

HHHTA

Communicator

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Unity and Strength

December 2005



Mel's Thoughts

The leaves are gone, we've had our first taste of wintry weather and the holidays are here already. How time flies when you're having fun – and working hard! I hope that all of you have had a relatively smooth first four months of the school year and you're ready for a well earned vacation. I know I am! Whether this is your first year or your 30th plus, a career in education always remains both challenging and, at times, exhausting. With an appreciation for all that you do, the role of our union is to be there in whatever possible capacity you might need. To paraphrase from the mission statement of our parent union, New York State United Teachers' (NYSUT), our union role is to continually work towards improving the professional, economic and personal lives of our members and their families. To achieve these goals we constantly strive to serve you better by listening to your needs and doing our best to fairly and accurately represent all of our members.

In order to accomplish the above I have been visiting our schools and I hear your concerns regarding testing, health and safety, child care, new teacher and para stress, etc. We will address these

concerns with the District and work towards resolving as many of these issues as possible – many situations have been amiably resolved already. If I haven't been to your building yet – I will – and I will listen! I do want to give credit to our administration for working closely with me, our other members of the executive board and our building and para reps to resolve as many conflicts as possible. Of course, as is often the case, as soon as one issue is solved another crops up i.e. our disagreement with the district in regard to our members safe arrival time during delayed opening days. Hopefully this too can be resolved in a mutually beneficial fashion.

Have a happy and healthy holiday season and, as always, keep in mind that if there's anything the union can do to make life easier please don't hesitate to ask.

Mel A. Stern

Notes from the Executive Board

Health & Safety

Many times staff fill out work orders in their buildings to have items addressed that need repair. Many times the response to these items takes longer than we would like. Obviously these items are prioritized and what is deemed more important is addressed first.

Please be aware that if the work order you fill out requests work or repair of an item that you consider a health and safety issue to you and/or your students

you should consider involving your health & safety rep.

The health and safety committee has generated a form that reports situations directly to your building principal and central office. If it is determined to be a health and safety issue, the response time will change dramatically. Taking this step may, in fact, help avoid a more serious consequence.

Sorry that Signal Hill was omitted from last months listing of schools health and safety reps. Signal Hill's rep. is Christina Retzlaff.

Rick Volpe

New Member Committee News

Our committee is up and running and working on ideas to help our new teachers adjust to, and meet the high expectations of our school district. We are also planning a workshop to help teachers become familiar with the terms and benefits provided in our contract. Our committee will be meeting monthly during the new year. If you have any suggestions for us please contact me or the member from your building. We still need a committee member for High School East.

Chestnut Hill	Jason Brittman
Forest Park	Liz Fishman
Otsego	Jessie Civelia
Paumanok	Erica Reinard
Signal Hill	Mary Picarello
Sunquam	Joanne Geller
Vanderbilt	Gloria Cucinello
Candlewood	Richard Haase
West Hollow	Suzanne Sugarman
H.S. West	Ericka Verderbor

Karen Cullen

Fall Fest turned Fun Fest

Fall Fest 2005 held at Belle Verde on November 10th was a success. The party was attended by almost 100 members. The evening consisted of fine food, good "spirits" and a busy dance floor. During the evening a 50-50 raffle raised \$150.00 for the union scholarship fund. In the end this was an event enjoyed by all. Hope to see more of you at the spring social.

Patti Fox

Paraprofessionals – Class Trips

It has been called to my attention that Paraprofessionals have been asked to pay for class trips. Please note paraprofessionals **do not** pay for class trips. Class trips are a part of a paraprofessional's job, and they should not be expected to pay.

Shirley Cooke

"Contact Your Elected Officials"

www.nysut.org

Elected officials cast their votes based on concerns voiced by their constituents. It is important for you to contact your representatives in Washington and Albany on critical issues ranging from educational legislation and funding to union and budget issues. New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), our state affiliate union, makes it easy for you to contact your State and Federal legislators. You can express your views by going to www.nysut.org and simply clicking the "CONTACT YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS" link. Enter your zip code and it will list your State Senator and Assembly representatives and Federal member of Congress and their contact information. You do not even need to write your own letter – simply click a topic and one of NYSUT's pre-written letters will be sent in your name. It takes less than five minutes to participate in the political process. Friends and family can also contact their elected officials using NYSUT's webpage.

While you may think that sending a pre-written form letter is not important – it is! Sending a letter, either pre-written or in your own words, lets the elected officials know your view and adds one more voice influencing their vote.

If everyone does a little, we can make a big difference in public policy.

Nicole Darling, Vote/Cope Chairperson

NYSTRS Conference Update

This years New York State Teachers' Retirement System 85th Annual Delegate Meeting was held November 13th and 14th in Saratoga Springs, New York. We attended seminars over the two days that

covered current regulations, future proposals and delegate concerns.

The three main seminars were; “How can you get the highest pension possible – legally!”, “The two biggest decisions you must make when considering retirement”, and “The impact of divorce on NYSTRS benefits.” Information regarding these and other topics can be found on the NYSTRS website. The address is www.nystrs.org. If you would prefer a video consultation to answer questions regarding retirement the closest locations are:

Dix Hills
James E. Allen Elementary School
762 Deer Park Road
and
Holbrook
Eastern Suffolk BOCES Regional
Information Center
15 Andrea Road

You may schedule a video consultation by calling NYSTRS at (800) 348-7298 ext 6100.

The following new legislation passed this year and is now in effect:

- **Patriot Plan Loan Repayment Extension:** Extends for one year a provision of the Patriot Plan suspending loan repayment obligation for members absent on military duty.
- **Service Credit for Certain Military Duty:** Makes service credit to members of public retirement systems called to active military duty on or after September 11, 2001 non-contributory.
- **Notification Requirements for Potential Privacy Violations:** Requires state agencies and businesses to notify persons of the potential unauthorized acquisition of vulnerable personal information.

See website for further information concerning these laws.

Legislation for the next session includes a 25/55 proposal. This would allow members of tier 3 and 4 to retire at age 55 or with a minimum of 25 years

service and receive no penalty. Currently members of tier 3 and 4 must acquire 30 years of service credit or reach age 62 (with less than 30 years) in order to receive the full 2% per year benefit. A person in tier 3 or 4 not meeting these requirements would only receive 1 2/3% benefit for each year of service. This is still a proposal – not a law!

One controversial idea still under discussion is to compensate tier 3 and 4 members who contributed 3% of their salary past the ten year requirement. One delegate suggested one month of service credit for each year of contribution made beyond the required ten. While the State Board believes in tier equity, funding for such a proposal does not seem feasible at this time.

As always, if any of these issues are of concern to you, we encourage you to let your voices be heard in Albany. ***Donna Gross and Patti Fox***

Have a very union holiday

Be sure to look for the union label as you do your gift shopping this season.

Check the AFL-CIO’s “do-buy” list for products made by union workers. Avoid the merchants and manufacturers on the AFL-CIO’s “do not buy” boycott list.
www.unionlabel.org/boycott_list.jsp. or go to www.shopunionmade.org.

Statement of deductions sent

Members and agency fee payers who participate in any NYSUT Member Benefits programs through payroll or pension deduction will be receiving a statement of deductions in the mail. This is not an invoice, but a statement outlining programs the member participates in and the amount of deduction per program per pay period or monthly pension benefit.

The statement of deductions is sent to payroll and pension deduction participants twice a year for informational purposes. Any questions should be directed to NYSUT Members Benefits at (800) 626-8101 or e-mailed to benefits@nysutmail.org.

Important – Updated – IRS Information

1. As of January 1, 2006 the maximum 403B (tax shelter) contribution limit will be \$15,000. This is a \$1,000 increase from 2005.
2. The Social Security Taxable Wage base in 2005 was \$90,000. In 2006, this will increase by \$4,200 to \$94,200.

Ed Nordstrom

H.H.H.T.A Website News

Over the last few months, I have been assessing the uses and purpose of our site. Seeing requests coming in now, I have recently decided that the site could benefit from a more flexible design, which will allow multiple users to post information easily. Over the next few weeks, I will be redesigning the site on a test server, which I will publish when it is completed.

The new site should feature sections for each committee and each school to post information from latest news and announcements to upcoming meeting dates for interested viewers. Anyone with a specific request for what they would like to use our site to communicate, should let me know in person or by e-mailing mrhaase@optonline.net as soon as possible so I can take it into account when designing.

Richard Haase

Viewpoints from a Member

Often times, even the mere mention of mental illness, conjures up fear and very upsetting feelings. This is partially due to the unknown and fear. Physical medicine, as we see around us, has made tremendous strides in dealing with the myriad of physical issues that can affect us. All one needs to do is to walk into any of the major teaching, research hospitals in New York City. But has the treatment of emotional issues progressed to the same degree? The ability to remedy mental health issues from acute to chronic has not progressed at the same rate. Insurance companies prefer paying for medication rather than counseling. My feelings about this issue are the results of my forty-six year journey with my recently deceased sister through her schizophrenia. Yes, my journey was scary in

the early years. This was fueled simply by not knowing what it was. Not understanding how it affects the individual and involved family members adds more to the darkness. Along my journey with my sister, I've met many mental health specialists that not only treated her but also helped me to come to terms with her disease and its impact upon me. They have helped me deal with my own frustration that I could not make her illness go away. My role was to support and advocate for her. Many organizations have Employee Assistance Programs that can benefit individuals and further their understanding. Locally, we also have the Suffolk County Mental Health Association on Wellwood Avenue in Lindenhurst. Nationally, we have NAMI (National Alliance for the Mentally Ill). Both of these organizations offer tremendous guidance and help in addition to Employee Assistance Programs for the various emotional issues that may confront us and our families. Five years ago I began to devote my time to a mental health agency in Manhattan. This organization was taking care of my sister in a community residence. My association with this organization has brought me even closer to mental health issues. More importantly it has brought me closer to those affected. In addition to my sister, it has added many more faces and stories to an important issue that can affect anyone.

Vincent McCambley - Sr. Building Rep H.S. West

What's New Classified

Candlewood M.S.

1. **Pat Rombous – gave birth to a Baby Boy**
2. **Heather McLaughlin – was married this summer and is now Heather Betz.**
3. **Heather Sandberg & Tom Neary were married**
4. **Kristen Joos – is awaiting the birth of her child.**
5. **Elaine Spitzer – is a new grandmother.**

H.H.H.T.A. Communicator

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HAPPY HOLIDAYS

