoy the job I have today, but when I checked it out it seemed there could be a lot of headway to be made serving the public in this way."

He'll be "Director of Public Affairs," working with government officials, the rank and file of the department, and overseeing the spokespeople who give out the details of incidents the HCSO is involved in.

Bernstein noted that Garcia ran on a platform of transparency that he favors, although that transparency doesn't extend to Bernstein divulging his salary.

"That will be a matter of public record once I start getting paid," he says.

Local blogger Uncle Darrell seems to have gotten online with the news first, as far as we can tell, and he makes the point that Bernstein's articles on Garcia are now "fair game." We've done a cursory search and haven't discovered anything as egregious as the puff piece *Chron* reporter Kathy Walt did on Governor Rick Perry shortly before being hired by him.

Bernstein has been a constant target of Murray Newman's Life at the Harris County Criminal Justice Center blog, although some detente eventually transpired.

The soon-to-be-former *Chron*ster couldn't deny that the tenuous status of the print--journalism world played a part in his decision.

"I really enjoyed my job here, and I'm rooting for everyone who's here," he says.

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CRIME

Wayne-O the Ageless
*Mug shot or glamour shot, he stays Our Wayne*

Richard Connelly

The legendary Wayne Dolcefino pled no contest to trespassing charges in connection with an Austin County incident.

He got onto the farm/ranch property of a Houston architect who was part of an exposé on Harris County contracts. We're somehow thinking shaky handheld cameras and hidden devices were involved.

He'll do some probation-type stuff and get deferred adjudication.

But the episode has presented us with the Dolcefino mug shot, circa 2008.

Compare that to Wayne's mug from the KTRK Web site.

You know, we guess Wayne is Wayne, whether it's a mug shot in front of a cinder-block background or a glamour shot taken by a highly trained professional under optimal conditions and lighting. There's only so much you can do.

Such a charming smile, though...on the first one.

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EDUMACATION

An Aggie Prodigy
*Houston nine-year-old is a physics whiz*

Paul Knight

Child prodigies are allegedly a delicate bunch, and a nine-year-old Houston boy is in that group.

He's Adam Atanas and he recently finished a semester of physics classes at Texas A&M.

"It's very easy to see them as little circus monkeys and they're not," says Dr. David Toback, who served as Atanas's professor and mentor this semester. "This is a kid that really finds the science of the stars and universe exciting and he's following his bliss. His mom does a wonderful job of letting him follow that and not getting in his way, and she's not trying to turn him into anything."

Toback first met Atanas at one of A&M's Saturday Morning Physics sessions, which are open to the public. When Toback asked how many people in the audience understood Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*, Atanas was the only person to raise his hand.

"I said, 'Okay, you're a liar;' but I was wrong," Toback says, adding that later in the lecture, "I was showing the deuterium process...and [Atanas] said, 'That's not really right, is it? That's not really the dominant process in stellar evolution.' I just thought, 'Good Lord.'"

After the lecture, Toback hunted down Atanas and his mother, and after talking with them he invited Atanas to attend one of his physics classes, and the boy did one or two times each week.

"Frankly, he was asking much better and much harder questions than most students in the class. If anything, I kind of need to quiet him down a little because he was intimidating the
class. If anything, I kind of need to quiet him down a little because he was intimidating the other students," Toback says.

Now that the semester is over, Toback has sent Atanas to a professor in the physics department at Rice University. Atanas's mother is working to get him a grad student as a tutor, because "the class was fun, but he has questions and he wants to go off and answer them," according to Toback.

"I think his primary job is to enjoy his childhood and grow up and keep having fun, but he has a special gift," Toback says. "He loves what he's doing, and he's not being pushed, so it wouldn't surprise me if he could stay doing this."

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