

# *Carole Lutness Receives the Robbyn Panitch Memorial Award*

Local activist and Democratic candidate for the 38<sup>th</sup> AD Assembly seat, Carole Lutness, was awarded the *Robbyn Panitch Memorial Award* at the annual Department of Mental Health Professional Social Workers luncheon on Wednesday, March 5, 2008. Presented by State Senator Mark Ridley-Thomas (SD26) on behalf of the AFSCME (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees) Local 2712, the award was in recognition of her “ceaseless dedication and support of all professional social workers employed by the Department of Mental Health and Health Services.” AFSCME Local 2712 president, Theodora McKenna went on to say, “Carole has demonstrated the highest level of social, political and job safety awareness that ensures that Los Angeles County social workers will always be able to focus more on the needs of our clients than our personal safety.”

Robbyn Panitch, a Psychiatric Social Worker for the Los Angeles Department of Mental Health was stabbed by a psychotic client whom she was counseling at a Santa Monica mental health clinic, February 21, 1989. Caught up in a round of budget and service cutbacks shortly before her death, Panitch had expressed fears because "the caseload was getting bigger and bigger and people were getting crazier." Lutness commented, “The Governor’s current cut backs are again creating severe staff shortages and a large increase in caseloads which means seriously mentally ill clients are deprived of the necessary services to help them remain stable in the community. This is yet another example of the budget being balanced on the backs of the poor and disenfranchised.”

