



VC ECHOES



Happy Holidays from the Valley Central Teachers' Association!

Volume 9, Issue 3

December, 2006

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VCTA Supports SRPs at BOE (pg 8)



Top: VCTA Officers Tim Brown, Rich Steger, and Patti Lunden address the Board of Education on October 23.

Bottom: SRP supporters fill the Central Office board room and spill out into the lobby, leaving standing room only

Remembering Ernie Pettine: Our Friend and Former Colleague

When Ernie Pettine passed away in the early hours of October 9, 2006, I was one of many who felt a huge personal loss. For thirty-three years, Ernie was an excellent math teacher at Valley Central Middle School. His retirement party has been described ever since as a lovefest, a fitting appellation. The Spruce Lodge was packed that night with colleagues, friends, and family who unabashedly loved Ernie.

Here are some of the things I loved best about Ernie Pettine:

I loved laughing with Ernie, but I especially enjoyed making Ernie laugh. When the laughter began to rise in Ernie, it was as unstoppable as a tsunami.

I loved the way Ernie would squint at me with that smirk on his face—the look that said, “Don’t disappoint me—let’s hear your smartass remark.” If you’ve ever seen the look I’m describing, you know it was as inseparable from Ernie as his name.

I loved listening to Ernie dig into his formidable memory bank to extract the details of some story he was telling. No matter that the events had occurred forty-five years ago, he’d recall each who, what, when, and where as if the scene were reoccurring on the inside of his eyelids.

I loved the way Ernie saw himself amongst his fellow teachers. Although he certainly could have used his seniority and teaching experience as justification for behaving arrogantly with his younger colleagues, he never once did that. He never presumed to expect his younger colleagues to defer to his “wisdom.” He was no elitist. He was one of us.

I loved Ernie’s devotion to his kids and theirs to him. My first memory and impression of Ernie was formed in 1983 as he strolled through the middle school library, closely followed by his kids, Alison, Vincent, and Lindsay, who were about 4,3, and not quite 2 years old. The children re-

minded me of ducklings. I didn’t know Ernie much at all back then, but I could easily see what a proud papa he was. Over the years, it was clear that there was nothing on this earth

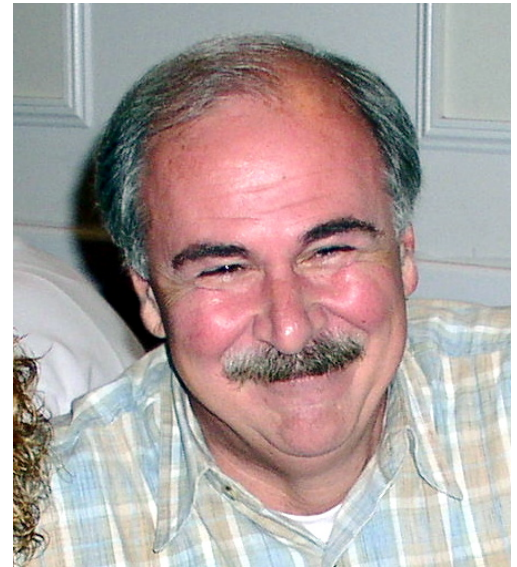
more important to Ernie than the happiness and well-being of his children. At Ernie’s funeral, his oldest, Alison, gave her father the most beautiful tribute that any father could ever want. His children cherished the many years of love and caring that Ernie poured into raising them. To them, he was the best father in the world.

It is a comfort to know that Ernie will always live on in the hearts of those of us who loved him. All the same, he is deeply missed.

—Gene Mueller

Middle School

Note: Ernie’s friends and colleagues are establishing a scholarship in his name. For more information and to find out how you can help, please see page 14 for details.



Presentation to the Board of Education October 23, 2006

The VCTA is here tonight to show its solidarity for the Valley Central community. Our school community is comprised of:

- first and foremost, our students and their parents;
- our local residents, both property owners and renters;
- each and every Valley Central employee, regardless of his/her title, bargaining unit affiliation or lack thereof; and
- this Board of Education that has been elected to fairly represent all of the previously noted school community groups.

Just as we strive to keep the VCTA's logo—*Putting Children Center*—at the heart of all of our activities, we also strive to keep the VCTA's union philosophy at the heart of our community and school activism. We VCTA teachers are not here tonight to lobby on behalf of ourselves, but rather to lobby on behalf of our co-workers and fellow community members.

Unionism is first and foremost about unity, support and fairness. For the VCTA to apply these standards exclusively to itself without regard to other workers would dishonor the very meaning and intent of union membership and activism. Who among us would ignore a cry for help from our neighbor if there was an intruder in our neighbor's home? Perhaps some would ignore a neighbor's cry for help, ignoring the plight of their neighbor and the rest of the world as long as nothing directly impacted their cozy corner of it. Most, however, would empathize with their neighbor's plight, reacting with compassion and honor. Although this is not necessarily indicative of capitalism, it is certainly indicative of democracy and community. And it is most certainly indicative of the very nature of the union movement. Capitalism should never negate the benefits inherent in de-

mocracy and community—benefits for which many Americans have fought and died.

Strong communities are held together by caring families; in fact, without these caring families, there would be no community. VCTA members stand here tonight in support of our family. Members of our Valley Central family have been excluded from the "dinner table:" the custodial and maintenance workers, paraprofessionals and food service providers. We are not blind to the fact that different benefits are inherent in different job titles; however, we are also not blind to the fact that school districts across this nation are adopting a Wal-Mart philosophy when it comes to dealing with certain members of its community. This is not productive and it is certainly not representative of a healthy community with strong family ties. These are **our** family members. They each perform an essential role within our community. These are our brothers and sisters. Are they your family as well? Or is your family more exclusive than inclusive?

Why are the paraprofessional and maintenance workers disillusioned with their work experience here at Valley Central? After decades of working as independent, stand alone bargaining units, unrepresented by state and national affiliates, why would other bargaining units or unrepresented units wish to join the VCTA? We certainly do not know for certain that their addition to our contractual recognition clause would benefit these groups in a significant, practical manner—the paraprofessionals are currently members of NYSUT and the VCTA. We do know, however, that emotional support has a value all of its own and that this emotional support is what often holds families together when they may feel powerless in face of their future.

I would like to read you the wise words of a local author—an individual I have come to know over the past four (4) years. He said:

(cont'd on page 4)

Presentation to the Board of Education October 23, 2006 (cont'd)

Power is embedded in institutions: legislatures, courts but also in education professions that categorize humans with labels and make them submissive subjects who must at least appear to accept the labels and the rules of those who control and manage them...Power is revealed through its backlash and resistance...Thus leaders need a particular sensitivity in using power. (Marshall and Hooley, p. 155)

Backlash and resistance are words often used to characterize unions in a negative light. Unions were not born from a desire to hurt employers, managers or institutions. Unions were born out of a desire for workers to be heard. The most effective way for workers to achieve this goal is to speak with one unified voice. Historically, unions have protected working men and women. Members of our family and community should be able to work and live here with the expectation of providing an honest day's work in exchange for a decent and competitive wage and benefits package—one that enables them to feed and clothe their families—one that enables them to take their loved ones to a doctor when they are sick—one that enables them to avoid eligibility for free or reduced school lunches for their children.

The VCTA has come here tonight to stand in solidarity with other members of our Valley Central family—to demonstrate that we value all members of our community. Vince Lombardi once said it is “individual commitment to a group effort—that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.” We would add that individual commitment to a group effort also makes a school district work. These members of our family are certainly committed to our district. But, how long will that commitment last if these members feel marginalized?

We will not speak to specific issues with regard to these units in this public forum. We

would be happy to speak directly to this BOE in executive session with regard to our specific concerns. In closing, however, we would like to reaffirm our commitment to family and community with two final points:

1. First: As our mission statement reads—*There are no greater advocates for children and education than teachers and teacher unions*. The VCTA sees one of its roles as watchdog to guard the future of this district in which we have invested so much of ourselves. We feel it necessary to address you tonight to speak to you about the value of all members of this community and the need to attend to all members with respect and dignity.

2. Second—I would once again like to quote our local author: “Deeper problems arise when... power arrangements promote privilege or discriminate unfairly. We assert that schools are bureaucracies that promote fairness and provide equity of access to the “goodies” of society. However, some powerful practices use policies and structures in ways that restrict access, cut off opportunity, and maintain privilege. The disempowered and silenced are kept that way, raising “serious questions about the role of schools in the social and cultural reproduction of social classes...” (Marshall and Hooley, pp. 155-156)

Our former students make up a large portion of our working staff. What values are we modeling if our former students and current employees perceive the existence of an institutional caste system within our own family and community?

Works Cited

Marshall, Catherine and Richard M. Hooley. *The Assistant Principal: Leadership Choices and Challenges*. 2nd Edition. Corwin Press. 2006.

—Tim Brown, Rich Steger, Patti Lunden

VCTA President and Vice Presidents

In the News...



Read all about it!

Note: This is a new column that will focus on current developments that affect teachers throughout New York State. In this installment of In the News..., VCTA President Tim Brown summarizes and comments on issues discussed in the November 16, 2006 edition of New York Teacher.

CSE Meetings: NYSUT is focusing attention on IDEA's new federal regulations permitting school districts to exclude both special education and general education classroom teachers from CSE meetings. Furthermore, new regulations permit the "school district and parent to agree to make changes to the student's IEP after the child's annual review meeting without involving the other members of the CSE" (p.3). This shortsighted decision eliminates the school professionals who know the child best from any decision-making regarding the child's placement and/or accommodations and essentially relegates CSE meetings to a politically correct farce. Teachers have been the CSE watchdogs best equipped to put children center by considering the needs of both special education students as well as their regular education counterparts while managers are too often swayed by political correctness and financial considerations. I wonder if responsibility for IEP progress will also be completely transferred to the parent and district managers in light of this new exclusionary process. We all know the answer to this!

English Language Learners (ELL): Don't forget to fax the Commissioner and Board of Regents regarding changes in testing scheduled to go into effect this January that will unfairly burden children who are English Language Learners and children with disabilities. Visit www.vcta.net and select the "Legislative Action" link to complete this task. Fortunately, this bad news has an up side. As a result of these new ELL standards, President Bush has now been required to take a standard ELA assessment. After 60 years living within the United States it was believed President Bush would have enough linguistic experience to finally pass the test. The Russians, however, chuckled upon hearing this news. I wonder why..."One thing is clear, is rela-

tions between America and Russia are good, and they're important that they be good" (George W. Bush, Strelina, Russia, July 15, 2006). Is President Bush is demanding that 1st year legal immigrants pass English assessments with the same proficiency that he has demonstrated throughout the years? (see cartoon on page 7)

Grade 3–8 Testing: NYSUT is lobbying "for a two-month turnaround time for results from this school year's tests in grades 3-8" (p. 3). Teachers often wait for nearly a year before receiving test results. If we are to be driven by data as Commissioner Mills demands, perhaps he should put his money where his mouth is and provide the data in a timely manner. NYSUT is also lobbying for the math curriculum to coincide with the school year (i.e., September to June), and for a dedicated week to be set aside for grades 3-8 ELA and math tests that would provide appropriate testing and scoring time in the same manner that Regents exams are administered and scored.

Elections: Recent elections resulted in all of NYSUT's area endorsements winning on November 7th. Throughout the state 232 of 238 NYSUT endorsed candidates were elected or reelected. On the national level, the first female speaker of the house, Nancy Pelosi (as of January 1, 2007), has promised to move quickly toward efforts "to raise the minimum wage, implement the 9/11 Commission recommendations on national security, and allow the government to negotiate Medicare drug prices" (p. 5). I find it sad that we must now fight hard to regain benefits for our seniors that were lost during the last 6 years. Our seniors were duped and the drug companies have gained at their expense.

(cont'd on pg 6)

In the News... (Cont'd) from pg 5)

Health Insurance Decision: In the Chautauqua Valley and Dunkirk School Districts an arbitrator ruled that the district violated contract “by failing to negotiate changes in the drug plan” with the teacher bargaining units (p. 7). Although their contracts had hold harmless provisions “protecting members from any reduction in benefits,” (p. 7) this may lend more support to the VCTA belief that the watering down of the OUSDHP by the unilateral decisions of Superintendents is inherently out of compliance with the original intent of Associations agreeing to work with districts beginning in 1982 during the formation of our self-funded health consortium. The recent decision by OU Districts to utilize the less than desirable GHI’s provider list for the sole purpose of saving money without regard to the impact upon members demonstrates the inherent dangers in the current system. I’m sure it seemed like a good idea in 1982. I wonder how many times people will say the same about us/me. That is, I’m sure it seemed like a good idea at the time, but dang it, why did you agree to that?

–Tim Brown,
VCTA President



You are never too young to learn about your Retirement System as evidenced by the shortcake socks!

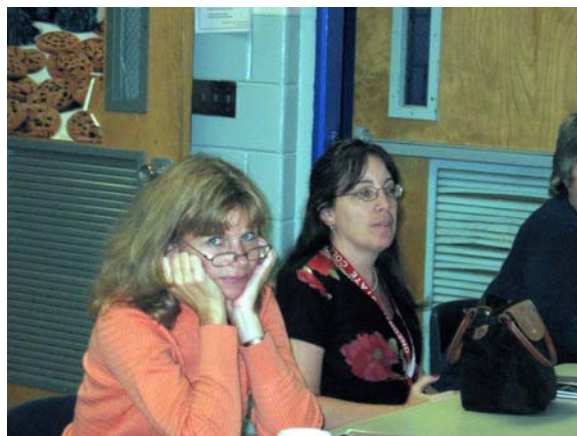
Mid-Career Retirement Seminar

The VCTA sponsored a Mid-Career Retirement Seminar on October 18, 2006 instructed by a NYSTRS information consultant, Mark Lipina. The seminar was well-attended. It was three hours long and packed with information that covered issues for beginning employees as well as for those close to retirement. The feedback received from those who attended was so positive that the VCTA will be sponsoring another seminar next year.

–Patti Lunden, VP



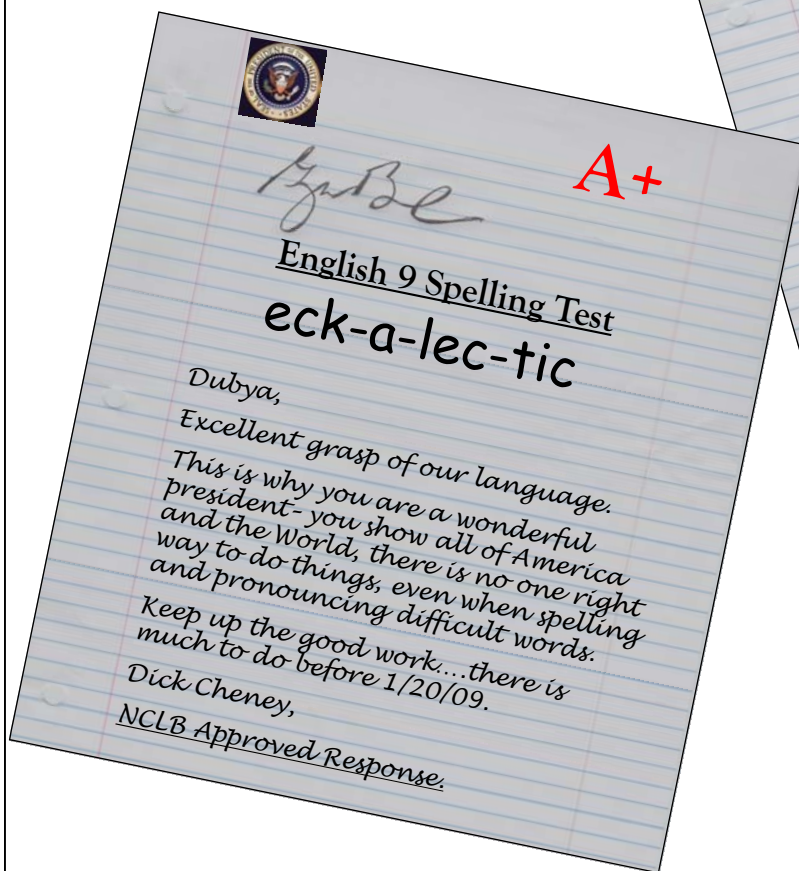
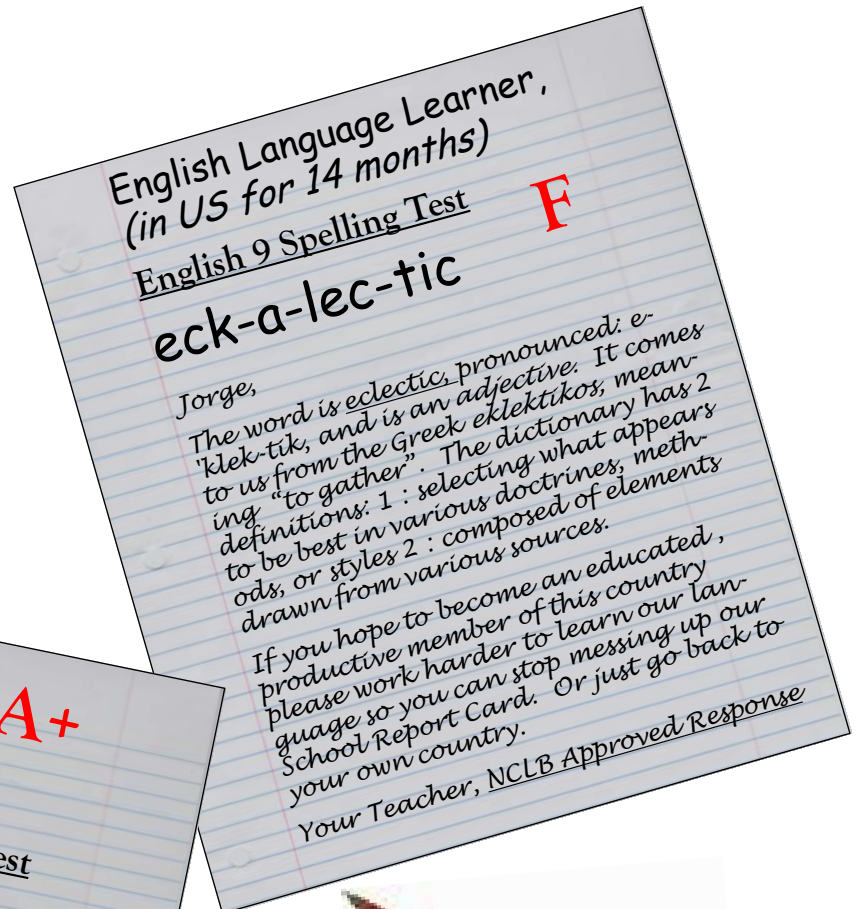
Mark Lipina, NYSTRS Information Consultant, teaches VCTA members about the Retirement System.



Sharon Satkowski (Walden) and Bev Risco (HS)

Shouldn't the same "Standards" apply to EVERYONE?

"I said I was looking for a book to read, Laura said you ought to try Camus. I also read three Shakespeares. ... I've got a eck-a-lec-tic reading list." --George W. Bush, interview with NBC's Brian Williams, New Orleans, La., Aug. 29, 2006



~ Patti Lunden, Vice President

SOURCES: <http://m-w.com/dictionary>; www.arapehlianian.com;
www.lincolnsfordistinction.com;
<http://politicalhumor.about.com/library/blbushisms.htm>;
www.nationstates.net

250 VC Family Members Showed Solidarity at BOE Meeting

By early October, the VCTA Paraprofessional Unit and the CSEA Custodial Unit had both reached levels of frustration in their respective negotiation of contracts that had expired in June 2006. And the VCTA Secretaries were scheduled to present a grievance statement in Executive Session regarding the denial of a holiday which had been given to the secretaries for years. Vice President Rich Steger presented the VCTA Executive Council at the October 10, 2006 meeting with the many reasons that the VCTA needed to encourage solidarity for our brother and sister union members. After lengthy discussion the VCTA Executive Council agreed with Steger and meetings were set by building representatives to get the word out to all VCTA members. The five officers of the VCTA went in teams to present the need to stand up for the paraprofessionals, custodians and secretaries to each building. Every building's meeting was well-attended. President Tim Brown asked members to pledge to not only come to the October 23 Board Of Education meeting, but to sign up for subsequent meetings so the message of support and solidarity would be shown publicly until both units had been made serious, respectful offers in negotiations resulting in fair settlements for both units.

At 6:30pm on October 23, 2006, coffee and donuts were being set up in the parking lot of Central Office by VCTA Officers. A VCTA banner was hung behind the table. By 6:40 pm cars began streaming into Berea's parking lot from 17K. Former VCTA Secretary Linda Cavanaugh commented to President Tim Brown that she couldn't remember a turn-out this impressive when VCTA members were coming out in support for their own negotiation concerns in the past. About 150 teachers, paraprofessionals, secretaries, custodians, and some of their family members crowded the Central Office parking lot by 6:50 as BOE members arrived for their meeting. By the time the meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm 250 VC community members crowded the Board of Education meeting room and lobby of Central Office. President Tim Brown and Co-Vice Presidents, Rich Steger and Patti Lunden delivered a speech written by the three regarding the topic of solidarity and family. (see page3 for full text)

Paraprofessional President Kathy Lennon met with the mediator on October 24th in an effort to reach a settled contract with the District. Lennon was able to bring an offer back which is scheduled to be presented to her unit on December 11th. Both VCTA President Brown and Paraprofessional President Lennon agree that the deal offered, although not great, is a fair one.

On November 13th, the VCTA returned to show their support for the custodial unit at the BOE meeting. By design, the number of VC community members who came to this meeting filled the interior Board room. CSEA President Sam Marrero and fellow CSEA members, Dave Trugilio and Craig Capwell gave a presentation comparing the salaries of their unit members to the universal living wage for this area. They asked the BOE to consider giving their unit the same raise it gave to Dr. Hooley (10.9%) since the members of their unit contribute the same percentage toward health insurance (10-15%) as does Dr. Hooley. They pointed out that even if they were given a 10.9% raise only one step out of the forty eight (four schedules x 12 steps) could even afford the cost of a three-bedroom housing unit in this area. The most moving moment of the presentation came when the BOE was rhetorically asked who they thought would be the first man in the building if Walden Elementary were to have a fire that night, the Superintendent or the Head Custodian who has worked there for 46 years? Although no answer was offered, it was obvious on the faces of the members of the Board and Dr. Hooley himself, that everyone knew who would be in that building first.

The Maintenance and Custodial unit returned to the bargaining table with the District on November 21st. They have yet to reach a settlement which is why both the custodial unit and the VCTA returned again on November 27th and will continue to return until a fair settlement is reached and ratified. The next BOE meeting is December 11th.

– Tim Brown and Patti Lunden

The Heart of Unionism

The labor movement was born in the 1800's as the working class men and women of America rebelled against unfair job expectations and low wages. They did not do this to bring industry to a halt, but in order to make their voices heard and ask that they have fair and decent wages and working conditions. Had they not made their voices heard, what would be the condition of this country today? Our nation was born of a rebellious voice that would not endure injustice to all, or to any. The labor movement has had its high and low points, and despite the current presidential administration's efforts, it has endured and will continue to do so as long as men and women are willing to stand up for each other and say, "enough is enough." This was certainly the message of the crowd of VC family members who came to Central Office on October 23rd and a wonderful demonstration of the very heart of the union movement.

When Vice President Rich Steger presented his concerns regarding the District's treatment of other bargaining units to the VCTA Executive Council on October 10th, he cautioned that "the District is moving in a direction that is detrimental to the children of the Valley Central community as these units feel that they are not valued or well treated as employees of the district." He called for the members of the VCTA to stand with our union brothers and sisters and act now to let the District know that in our eyes there are no large negotiating units and small negotiating units but we are all one family as often expressed by administration. Steger called for VCTA members to take a philosophical stand before the Board of Education to show that as a union we will not stand by as our colleagues are being treated unfairly. The Executive Council supported his call; and so did the membership as 250 people poured across the Berea parking lot into Central Office.

As I scanned the crowd, I was overwhelmed by (1) the number of members of all units who were there and (2) the spread of years of experience—teachers with 2 years experience to thirty plus years were represented. It made me recall a comment a professor made in an ethics class I'd taken—she rhetorically asked what kind of real change could come from a well-organized grassroots effort by committed educa-

tors? It was one of those comments that have become cemented in my long-term memory and I hold in check to the work I do as an officer and union member. Certainly that evening begins to answer that question. The air was electric with a feeling of unity and once the presentation was over, Steger commented to his fellow officers that the night would be one that he would never forget in all his union memories, and I believe that it will be an enduring memory for all 250 people in attendance that evening.

Coming together to take a stand for the members of the circle who stand with us, "putting children center" demonstrated the caring attitude and culture of the Valley Central family. That caring attitude and culture is not a convenient figment of management's imagination but a true attribute of the Valley Central tradition embraced by the family members who give heart and soul to their work on a daily basis. The VCTA did not come on that evening to negotiate on its own behalf or even lay the groundwork for future negotiations. Quite frankly, President Tim Brown has stated that the District would not insult the teachers with such disrespectful offers as had been made to the paraprofessional and custodial units. This is exactly why the VCTA made the statement it did—because we could not stand idly by and allow our union brothers and sisters to be insulted and demeaned. It was time to stand and act—and to teach a lesson on the heart of unionism; to have a voice and make it heard. Hopefully it will be a lesson taken to heart. If not, the VCTA stands ready to act again.

~ Patti Lunden,

Vice President

VCTA helped to Make Strides!

The VCTA team joined over 9000 walkers at Woodbury Commons on Sunday, October 14th to participate in Making Strides Against Breast Cancer. The 11th walk at Woodbury Commons raised over \$750,000 —of which about \$10,000 was donated by the Valley Central Family through ribbon cards, t-shirt sales, dress down days and donations!

Thank you to all who participated, especially our building team leaders:

Christine Giudice — Mont.

Holly Bacon—EC

Donna Lloyd —Maybrook

Robin Scott —Berea

Rich Steger —W

Maddie Brooks—MS

—Patti Lunden,

VCTA Team Coordinator



Above: VCTA Walkers



Right: Jeanine Maridou and Jill Conklin



Left: Mary Starro, a breast cancer survivor and Para at Maybrook.

Mary sold a good number of the ribbon cards



Right: Kathy Lennon, Para President

Fun, Fun, Fun at Fall Fest 2006

The VCTA Fall Fest was held on October 13, 2006 and was thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended. Three hours went quickly as people were able to catch up with friends and enjoy time together. Kudos to Secretary Laurie Hey who arranged the Fall Fest. The VCTA Executive Council is exploring the idea of a Spring Fling in March. Be sure to talk to a building representative if you would be interested in an annual VCTA Spring Fling!

Winners of Fall Fest Giveaways:

\$20 Gift Certificates to local restaurants

Chinatown Kitchen: Al Ortiz

Carmela's : Dolores Mundy

Sweeney's: MaryEllen Mangiamiele

Walden Diner: Derek Devoe

Daxxon: Gina Strolla

Cascarino's: Terri Campbell

Cooperfield's: Gail Roberto

Daily Bean: Nancy Rypkema

Rick's Runway: Carol DeMicco



Left: (from l-r) Ron Hebbard (HS), Kimberly Callan (B), Paul Cummings (HS), and Tara Hart (B)

Right: (from l-r) John Bonagura (EC), Kerri Meyer (HS), Elaine Keefer (HS), Kathy Manning (HS), Beverly Risco (HS), and Nellie Briggs (HS)



Left: (from l-r) Chris O'Shea (MS), Nancy Rypkema (MS), Tammy Coleman (MS), Kimberly Brosius (MS), and Nicole Benjou (MS)

Northern Lights Shining

Kayla Garrison, Jenna Moskwa, Courtney Popowick, Briar Rightmeyer, and Terriann Smith are 6th graders at Ostrander Elementary School. They are members of a club called Northern Lights. On October 7 and 8, they held a Yard/Bake Sale to benefit Breast Cancer Research. Over these two days, they raised \$800.00 for the American Cancer Society.

Please know that what you do is being noticed. The time and effort you give to help others is greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

Rich Steger

Summer School Blunder

The New York State Education Department recently released statistical data regarding Regents Exams to school districts throughout the state. Valley Central is currently a school that is not making adequate yearly progress in one “subgroup”: students with disabilities. This news, however, should not be a surprise; this information can be easily deduced from the exam results. Why then, if this group of students is struggling, would the district decide to eliminate summer school special education positions?

I question the wisdom of this decision and hope that it will not be repeated this summer, especially in light of our current status. The decision to eliminate these positions was made despite the urging of experienced teachers to reconsider. Now that official statistics have been published, this decision will hopefully be revisited for the 2007 summer school program. I find it difficult to believe that the financial gains from this cut were the motivating factor. What then led to the decision? Could it be that administration does not view summer school as an effective or important program? If that is the case, the program must be modified. We must take steps to fix the program, not punish one particular “subgroup” of students because the state doesn’t mandate special education in summer school. Does this attitude reflect a deep and abiding concern for our children?

Perhaps the summer school program should be reviewed. The premise itself seems dubious. How can a student who could not handle the course work during the year become a master of the material in five short weeks? From personal experience, I can tell you about students who never passed a test in my class throughout the regular year, yet sailed through summer school with A’s. Still others have told me in September that they do not plan to pass during the year. They will just take the class in summer school because it’s easier. How does this happen? Some of these students are special education students whom I worked with through lunch and plan periods and spent countless hours af-



ter school reviewing and re-teaching material. I recognize that too many students failing will impact class sizes for the following year; however, what are we teaching our children with this system? Moreover, in an already less than ideal situation, how can we deny services to the population in our district that needs it the most?

The situation begs the question: What is best for our students? Is it enough to tell them, if you don’t pass, we’ll ruin your summer for five weeks and consider it “lesson learned?” I believe that summer school in its current form does not help our students, especially when those who require modifications and extra support are not guaranteed these accommodations during the summer. The students would be better served by a summer institute that teaches study skills, time management, and provides remedial assistance with basic content to keep their skills sharp during the break. This is true for students with or without disabilities. It also teaches and reinforces the concept that failure must result in a change in effort and attitude. This is a much better message than the current: “flunk now, coast through in five weeks of summer school.”

Right now, summer school is an opportunity for students to catch up. Students with disabilities need to have their program modifications and work with professionals who are trained to help them to be truly successful. Last summer, they were short-changed. I hope that this summer does not result in more of the same, especially now that official statistics reveal that this “subgroup” needs improvement. Now is the time to begin thinking about this issue, not April, May, or June. Though the state doesn’t mandate it, let’s put ALL children center this summer and beyond.

—Meghan Riley

Straight from the Heart, I Thank You!

Even though Tucson, Arizona is mostly flat, the heat that day was ten degrees hotter than normal, even for Arizona. It ended up being 86 degrees at one o'clock on November 18, 2006. I was used to the cold of November in New York and in most training rides I was layering up and trying to stay warm. Now, I found myself trying to stay cool. There was no shade to be found on this ride of 109 miles, not even a cloud in the sky.

The first half of the ride was uneventful. There were two dry river beds that you had to carry your bike across. I was feeling pretty good until mile 60 when I began to get a cramp in my left calf. That was my first thought of "can I finish?," because at mile 65 the cramp was still there. The one thing that is great about Team in Training is that you have coaches. They are the ones that trained you and prepared you and they are even out on the course with you. So I saw Coach Bob and he gave me some Tums. The calcium in Tums helps relieve cramps, it's something even Lance Armstrong uses. Coach Bob and Coach John met me at the next rest stop, which was mile 75; they took my bike and told me to get some salt and drink water. At this point the cramp was on its way out, but my stomach was bothering me. I was in the beginnings of heat exhaustion. The coaches made me sit and drink water and kept me in under the tent resting longer than I wanted to stay there. I wanted to get going, with only 34 miles to go.

As I left that rest stop I was beginning to wonder if I could handle this heat. Would I be able to finish? I couldn't believe that I was even thinking of not finishing. I guess I got a little distracted, because I went off course. I missed a turn. I couldn't believe it! What is going to happen next? First I had a cramp, then my stomach and now this! Then someone in a car came up with a map and got me back on the route. So I ride a few more miles in this heat, I thought. Taking a wrong turn actually gave me a few more minutes of rest and I was distracted from my stomach not feeling well.



What a woman! Erin displays her bronze medal!



Erin Rides Again!

As I began to get back on the route, I thought about all the people that I was riding for. I wondered how they dealt with all the chemotherapy and the pain. They didn't have a choice; they were fighting for their lives. Yes, riding 109 miles is hard, but dealing with chemotherapy is unbearable. If they could handle it, I could handle the heat. With all that inspiration, I finally finished the ride.

So as you can see my weekend in Tucson, AZ was very memorable. It was memorable because of all you wonderful people that donated to the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. It didn't matter if you donated \$10.00 or \$500.00. It was all worth it. Team in Training had about 500 people participating in The Tour de Tucson and raised over 2 million dollars for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. It is amazing what can be done when people come together. Thank you all.

The following are the people that I rode in Honor or Memory of: Christopher, Adrienne, Dean, Harrison, Jonathan, Ernie, Leo, Maryanne, and Matthew.

—Erin Davis,

Building Rep (and Wonder Woman) , Berea

What's Going On?

VCTA Blood Drive

Date: February 22, 2007

Time: 1:30 pm– 7:00 pm

**Place: Valley Central Middle
School Library**

**Contact Kathy Manning at
ext. 6017
to sign up!!**



*This holiday season,
give the gift of life!*



Hawaiian T-Shirt Day at the Middle School to honor Ernie!

Ernie Pettine
Math
Scholarship

Ernie was a beloved member of the VC Family and in his honor, his friends and colleagues at the middle school wish to establish a scholarship. It is hoped that this scholarship will be awarded in perpetuity.

If you wish to contribute or would like more information, please contact Sandy Strauss at the middle school, ext. 6684, or sstrauss@vcmail.oubores.org

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

Greetings and a Happy Thanksgiving!

Today is November 21, and the column is due today. I know that you will receive this missive after Turkey Day and prior to Hanukah and Christmas—so a very happy and blessed holiday season and, once more to steal from Dylan Thomas, may you all be embraced by “the close and holy darkness.”

Again this year I have much to be thankful for—the kids and grand-kids (the addition this year of Ian Matthew to the fold), a very patient wife, good friends and my Valley Central family. Thanks to you all.

—Some reflections on things past and present

It is my hope that the incoming governor is more tuned in to the needs of education in the state and to the concerns of those who have carried the public school system for so many years. Retiree health benefits should be mandated by the state, not on a Pataki year-to-year whim. The retirement system must remain the same: no changes, no tinkering. Covenants, lo-

cal and statewide are meant to be kept, not to be subject to post-factum action.

All bargaining units of our VC family deserve good and timely contract agreements. Let us hope that the end of '06 will see these things accomplished.

Be wary of a state legislature which is interested in a Tier 5 for retirement. Let your local legislator know that you are watching.

—Life After VC ...

—Dr. Val Terwilliger (B) has just returned from a 30 day cruise from Capetown, South Africa to Sydney, Australia. Had a great time and “big time jet lag.” Val also shares info re: half price River Barge Excursions open to teachers and retired teachers. For a DVD, video, or free brochure call 1-800-GO BARGE (or www.riverbarge.com). Thanks, Val.

—Joan Holland (B) was in the Northeast in August but back in SC before the luncheon. She sounds great and sends her best to all.

—Mary Goldberg (MS) and husband Henry spent the summer in Maine as always, but were not returning to Florida until late September, thus missing the lunch-

eon. Both send regards.

—Ed Hart (HS) spent time this summer in Michigan researching Andrew Elliot “stuff” for his book. He hopes all are well.

—Norma Ancona Manning (HS) was in West Virginia for Jack's family reunion.

—Dora Blizzard (CO) sends regards from Florida. She misses all of us.

—More next time!!

—Condolences

—To Ernie Pettine's family on his passing. Ernie was a long-time math teacher in the middle school and soccer coach at the high school. He was deputy mayor of Montgomery and long-time activist in community affairs. HE will be sorely missed also as a board member of the credit union and as a past negotiator for the VCTA.

—Our sympathy also to Teresa Concors (EC) and the Concors family on the death of Arthur Concors, owner of Thruway Market. Literally hundreds of VC graduates were able to save for college from their part-time jobs at Thruway.

—Congratulations!

—To the students (elementary and secon-



Mac urges you to let your legislators know that you are watching!

dary) for their presentations at school board meetings (and to their principals for their reports).

—Also congrats to Nancy Phelps and the Walden History Project kids from Walden Elementary for their double award winning presentations.

—Amen

Thanks again for turning to the back pages. Let me hear from you. Health and happiness to all of you, and until next time, keep pushing back the barriers of ignorance in whatever venue life finds you. Peace.

~ Kevin McFadden

Retiree Representative

“T” is for Teacher...

Last year, my collaborative teaching partner Kerri Meyer and I decided that we would apply for a mini-grant through the PTSA in our building. We intended to use the funds to purchase materials for various projects that we do with our students that support the curriculum and develop important social studies skills. Kerri filled out the paperwork and in short order we were awarded a mini-grant which enabled many projects throughout the year that really helped our students.

The PTSA also sponsored Student Achievement Recognition Night twice last year. This was a wonderful evening that honored students who performed well but were not generally recognized for their academic achievements. It allowed teachers an opportunity to personally recognize a student for their impressive work, dedication, and character. For these students, their families, and their teachers, it was a memorable event. The PTSA/PTA/PTO in each building sponsors many such activities throughout the school year.

PTA/PTSA/PTO helps fund mini-grants, assemblies, and field trips, as well as many other programs throughout the district. All of their activities support our mission as educators. In each of these acronyms, there is a “T” which stands for teachers. In many of our buildings, teacher participation is already excellent, a fact very much appreciated by PTA leaders. It would be wonderful to see expanded teacher membership in every building. Our Parent-Teacher organizations support us and, more importantly, our children.

If you haven’t already done so, please consider joining your building’s PTO/PTA/PTSA this year. Membership comes at a nominal fee, yet pays considerable dividends to all of our children. Teachers are hardworking and have many demands placed on them—at work and even at home. As a PTA member, you can get as involved as your schedule allows. If you wish to attend meetings, you can. If your life does not have any room for more commitments, that is fine. What is important is teacher support, and membership is the single best way to show it.

At left you will find more information about joining your school’s PTO/PTA/PTSA. There is no shame in joining late; I can personally attest to that! One year, I realized in January that I had not yet received my little green card. I was received with open arms despite my tardiness! It’s never too late to support our children.

—Meghan Rilley



- ♥ *Interested in joining?*
- ♥ *Did you just forget?*

No Problem.
Just contact the person in charge of membership in your building.

There is a PTO/PTA/PTSA mailbox in each building’s main office.

Dues:

- ♥ Berea= \$4
- ♥ Maybrook=\$3
- ♥ All others=\$5

NYSTRS Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the New York State Teachers Retirement System was held November 6-7 and attended by Valley Central delegates, Patty Joy and Patti Lunden. Michael Corn was re-elected as a teacher representative to the NYSTRS Board of Directors. Joseph MacLaughlin and Sheila Salinger are the other two teacher members. Thomas K. Lee was introduced as the deputy executive director, a newly created position. He will be overseeing the benefits for nearly 400,000 members, member and employer services and investment initiatives. The fund is currently valued at \$92 billion.

The fund is very secure, and that is because it is a defined benefit rather than a defined compensation system. The NYSTRS cannot make changes to the tiers or the system. Such changes are legislated and susceptible to political winds of change. Therefore, legislative action is an important responsibility of membership and should be monitored throughout your career. Legislative action that will be watched this year includes the 55/25 bill which would allow members to retire at 55 with 25 years of service. The current requirement for Tiers 3 and 4 requires members to have at least 30 years before retiring at 55 without penalty. Another legislative concern to be aware of is the chatter about beginning a Tier 5. The tier structure creates a system of haves and have-nots (as in the inequity between the tiers that currently exist); a Tier 5 would likely be suggested to be defined compensation which would definitely weaken the benefits for those members. Make sure that you regularly contact your state legislators to make your voice heard regarding your retirement system—this can be easily done by going to www.vcta.net and utilizing the “Legislative Action” link.

The NYSTRS website was reviewed with delegates (www.nystrs.org) and a new DVD was previewed, entitled “Retirement Countdown”. It is an information video chronicling the steps a member should take in the last year of work prior to retirement. The VCTA has a copy of the DVD which should be available on the retirement system website soon. Two new pamphlets were reviewed, “Path to Retirement” and “Working in Retirement”. In addition, break out sessions were attended regarding Social Security, Choosing Retirement Options, Planning for Retirement throughout your Career and how the NYSTRS invests for its members. These presentations are available on the website.

In the open session, many Tier 3 delegates voiced their frustration with the inequity between Tiers 3 and 4 and Tiers 1 and 2 regarding the number of years that many older Tier 3 members were required to contribute 3% to the system. Certainly, this campaign will be continued at the NYSUT RA as the Legislative package for 2007 is determined.

If you have any questions regarding retirement feel free to contact either Patty Joy (Walden) or Patti Lunden (HS). If you are within ten years of retirement, Pre-Retirement Seminars are available and can be found on posters posted throughout the buildings, the October Echoes and on the website. If you are within three years of retirement, you are encouraged to schedule an individual retirement consultation—again, check the website. The District usually holds a Retirement meeting in February to inform members intending to retire at the end of the year of the process required by the District. This meeting is also attended by VCTA Officers.

~ Patti Lunden,
NYSTRS Delegate

Just For Fun...

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND--The Football Version

This is circulating on the Internet. The author is unknown.

1. All teams must make the state playoffs and all MUST win the championship. If a team does not win the championship, they will be on probation until they are the champions, and coaches will be held accountable. If after two years they have not won the championship their footballs and equipment will be taken away UNTIL they do win the championship.

2. All kids will be expected to have the same football skills at the same time even if they do not have the same conditions or opportunities to practice on their own. NO exceptions will be made for lack of interest in football, a desire to perform athletically, or genetic abilities or disabilities of themselves or their parents.

ALL KIDS WILL PLAY FOOTBALL AT A PROFICIENT LEVEL!

3. Talented players will be asked to workout on their own, without instruction. This is because the coaches will be using all their instructional time with the athletes who aren't interested in football, have limited athletic ability or whose parents don't like football.

4. Games will be played year round, but statistics will only be kept in the 4th, 8th, and 11th game.

It will create a New Age of Sports where every school is expected to have the same level of talent and all teams will reach the same minimum goals. If no child gets ahead, then no child gets left behind.

If parents do not like this new law, they are encouraged to vote for vouchers and support private schools that can screen out the non-athletes and prevent their children from having to go to school with bad football players.

The True Meaning of Family

On December 1st Patti Lunden opened an interschool envelope that had been placed in her mail box. Inside was a \$70 donation for the "Friends of Tyler Ryan" fund raiser without any explanation as to where it came from. After snooping around, Patti was informed by one of our high school secretaries that it came from the High School Nutritional (Cafeteria) Staff. "They are always doing nice things like that," she said. Apparently they contribute to noble causes all of the time, not expecting or wanting recognition for their deeds.

I am still amazed by the generosity of so many people who live and work within the Valley Central community...and I am still amazed that those of us who have the least are often the most caring and giving. Nearly all of our Nutritional Staff are part-time employees earning the lowest hourly wages within this District and, therefore, are mostly ineligible for any

type of insurance benefits for themselves or their loved ones. Tyler Ryan and his family are certainly grateful for your generosity. The VCTA recognizes your hard work, resilience and compassion. You truly represent what is best about the VC Family.

Finally, I would like to welcome all of the Cafeteria Staff into the NYSUT family. The Unit of the Nutritional Staff has recently voted to affiliate with the New York State United Teachers, AFT/NEA, AFL-CIO. They will be our NYSUT sister unit working here within the Valley Central School District. The VCTA's Labor Relations Specialist (LRS) will also represent the Nutritional Staff and the VCTA Executive Council will support them in all of their endeavors.

~Tim Brown

Valley Central Credit Union's Annual Dinner Dance



When: January 27, 2007

Where: Spruce Lodge, Route 17K Montgomery

What to Bring: Yourself, Your Friends, and a Healthy Appetite

RSVP To: Stan Davie (Manager) at 457-5592

Advertising Section

These ads will be seen by over 900 members of the VC Educational Community and their households. If you would like to advertise in the next issue of the VC ECHOES, contact Meghan Riley, 457-5899 for rates.

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WE'RE ON THE WEB!!

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Vice President, Richard Steger (Walden) VM 5648
Vice President, Patti Lunden (HS) VM 7664
Secretary, Laurie Hey (MS) VM 6646
Treasurer, John Bonagura (EC) VM 2604

VCTA Executive Council Building Representatives

- **Berea:** Erin Davis, Robin Sinclair-Scott, Carol DeMicco
- **East Coldenham:** Holly Bacon, Denise Pagliocca
- **Maybrook:** Donna Lloyd, Sandy Tarallo
- **Montgomery:** Chris Brand, Gail Nozell, Jane Dionne, Mike Gonzales (alternate)
- **Walden:** Kathy Bordone, Patricia Joy, Mary Ellen Mangiamiele, Lori Myerson
- **Middle School:** Mary Bleau, Tammy Coleman, Joe Collins, Joe DeVenuto, Sandy Strauss
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- **Secretarial Representative:** Lucy Fox (HS)
- **Paraprofessional Representative:** Kathy Lennon (W)

The VC Echoes is the official publication of the Valley Central Teachers' 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 Meghan Riley, HS, by January 26, 2007.

Any articles submitted to the VC Echoes will also be posted on the VCTA web site.



From r-l: CSEA President Sam Marrero, and Members Dave Truiglio, and Craig Capwell address the Board of Education on November 13, 2006.

Loyalty: A Most Precious Gift

Loyalty is fairly simple as far as concepts go. Dictionary.com defines it as faithful adherence to a sovereign, government, leader, cause, etc. Loyalty as an emotion is far more complex and difficult to understand. Anyone who attended the November 13th Board of Education meeting heard firsthand about a case of loyalty that seems to defy reason.

Sam Marrero, CSEA President, led his colleagues in a presentation to the Board that presented hard and sobering statistical data about the lagging salaries of the Custodial and Maintenance units of Valley Central. (If you did not attend but would like to read the presentation, it is on the VCTA web site, www.vcta.net. Follow link on home page.) To illustrate their situation, they told the story of Walden's head custodian who has worked in the district for 46 years. His son works in a nearby school and after seven years makes only \$8,000 less per year than his father *after 46 years*. What keeps him here and giving his all? Loyalty. And that is only one man's story.

The Valley Central School District receives a precious gift each and every day in the form of loyalty from all of its employees. It is one of the most important ties that binds the VC Family. How long can loyalty hold up in the face of the reality that you cannot afford to support your family and stay with the district that you love? More importantly, can Valley Central afford to find out? In this holiday season and all that will follow, I hope we do not receive an answer to either question.

The surest way to ensure that we do not is to treat all employees fairly. The most precious gift of loyalty should be rewarded with fairness and acknowledgement. We must continue to support our school-related professionals to make sure that they are seated next to us at the holiday dinner table.

—Meghan Riley, Editor