

VC ECHOES

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 2

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From The President: The Heart and Soul of the Union

The hectic, *hurry up so you can hurry up some more* month of September is over. Thank goodness the remaining nine months are much easier. The months of October through June simply consist of sleepless nights, endless worry and limitless work. You're in the home stretch. Piece of cake!

If you have questions, need information, or desire support or advice, contact a building representative. The names of your building reps are on the back of the union structure hand-out that was available at commencement. Your building reps are your most vital link to the *who, what, where, when, why, and how* of the union.

(THAT'S YOU! YOU ARE THE UNION!)

Your building reps bring your concerns back to the Executive Council (your elected representatives). Your building reps and union officers are your spokes-people. They carry messages that support the entire educational process, while working diligently to modify and improve what we already do so well: educate the youth of Valley Central. It is YOU, the staff in the trenches, that most clearly see and understand the impact that changing legislation and policy have on our ability to teach and our students' ability to learn. It is YOU, therefore, that must always remain the



driving force and, therefore, the heart and soul of the union.

In keeping with this, new professional development regulations require union involvement. *(continued p. 7)*

Kathy Sahl named New York State Elementary Environmental Teacher of the Year

It is a great pleasure to announce that our colleague, Mrs. Kathy Sahl, has been named New York State Elementary Environmental Teacher of the Year. Kathy received this award at a dinner held in Syracuse on Sunday, September 26, 1999.

Kathy was recently honored as Orange County Elementary Environmental Teacher of the Year in May, 1999. She was nominated by her colleagues for her involvement in developing an environmental center at the East Coldenham School and for her dedi-



cation to teaching her students about the importance of protecting the environment. Kathy will now be considered at the National level.

**CONGRATULATIONS,
Kathy !**

~ John Bonagura

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *Join the PTA, page 2*
- *October is the month to consider Insurance Options, page 4-5*
- *Highlights of VCTA September Council Meeting, page 9*
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Jill Sutter nominated for State Teacher Award

How often we've said, "If only parents could spend a day in the classroom to see what really goes on." Well, Valley Central Board of Education member Mark Tierney did just that. He became a room parent and classroom volunteer and spent many hours in Jill Sutter's third-grade classroom in Montgomery Elementary. So awed by what he saw, he nominated her for the New York State Board of Regents in finding and nurturing the strengths of each student and fostering trusting relationships among pupils, parents, teachers and administrators.

Mr. Tierney said that he was very impressed by "the consistency of her upbeat personality. She always had the kids turned on and tuned in to her. She was always listening and responding with her wonderful attitude." Filled with enthusiasm about what he observed, he described how she could be "bombarded by a dozen eight year olds at a time, and yet she could address the situation to the satisfaction of each child." Excited and proud that he had

nominated Jill Sutter and "brought her to the surface" he boldly proclaimed, "We should clone her!"

Jill's third grade teaching partner, Cathy Sowa, described her as "a dynamic, nurturing and dedicated teacher who is of exceptional character in all personal and professional areas." In her letter to the State Board of Regents she discussed many areas that make Jill an expert in classroom management. Cathy explained how Jill has designed her behavior contract with the premise that "we all want to be good." It is a reward system that gives young children "a personal interest to succeed".

Principal Margaret Lyons wrote that it is not only Jill's creativity that "distinguishes her from other fine teachers. She has a keen sensitivity to each child and a genuine con-

cern for each child's success. She epitomizes the personal side of teaching - the human, nurturing side that not only teaches, but reaches each student, and appreciates each child as a wondrous being."

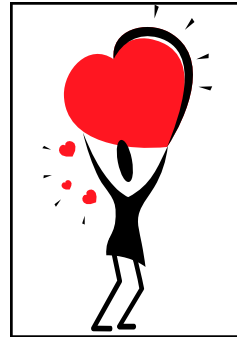
Parents and students also wrote letters to the Board of Regents praising Jill and describing how she treats each child with respect, makes learning fun, always has a positive comment and very important to the students, She never yells!

The staff at Montgomery Elementary is thrilled with Jill's nomination. The kindness and genuine concern she so generously gives to her students she also shares with her colleagues each day. The upbeat personality Mr. Tierney described has made Montgomery Elementary a special place to be. All who have had the pleasure to know Jill wish her good luck and the recognition she deserves.

~Kathleen Takvam

"Jill Sutter epitomizes the personal side of teaching - the human, nurturing side that not only teaches, but reaches each student and appreciates each child as a wondrous being."

cern for each child's success. She epitomizes the personal side of teaching - the human, nurturing side that not only teaches, but reaches each student, and appreciates each child as a wondrous being."



The "T" in PTO/PTA/PTSA is for VCTA members

The Valley Central Teachers' Association would like to thank our building PTO's (Mayb., Wal.), PTA's (Berea, E.C., M.S., Mont.), and PTSA (H.S.). These organizations work diligently on behalf of children and can be credited with many pro-education initiatives.

Our local parent-teacher groups sponsor programs and trips for students, provide guest speakers and leadership training, and formally recognize the efforts of staff in a variety of ways. Some of their efforts have even led to community action that directly impacts the safety of our chil-

dren. For example, the East Coldenham PTA was instrumental in bringing about the installation of the traffic light that now stands at the entrance to the school on Route 17K.

The T in these abbreviations represents teacher involvement and, therefore, the involvement of the many school employees that make up the Valley Central Teachers' Association. Many VCTA members already support their building PTA, PTO, or PTSA by attending meetings and fund raisers and/or by contributing the modest dues necessary for membership in one of these organizations (\$3

- \$5).

We encourage all VCTA members to support their building's parent-teacher group by responding to membership drives. Many of these groups utilize the membership drive as a fund-raiser. Additionally, the State PTA offers awards to local units with 100% participation. As a member you are welcome to attend meetings and may take as active or inactive a role as your schedule permits.

~ Tim Brown

A Conversation with Dr. Arthur Nugent

Although Dr. Arthur Nugent was officially appointed Superintendent of the District this past March, he began his first full year at the helm in September. Dr. Nugent is a lifelong resident of the area having grown up in Newburgh. He has an undergraduate and graduate degree in Music Education and earned his doctorate in School Administration from Fordham University. He taught for one year in West Seneca, NY, before coming to Valley Central in 1969. He taught music until 1974 at the Middle School. He served as assistant principal of the Middle School from 1974 through 1980 and served as principal of East Coldenham from 1980 through 1987. In 1987 he moved into Central Office Administration starting as Director of Personnel, and then held almost all the Assistant positions as they developed. Dr. Nugent recognizes the advantage he has in having worked his way up to his position over his thirty year career at VC. He says that it gives him a good understanding of the issues and challenges facing Valley Central because he understands the evolution and history of the District and shares the concerns of the community.

It was Mr. William Cocks, former MS principal, who gave Dr. Nugent his first administrative opportunity and Dr. Nugent credits Mr. Cocks with modeling for him the value of being forthright and honest in dealing with people. Dr. Nugent hopes that the VCTA membership will see him as a superintendent who will listen to their concerns and deal with them honestly while providing leadership for the District. Dr. Nugent recognizes the value of coming up from within. He said that it is “always

wonderful to have candidates from within because you know the quality of their work and their strengths before the interview”. However, he stressed that it is the District’s responsibility to always hire the best candidate for a position, whether from the inside or the outside. He feels the hiring of Mr. George St. Lawrence, as Director of Health, PE and Athletics, and the hiring of Mr. John Hunter, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction is evidence of his philosophy of hiring. When asked how the impending teacher shortage coupled with retirements and a salary scale below that of our neighbors will affect the District in the future, Dr. Nugent responded that it is his goal to provide the employees with an appealing positive work environment so that they will be enticed to stay. He stated that although he does not have control of compensation packages offered by other districts, he does have control over making the work environment pleasant for all employees. Teachers and other qualified employees do leave for reasons other than compensation. He recognizes the need for the District to support teachers through staff development, especially as we approach the New Professional Development Plan which calls for the mandatory 175 hours for new employees beginning in 2004. He said that he would definitely encourage VCTA members to develop and teach in-service courses, as long as they are appropriate and relevant to the needs of the staff.

When asked what challenges the District is facing, Dr. Nugent re-



sponded that our biggest challenge will be the implementation of our Bond Project including the realization of our Technology plan which will cata-

pult VC into the 21st century. He also recognizes the impact of a growing population on the District. He pointed out the three smallest classes have been the last three kindergarten classes so relief may be on the horizon for some of the elementary buildings, along with the relief that redistricting is already providing to Walden and Berea. Due to increased enrollment the MS and HS will continue to deal with the problem of overpopulation. He hopes that the Bond Building Project will help to alleviate the problem although we are probably two years away from its completion. “Because the District has no control over housing starts, we must deal with population issues as they arise: for example, new staff was added as part of the budgetary process last year to respond to these needs,” replied Superintendent Nugent.

One of the other challenges affecting the District is the achievement of the Academic Standards as required by the State. He recognizes the anxiety that these new standards have created for staff, students and parents. He hopes that Curriculum Mapping will assist us as a way to meet the state requirements by aligning the curriculum on each level to ensure necessary instruction for success on the next level. He said,

Continued on page 7

Dr. Nugent hopes that the VCTA membership will see him as a superintendent who will listen to their concerns and deal with them honestly...

October is Open Enrollment Month for Health Insurance

The VCTA Health and TSA Fair provided an opportunity for all VC employees to check out alternatives for Health Insurance. October is the month to change Health Care coverage if you would like to do so. If you picked up an information packet on one of the Health Care companies, then you will find an enrollment form inside. Fill out the enrollment form and send it to Polly Conigilio at Central Office by October 29th. Your coverage will become effective as of January 1, 2000 and continue until you make another change.

If you wish to change from an alternate health care company back to the Orange-Ulster

Schools Health Plan, contact Mrs. Conigilio at 457-3171 for an enrollment form.

Before you make any changes be sure that you have checked with your physicians to be sure that they accept that insurance.

Although the Association invited only three Health Care Companies to the Health Fair, by Federal Law you have the right to choose any HMO you prefer. You would need to contact that HMO on your own to arrange for enrollment. Be aware that the District will only pay a

single or family rate equal (or less) to the Orange-Ulster School District Plan. That rate is \$254 for single coverage and \$572 for family coverage. (This is the monthly rate that is paid on your behalf twelve months a year by the District.)

The VCTA does not recommend you choose any one company over the other; we encourage you to consider all your options and choose the coverage that best meets your needs.



Retirees can also opt for a HMO

If any retirees are interested in opting for HMO coverage rather than being covered by OUSDHP, they may do so. The Association has helped to make three Health Care Companies an alternative to the District's plan. Like active employees, retirees have the right to choose any HMO they prefer. However, if they don't use one of the companies the

Association has brought in, they must contact that company themselves. The change must be requested in October (by the 29th) by filling out an enrollment form and will take effect January 1, 2000. Retirees 55-64 would have the same HMO package offered to active members, while retirees 65 and over would have packages that coordinate with Medicare. If the

HMO costs more than the District is currently paying to OUSDHP, the retiree would have to cover the additional cost of the premium themselves. Retirees who do not need any insurance coverage because they are covered by a spouse can opt for a buyout. For more information on any of these options, please call the Union office at (914) 457-5899.

VCTA Health and TSA Fair a Success

Valley Central Employees were greeted by more than the usual coffee, bagels and muffins before this year's Convocation. Representatives from 6 TSA companies and 3 Health Care companies filled the lobby with information on their services, while the VCTA officers worked hard to keep up with the demand for totebags with the VCTA logo. Although the fair

only lasted an hour, it was convenient for employees to attend and many more people seemed to take advantage of the information being offered than during past fairs.

~ Patti Lunden

If you wish to change your health insurance coverage, you must

- (1) fill out the enrollment form provided by the company, and**
- (2) send it to Polly Conigilio at Central Office, by October 29th.**

The change in coverage will be effective January 1, 2000.

If you wish to switch from an HMO to OUSDHP, contact Polly Conigilio.

If you're considering GHI, MVP or Empire...

GHI HMO is the company that has taken over WellCare. The package that they are offering is the same as last year but it is important to make certain that your doctors accept GHI as the directory may have changed. There are two copies of the directory at the VCTA Office. If you would like to borrow one, please call Patti Lunden at 457-5899.

The rate for GHI is \$210 for single coverage and \$534 for family coverage per month which is less than what the District is paying OUSDHP, so if you choose GHI it will not cost you anything toward the premium.

The plan being offered by MVP has changed slightly. Coverage for students is only until age 23 instead of age 25 and the vision and dental coverage has been dropped. The change was made to lower the rate. **The rate for MVP for single coverage is \$238 which is less than what the District is paying. Therefore single coverage on MVP will not cost anything toward premium. However, family coverage will be \$591 which is \$19 more per month than the \$572 that the District is paying to**

The MVP Family Coverage Premium will require a pretax \$19 contribution from the Employee toward the monthly premium. If you live in Dutchess or Putnam, Westchester, or Rockland counties, then Empire will also require a contribution.

OUSDHP. The \$19 would be divided between your two paychecks per month and deducted pretax. If the OUSDHP rate goes up at least \$19 when the rate changes July 1, 2000, then you would not have to pay the premium for the remainder of the calendar year. The MVP plan selected for the District has a Point of Service (POS) option which allows the insured to go outside of the MVP Network in a similar manner to the OUSDHP. This option is the reason that the rate is not as competitive as Empire or GHI. If you utilize MVP and would not miss the POS option, please let Patti Lunden know for next year.

Empire is offering "Direct Connection" which has a better copay than the currently offered "Blue Choice". The Empire plan being offered is not the New York State Health Insurance Plan offered by some of our neighboring districts. (Empire administers that plan for the state, which is why it is sometimes referred to as Empire.). The Direct Connection Plan offered by Empire has two rates depending upon where you live. **If you live in Rockland, Westchester, Dutchess, or Putnam counties (or**



the city counties) the rate for single coverage is \$242 a month which is less than the District is paying for the OUSDHP. However the rate for family coverage is \$629.70 a month which is \$57.70 more a month than what the District is paying. The \$57.70 would be divided between your two paychecks per month and deducted pretax. That's only if you live in Dutchess, Putnam, Rockland or Westchester. If you live in Delaware, Orange, Sullivan or Ulster county, the rate for single coverage \$209.31 which is less than the District is paying and the rate for family coverage is \$544.22 per month, which is also less than what the District is paying.

Before changing your coverage, double check that your physicians accept the plan. Also compare the major points of the plan to your current plan. Be sure the services that you utilize are covered.

Consider Comparability

The open enrollment time is a good time to consider the issue of comparability. According to the Collective Bargaining Agreement, Article 25, D.1 (pg. 16) any teacher whose spouse provides comparable health insurance coverage must take the mandatory buyout of \$1800. According to the CBA, the spouse must be providing insurance, for the employee to be considered. If the spouse does not provide insurance then this article does not affect the employee. If the spouse does provide insurance, then that coverage must be comparable to the plan provided by the District.

The issue of comparing insurances is certainly not easy. The plan must be compared on the basis of the coverages provided and the potential out of pocket costs. These are found in the summary page of the plan. Once the comparability has been determined by the District, the employee has a course to follow if the does not agree with the District's conclusion. The buyout can be taken on a voluntary basis as long as the employee shows that he had alternate coverage.

The comparability decision is not one that never changes. Any time

there is a change in marital status or in insurance coverage, comparability must be considered again. It is not only important to inform the District of any changes; it is a contractual obligation. It is also in everyone's best interest to review various plans offered each year to be certain that you are getting the best coverage available to you.



TSA and Maximum Exclusion Allowance Compliance

On Convocation Day, Mr. Roden and a representative of Travelers Educators Retirement Services spoke about the District's plans to better monitor tax-sheltered or tax-deferred annuities to insure compliance with the IRS's maximum exclusion allowance rules. An article published in *The Bottom Line*, a NYSUT newsletter published for local leaders, endorses this safety measure.

The Employee Plans and Exempt Organizations division of the IRS is auditing public school Section 403(b) tax-deferred annuity plans, nationwide, because of "suspected abuse." Noncompliance with the maximum exclusion allowance calculation apparently is the major concern. This calculation determines how much an individual may contribute to her or his account. Generally, the limit is the lesser of 25% of gross pay or \$10,000. In certain situations,

however, an individual may be able to invoke a "catch-up election" and contribute up to \$3,000 more than the above limitations.

Rather than become experts on the technicalities of the "maximum exclusion allowance," NYSUT recommends that local leaders use the expertise of 403(b) representatives. Aetna (NYSUT's endorsed annuity representative) will calculate the maximum exclusion allowance for participants in NYSUT's Benefit Trust-endorsed Opportunity Plus Program and will reimburse participants, if tax penalties are levied as a result of an error by Aetna.

The District has taken a reasonable step toward protecting itself from inadvertently violating IRS annuity compliance regulations by hiring an outside agency to monitor withholding calculations. This outside agency, rather than the District, will now be responsible for any errors in these calculations.

VCTA members can also be held accountable for errors in "maximum exclusion calculations" and should obtain these calculations from their provider to insure IRS compliance. In fact, some school districts are requiring NYSUT members to submit "maximum exclusion allowance" calculations before withholding the requested contribution.

Finally, representatives of Travelers Educators Retirement Services have been hired by the District to evaluate IRS compliance issues, and should at no time solicit members during these meetings. If you find this to be otherwise, contact your building representative immediately.

~Tim Brown

TSA's are worth considering as an Investment Option

The time to think about your retirement is not the night before you write your retirement letter. It is something you should give thought to years in advance, so that you are "guess"-timating what your financial needs are in retirement and preparing for them while you are still working.

There are many ways to save money. You could hide it in a mayonnaise jar buried in the backyard, utilize a savings accounts, or take advantage of investment opportunities. The choice you make is totally yours, however the VCTA does feel that we are obligated to let you know that one investment possibility is opening a TSA account. Simply put, TSA stands for tax-

sheltered annuity which is an opportunity only open to public service employees, like those of us in public education. The money that you wish to save is deducted from your paycheck on a pre-tax basis this has two advantages. First, it lowers your taxable income and second, the amount of money deducted from your check will have less effect on your net paycheck than a savings deposit made after taxes have been taken out. A financial planner or company can advise you on the specifics of how TSA's are invested and the amount of return you can expect on your investment. The VCTA has approved seven local financial advisors who were invited to attend our TSA fair and have

access to your attention. You may use any company you choose to set up a TSA. **However, if you wanted to set up a TSA or make a change to the amount of money you are currently investing in a TSA, you must do so by December 31st or wait until next year.**

If you would like contact information for the VCTA approved TSA providers, or if you have a problem with one and feel they should be re-evaluated, please contact the Union office, (914) 457-5899.

~ Patti Lunden

The President's Message.... (continued from page 1)

The Board of Regents in September agreed that teachers appointed by the local union will make up a majority of each district's professional development team. This professional development change closely followed union recommendations. NYSUT has been insisting that professional development is union business, and that local involvement in district professional development plans is essential. The new regulation affirms the union's role.

Basically, the change requires each district to have a professional development plan. Profes-

sional development teams to create the plans must be established by October 8, 1999. At NYSUT's insistence, they must include a majority of teachers designated by the local union. This is a major change from earlier proposals that allowed administrators to select teachers, who were to be a minority on committees. The teams must develop annual plans to be adopted by September 1 each year, starting next fall. The plans must provide training for all

teachers, not just rookies, in line with new standards.

John Bonagura will develop and lead our contribution to the Professional Development Team. He will be contacting teachers to request that they serve on the professional development team. When the team has been formulated, we will publish the names of its members and look forward to their developments.

~ Tim Brown



A conversation with Dr. Nugent (continued from page 3)

"To not do this would be a disservice to our students as well as our staff." He recognizes the emphasis the state is placing on test scores and that the new assessments have come upon us with little preparation from the state, so that it will take time to get used to these changes. He states that "test scores are only a small part of a school's profile"; and that when parents judge a school based solely on those scores, they need to get more information about that school, especially if they are comparing one elementary school to another. Parents need to see the bigger picture. He stressed that teachers and administrators should be concerned with educating the whole child, not just their ability to score well on a test.

We need to nurture them to address all their needs especially by reaching out to those students who may be at risk emotionally or academically and get involved in the situation right away.

When asked about his view of the VCTA, Dr. Nugent responded that the VCTA is "an active, viable organization that truly cares about their membership." He recognizes the effort that the VCTA has made in dealing positively with administration, hopefully in deterring future problems from occurring. He hopes that the positive relationship and open dialogue that has been established will continue. He praised the VCTA leadership for their dedication to their members

and for their efforts to improve the quality of life for teachers both inside and outside the classroom.

Dr. Nugent hopes that his legacy to the District will consist of technical gains and construction "properly completed, not a band-aid effort" that ultimately will be a solution to the overcrowding due to increased enrollment. Finally, he hopes his thirty plus years of service will be seen as having made a difference in shaping of Valley Central's past, present and future.

~Patti Lunden

Horticulture classes...that's the kind of thing the back-to-basics folks do not find to their liking. Making flowers grow is not essential and will not improve their chances at gaining employment or college admission.

"Get these kids to pass their tests! Forget about the flowers!"

They need to go to college, they need jobs; but they also need flowers.

From Savage Inequalities, by Jonathan Kozol

Negotiation Update – Paraprofessional Chapter of VCTA

What Negotiations? As of this writing, the District and the negotiating team have yet to come to any agreement. The following was the District's initial response to the Paraprofessionals' Contract Proposal of May 26, 1999:

DISTRICT PROPOSALS
VALLEY CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
VALLEY CENTRAL TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION
PARAPROFESSIONAL CHAPTER MAY 26, 1999

1. Add the following:

Management Rights

Subject to the provisions of this Agreement and applicable law, the District retains full responsibility and sole right of management of its business affairs and property, including, but not without limitation, the right to assign, supervise, direct, and transfer the working forces; to plan, control increase, decrease, transfer, discontinue operations or subcontract work; to establish and modify work hours/ schedules; to hire, and promote employees; to increase or decrease the working force; and to suspend, discipline and discharge employees.

This agreement shall constitute the entire agreement of the parties and neither party shall be required to negotiate with respect to any subject not covered in this agreement. Terms not covered by this agreement shall continue to be subject to District control and shall not be the subject of negotiations.

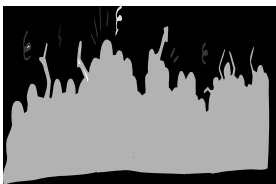
In essence this means the District no longer values our present agreement (or any agreement reached in the future) and can nullify what was previously negotiated.

Is this the District's way of negotiating in good faith? Will this be the way the District handles the future negotiations for teachers, secretaries and custodians?

The Paraprofessional Unit thanks you for your continued support during our negotiations.

~ Joan Grippo and Kathi Russo

**Neither snow, nor rain, nor Hurricane (Floyd)
Will keep the VCTA from hosting a party!**



**The VCTA Welcome Party
has been rescheduled to
Friday, October 15
beginning at 3:00 pm.
at Stony Ford Clubhouse
OC Park, Montgomery**

Hor's Douevres • Cash Bar

**All active and retired members are welcome.
If you need directions, please call 457-5899.**

**An educator takes a
hand,
opens a mind,
teaches a heart,**

For Sale:

New 8000 watt generator
13 HP Honda Industrial Motor
Call 457-5579 after 5 PM.

Berea to Celebrate its Thirtieth Birthday

Berea is thirty years old!
Berea Elementary School was dedicated on November 13, 1969. On November 12, 1999 a thirty year rededication will take place with Mrs. Dorothy "Dee" Reisert as principal for a day.

All teachers who worked at Berea in the past thirty years are invited to attend the day's events. We want you there to join the fun. If we miss you with an invitation, please contact Berea

at 457-3191.

A former Berea student day will be on Saturday, November 13, 1999, from 10:00 am – 12 Noon. Come and meet your former teachers and principals.

Berea looks forward to seeing all of you.

~ Carol DeMicco



Happy 30th Birthday, Berea!

Highlights of the September VCTA Executive Council Meeting

Meeting Date: September 21, 1999, at the VCHS Professional Library at 3:45 pm.

- ⇒ President Tim Brown's administrative internship (August 1999– June 2000) was discussed. Minutes from November 1997 and January 1998 were reread. No action needed or taken.
- ⇒ A grievance on behalf of Mark Newman is at Step 3. The District violated the rules of the sabbatical leave when it (1) demanded Mr. Newman complete the sabbatical on location at VCHS and (2) required Mr. Newman to submit biweekly reports rather than the midterm report stipulated in the CBA.
- ⇒ Because of our growing numbers we are permitted 3 TRS reps. We have one. John Solan and Kathy Takvam will join Sally Grodin this year.
- ⇒ Photo ID's for the staff will soon be required for security purposes. Pictures will be taken on site.
- ⇒ All buildings now have hall monitors.
- ⇒ Officers' cabinet meeting with CO will be on Sept. 22
- ⇒ Arbitration on Health Comparability for three people will take place Sept. 22.
- ⇒ Health and Safety follow up meeting between Tim Brown, Jay Sussdorff and CO administration will take place Oct. 1.
- ⇒ The District will have a security expert evaluate our buildings this Fall for potential problems.
- ⇒ Maximum Exclusion Calculations – basically IRS wants to check that those investing in TSA's not going over their limit. By having Traveller's do this, liability passes from the District to Traveller's. Individuals could also be held accountable if over limit. Copeland (Traveller's) is not to use this as an opportunity to solicit.
- ⇒ Stu Rosenwasser asked for an endorsement from the VCTA. It was decided to only endorse candidates for school board.
- ⇒ BOE: New board members sworn in July, the collaborative model is on file in CO, (the TEACH class problem continues). The MS/HS may be getting a new well. EC reported their water is brown, MS reported having black water at times.
- ⇒ The deadline for the Echoes will be by the 4th Tuesday of the month. Would like the names and addresses of any active employees on leave so we can mail the Echoes to them.
- ⇒ 81 retirees attended the Retiree Luncheon on September 2. Kevin McFadden would like to see Tier Reinstatement apply to retirees as well.
- ⇒ Paraprofessional Negotiations are not moving. They have written a constitution. Thank you's were received from 1999 retirees, scholarship winners and Kathy Sahl.
- ⇒ The VCTA Welcome Party will be held October 15th since we were rained out on September 17th.
- ⇒ The VCTA will host a Party to honor 2000 Retirees in the Spring.
- ⇒ The implications of students in diapers (at EC) were discussed as were the implications of teaching classes with students whose needs are greater than the teacher has been trained for were discussed.

The VCTA Executive Council meets again on October 19th at 3:45 pm in the VCHS Professional Library.

The meeting is open to all members.

What is the Truth?

Two years ago the Collaborative Teaching Program was presented to our staff at East Coldenham in the hopes of getting the staff members on board to support the program. During the presentations it was stated that, in theory, there would be no more than twenty students in a class so as to service the educationally handicapped students appropriately. Also, we were told that there would not be more than seven challenged students in the room, and a paraprofessional would be in the class all day. Well, what is the actual practice in today's Collaborative classes? There are anywhere from twenty-three to twenty-eight students in the classes. In some classes there are also students who could benefit from a 15-1 program as they do not qualify for the collaborative, but does the district want to start a 15-1 class? No. So, where do we place them? Of course it is in the collaborative class which already has more than its share of challenged students. The paraprofessional is shared with another class as there was a need to open a new section in East Coldenham's fourth grade collaborative classes. Was this presentation of the Collaborative Classes an honest one? Are we putting children first? What is the truth?

Many classes have come back (or will be coming back) to the District that were previously sent off campus. Is this being done to save money for the district at the expense of these students? (At the expense of the teacher?) Is enough being done to train the teachers and the paras of these classes? Do any of the other teachers who are involved in the education of these children receive training? Are there enough supplies for the teacher and the students to work with? Is there enough support for the teacher and staff?

What are the parents told about the program? Is it portrayed to be what they were getting at BOCES? What is the truth?

East Coldenham's staff was asked to come out one evening last spring to "sell" the school to incoming students and their families who were affected by Redistricting. All presenters spoke eloquently to the families explaining the positive features of our school. Well, as was found out during the redistricting committee meetings, EC's numbers went up, especially in the fourth grades. This was seen outright during the sessions, but nothing was done until two days before school was to begin. Was the district being honest about class size to the new families coming to EC?

Recently, East Coldenham had a need to open a new fourth grade section. Shouldn't this position have been posted to allow in-District

teachers an opportunity to apply? There were two and a half days to interview for this position before the beginning of school. The

*"Are we putting children first?
What is the truth?"*

negotiated contract calls for a seven day posting in an "emergency" hiring situation. However, inside teachers were not even considered (even though some had indicated an interest), as this would make things difficult, for many reasons we were told. Is this good for teacher morale? Is this what we get for doing our job well and honestly? Is this what we get for our loyalty? Won't the powers that be stand up for us? Because of this rush job to open the new section, children had to be rescheduled into the new section twice in a week's time. What is this doing to the morale of the students?

Perhaps more time should have been taken to set up this class. Then the district teaching staff might have had an opportunity to interview for the position, and hiring from within could have occurred. It would have worked better, and with less transferring of kids, if more time was taken beforehand in the planning. The negotiated contract would not have been ignored either. (Luckily for our students, the District did hire an outstanding teacher with a lot to offer.)

I have a big problem with these four events. I question the honesty to the staff of Valley Central in these matters. I question the honesty to the families of Valley Central. I question the loyalty of the administration toward its staff. Over the years I have questioned these things, but put on my "rose colored" glasses and hoped that they weren't true. Today, my acquired wisdom tells me that all of this is true. What really scares me is that many of my colleagues will just let these things go on and not do anything to let the "powers" know of their dissatisfaction, because it doesn't affect them. **Well, next time it could be you. Stand up for your colleagues. PLEASE.**

~John Bonagura

Staying centered....

Recently I left the editorship of the VC Echoes. With help, I had discovered that the position was causing me to take a view of people, of situations, and of myself that was not healthy for me. My decision left me with a sense of loss. In a small way, it must be what some teachers experience upon retirement... a disconnection from something I have cared about for a long time. It also left me with some extra time.

For you young teachers who are teaching, raising a family, going to graduate school, and holding down a part-time job, "extra time" is one of those necessities you won't realize you've withheld from giving yourself until you quit doing that little something extra you've done for 15 or 20 years.

"Now, do what is healing," was the advice that my wife gave me about what to do with my new-found extra time. So this is what I am now searching for, and what Patti Lunden's recent article, "Putting Children Center" spoke to me about. If you recall the symbol which accompanied Patti's article you may have noticed that it blended the starfish motif which the district began to use last year for the Richard Aderson Award and two adult figures forming a circle to hold the starfish safe. By design or coincidence a healing symbol points in a new way toward another area in need of our attention.

Patti's words ask us adults to come together in new ways to hold our children safely within the circle of school, home and community. Patti has been working hard to help teachers feel safe with their health coverage decision and she has tried through the union, unsuccessfully, to bring an employee wellness program, called HeartMath to Valley Central. Currently, she is talking up Emotional Intelligence as an important direction

to explore in helping to hold our students at the center of a safe environment. This can only happen if we adults feel safe. To put children center, we must begin by centering ourselves.

We were told last week by the President that the higher standards created by business and government are here to stay. We were not told how to help keep our children safe in the face of the tensions the standards create for all of us. We are not holding children center, if we first center our efforts around meeting the higher standards, and then give what's left of our attention to the problems the mandates create within our students' lives. At the same time, if we teachers are feeling anxious and unsafe about how the standards threaten our own jobs, how can we avoid passing our fears down to our students? The politicians and business leaders do not have to live with the fears and desolation their edicts create in our students right now. The rush to create standards before providing a real safety net was reckless in its timing. Standards are important, but whose interests have

been most served by the rush? The standards are to help us prepare students for the burden of competition that American business faces. Their purpose is to make schools produce future workers who can be trained to be... more productive.

This agenda serves local politicians who in turn serve the business interests that finance their careers. Power and profit are the ultimate goals of the increasing control over the schools. Productivity becomes the sole value and measure of what education means in the life of our children.

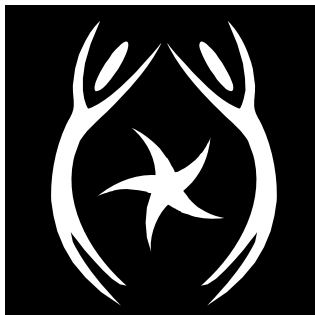
Our children recognize the motivation behind such standards, and they are afraid of what is in store for themselves at the hands of administra-

tors and teachers who may not have the time to practice higher standards of compassion, creativity and emotional intelligence that would preserve students' childhood years safe from premature exposure to the political and economic forces that intimidate even many adults.

Safety and standards can complement each other. But only emotionally intelligent school practices and programs should be used to carry us forward. Motivating our teachers or our students with the fear of the consequences of failing the standards is an unsafe teaching or management practice. It creates human problems that the politicians and business leaders are insulated from. It does not take much insight to see that threats to principals' jobs, for example, will probably create a chain-reaction of unsafe pressure going right down the chain of command until it hits children. We all need to slow down the standards to a safe speed.

Only emotionally intelligent administrators, teachers and parents can truly hold children safely at center. I hope that Patti Lunden and the VCTA will continue to explore whatever can be done to bring our teachers the training we need to begin a healing process already necessitated by the damage the standards movement has wrought. The standards are here to stay. We need to create for ourselves the extra time, the extra space, and the emotional intelligence to help us cope with the changes they bring to our work and to the lives of our students. We need help, right now, to center ourselves and to safely hold our children center.

~Jim Lignori



Mac's Musings....(from the Retiree side)

Aside to whoever is listening -

An AFT survey of new members (*to the profession of Socrates and all of us*) shows that they would like workshops and training on instructional techniques, mentor programs, advice on handling disruptive students, help in dealing with rules and procedures, and support groups and social events that allow them to share ideas with other new members.

The retirees of VC had a most pleasant and successful opening-day-of-school luncheon.

One wonders whether the OCTA could do this type of thing for new members from districts across the county or whether the VCTA could undertake workshops and/or training on a local level (*perhaps even with volunteers from the Retiree side*). One wonders. As I write this on September 13th, I am hopeful that the VCTA New Member Welcome party on October 15th will be an impetus in this direction.

Update II

The retirees of VC had a most pleasant and successful opening-day-of-school luncheon. Eighty-one retirees attended the luncheon. Among the number were those retired for two months and those retired over thirty years. Many a story was told, many a laugh shared, many a chop busted. For the seventeenth year, **John Mirola** (*retired School Business Administrator*) and father of the Valley Central Credit Union was funny, timely, and concise as the master of ceremonies. This was our largest group ever; we all hope for many more!

Thirty folks from far-flung VC Retiree outposts (*California, Georgia, Florida, North and South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia,*

etc.) took the time to respond and, although unable to attend, to fill us in their lives after VC. We will share some of their comments in this and ensuing columns. A special thanks to **Patty Depew** at the high school for her help in preparing our send-outs.

Our Condolences:

To Desmond, Elizabeth and Tim Cavenagh on the loss of their wife/mother and our beloved colleague, **Marge Cavenagh**, who died in Au-

gust at the age of 90. Marge was a very caring and effective middle school English teacher for many years. Her knowledge of English grammar and literature was an inspiration to those of us who worked with her.

We get Letters (or notes, or a few words)!

* **Anna Brooks** (*retired HS Math*) checks in from her new home in Gloversville, near many members of her family. She is walking three miles a day and doing volunteer work, has recently attended an Elderhostel in San Francisco. Anna and her late husband, **Don Brooks**, were two of the stalwarts for many years in VCHS's magnificent Math Department.

* **Marilyn Smith** (*retired elementary*) is traveling through the Northwest (*as of Sept. 2*) enroute to Arizona for the winter months. I could see her smile in her words! She recommends that "Mac's Musings" be kept in Echoes. (*Do you think she heard that I was getting dumped???*) **Editors**

Note: We are not dumping Mac- we all look forward to reading his column.

- * **Ernie Carter**, a regular at our luncheons (*retired elementary*), was in Illinois this year for his brother's 50th wedding anniversary. He is now on his way to Santa Fe.
- * **Ronnie Savino** (*retired elementary*) and her husband have relocated from their home in Maybrook to Las Vegas. She really sounds excited and asks that I put her new address in Echoes. Here it is:

Mrs. Veronica Savino
231 W. Horizon Ridge Parkway,
Apt. 313 (Bldg. 3)
Henderson, NV 89012

I really appreciate the epistles and will excerpt more in the months to come.

Congratulations to **Bruce and Joan Seguin** (*retired MS-Bruce, that is*) on the birth of their eighth grandchild, a boy (*VC grad Melanie's son!*)

Nobody asked me but...

The New York State Teachers' Retirement System is the best bureaucracy I have ever encountered. Their staff is well prepared, helpful, pleasant.

Would that this could be said of all bureaucracies. (*State Ed. Department- take note!*)

continued pg. 13



Mac's Musings....(continued page 12)

The move, nationally and locally, to lower class sizes is a many-splendored idea. Primarily, kids are helped, and that's why we are in business. And, so corollary to that, teachers are able to give more quality time to individual students.

My heart went out to our brother and sister teachers in nearby Marlboro who had been without a successor contract for over three years. A tentative agreement was reached on September 14th.

Charter Schools (*though they may do a good job*) are not

going to improve the public schools. Public funding belongs in public schools!

What did I do before I found this soapbox??

Mac Moment

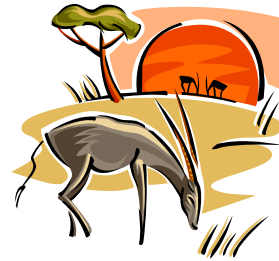
November's column will be written in South Africa and mailed to Patti Lunden. **Ginny** (*retired MS*) and I leave October 7 to visit our son, Christopher. Chris (*VC '89*) was a remedial math teacher at

Berea, Montgomery and East Coldenham. He is presently a member of the Peace Corps and a primary resource teacher in Selika, Northern Transvaal. Perhaps I will return wearing a pith helmet.

Until next time, keep pushing back the barriers of ignorance in whatever venue life finds you.

Peace!

~Kevin McFadden



Accolades for Dr. Dank!



DID YOU HEAR?!...

...Last October Valley Central's very own Dr. Martin Dank was awarded School Psychologist of the Year by the New York State Association of School Psychologists! Bev Ouderkirk traveled to the Syracuse Convention to personally present the award. Later, our Board of Ed. Commended Marty as well. This well-deserved honor qualified Marty for national honors.

DID YOU KNOW...

...Marty is beginning his 10th creative year at VC. He has worked at both the High School and Middle School and currently "resides" at Maybrook Elementary. His other responsibilities include

conducting evaluations at BOCES and private schools. In addition, Marty is always more than willing to consult with colleagues when needed.

DID I TELL YOU...

...Marty majored in Psychology and Music and was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of City College of New York. He later received his Ph.D from NYU. In addition, Marty earned a Bachelor of Sacred Music and Diploma of Hazzon (Cantor) from the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York. Marty plays several instruments and speaks several languages.

Before joining the VC staff Marty was the Director of Psychologist Services at Helen Hayes Hospital; the Chief Psychologist at the Child Development Center; and has been in private practice for 26 years.

Marty and his wife, Judy, have two children. Their daughter is a School Psychologist and their son is a Teacher. Judy has a Masters in Education as well.

HOPE YOU KNOW...

How well deserved this distinction is. If you know Marty, you know what we're talking about. If you don't know Marty...take our word for it!

MARTY'S FAVORITE QUOTE...

"The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter her life by altering his attitude."

- William James

~Adrienne Hershfield

and Melinda Sulzbach



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Under construction

The VC Echoes is the official publication of the Valley Central Teacher's Association – Local 3076 and is published regularly throughout the school year. Article Contributions or Letters to the Editor for the next issue should be sent to Patti Lunden at the HS by October 26th. Any articles submitted to the VC Echoes will also be posted on the VCTA Web page.

What is the Role of the Building Representative?

Each building in the District is represented by a number of representatives relative to the number of members in the building. These building representatives vote on behalf of the member's building at Executive Council meetings.

They bring concerns to the attention of the Executive Council from the building. They also bring information back to the building, either through building meetings or memos. If any member of a building needs representation in dealing with administration, feels that the Collective Bargaining Agreement is being violated, or has a concern about working conditions, the building representative can and will assist them. In turn, once issues and concerns have been brought to the table at Executive Council, the Union officers meet with Central Administration to discuss and negotiate solutions; if that is impossible a grievance proceeding is begun.

The Secretaries and Paraprofessionals have their own representatives who are members of Executive Council and present their issues and concerns as well.

The time to speak is now....

There was an article in the September issue of the Hudson Valley Parent Magazine on the Albany Charter School, an "independent public school". The school will be using a "Direct Instruction" approach where the students and teacher engage in a back-and-forth dialogue in every subject. Teachers are responsible to be sure that all students are achieving or be penalized. According to a spokesperson for the school, teachers are given every level of support and all the necessary tools to accomplish this and are observed on a daily basis. If the students don't perform well academically, it is the teacher who pays, literally: his salary and his job security (*lack of tenure?*) are directly connected to how well the student performs academically. As I read this article, I couldn't help thinking...How ever did we come to this? "Direct Instruction"?...I'm sure we could all figure out how this model works and provide about ten other names for it and examples of how it is already used in "dependent public schools". The saddest part

is that this Charter School, and all charter schools, are bound to rules that NYSUT had input on. These rules and regulations are much better than what had originally been proposed by our illustrious state legislature which passed this obvious attack on public schools and teacher unions. So again, How did we get here? I think the answer to that question begins with us. It is important for every one of us to understand that no one among us is an island. People cannot afford to cocoon in their rooms waiting for something to blow over, someone to leave, or someone else to take care of it. If you don't believe that your vote can make a difference, consider the election in which Al D'Amato, chief basher of public education, was defeated. He lost his election by 400,000 votes. There are 400,000 members of NYSUT...interesting coincidence, isn't it? Reaching your state and federal legislators and political leaders is as close as the click of a button on the NYSUT web page (www.nysut.org). All that is required is for you to check off the letters you'd

like to send and type in your address, in a matter of a few minutes they are sent. Sure they're form letters, but if our legislators were to receive 500 letters a week from the members of the VCTA, (*plus 165 more from our retirees*) I'm sure they would begin to take notice.

But state issues are not our only concern. There are plenty of local issues we need not only to be aware of, but make our voices heard on. What affects one member of the VCTA has implications for all members. What happens in one classroom affects all classrooms. We all have a voice. We all need to be heard, for when we do not, our silence speaks. If Charter Schools are an indicator of the future of public education, we need to speak loudly, clearly and right away.

~ Patti Lunden