

VC ECHOES



Valley Central Teachers' Association

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VC's Paraprofessionals Sign New Collective Bargaining Agreement (pg. 2)



Paraprofessional President, Kathy Lennon (W) and Debbie Zwart (HS) hold up their new CBA

Fair Contracts Approved for Paraprofessionals and CSEA

After more than seven months of difficult negotiations and working without a contract, the Paraprofessional Unit of the VCTA and the CSEA (Civil Service Employees Association) now have collective bargaining agreements in place. Prior contracts for both groups expired on June 30, 2006.

Agreements for each unit were approved at consecutive Board of Education meetings in January. On January 8th, the Board of Education voted to approve the Paraprofessional Unit's contract with a count of 6 'yes' votes and 1 'no' vote from Mark Tierney. The Board approved the CSEA agreement on January 22nd with Mr. Tierney again the lone 'no' vote.

Negotiations for the Paraprofessional Unit went to mediation after the district and paras reached a stalemate regarding salary. The negotiating team consisted of NYSUT's Steve Berman, Paraprofessional President Kathy Lennon, Secretary Wenda Heaney, Kathy Caltavuturo, Lori Schmidt,

and Debbie Zwart. VCTA President Tim Brown attended the final mediation session. In the wake of the settlement Ms. Lennon says, "The majority of the paras agree that this is a fair contract."

The majority of CSEA members feel the same way about their contract. CSEA President Sam Marrero says, "We felt the contract was to the benefit of all our workers." Mr. Marrero and his fellow negotiators, Craig Capwell, Mike Bartle, Roger Williams, Wilson Bunting, and Anne Marie were most concerned with making sure that the contract was fair to all members. Health benefits became the major stumbling block to the process. Under the new contract, Marrero says, "everyone is being treated fairly." Sam extended his members' gratitude to all VCTA members for all of their support during their difficult negotiations.

—Meghan Riley

Paras Settle Contract

After several meetings of contract talks at Central Office, which weren't leading much of anywhere, a major change occurred. We wish to thank the VC family for your large show of support. The night after our family showed up at the Board of Education meeting on October 23, 2006, our talks progressed rapidly and we were able to settle with a fair and reasonable 4-year contract. The Paras are pleased to be a part of the VC family and thank one and all for your tremendous show of support.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathy Lennon, President
Wenda Heaney, Secretary

Dolores O'Brien Receives the Richard Aderson Award

For the second consecutive year, a member of the VC family has been honored with the Richard Aderson Award. Dolores O'Brien, a speech and language pathologist at Berea Elementary School, has been named the recipient of this year's "Make a Difference" award which recognizes the accomplishments of an outstanding educator in the region. Recipients of the honor must demonstrate a genuine contribution to the field of education, possess a humanistic concern for faculty, students and all persons in education, have a record of excellence in education-related service and be a living example to making a difference in children's lives.



*Congratulations Dolores!
You really "Make a Difference!"*

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the death of former Valley Central Assistant Superintendent, Richard H. Aderson. Therefore, it seems more than fitting that, Dolores, a faculty member from his own district, would be chosen for the award that was created in his memory.

Dolores is a caring teacher who integrates speech into many aspects of school and also involves parents and other teachers in her program. She is a very positive, genuine, and nurturing person who really gets to know her students. Dolores plans a program that is motivating and right for her learners. She also initiates many school wide activities such as Celebration of Capabilities, which has brought awareness to students and adults about the disabilities of others. Assistant Principal Jane Malley recognized Dolores's steadfast commitment to children and education and nominated her to receive this distinguished honor.

Dolores, a graduate of the Valley Central High School, has worked for the School District for more than 20 years. Her children, Sean, Aubrey and Katie are also a part of the Valley Central family.

Congratulations to Dolores O'Brien for being honored with this award.

—Carol DeMicco

Building Rep, Berea

Richard H. Aderson "Make a Difference" Award Presentation

Prior to the regularly scheduled Board meeting on Monday, February 12th at 6:30pm in the Administration Building, the public is cordially invited to a reception honoring this year's recipient of the *Richard H. Aderson "Make a Difference" Award*. Please join us to honor Mrs. Dolores O'Brien, Speech and Language Pathologist at Berea Elementary, Valley Central School District.

Formal presentation of this Award will follow.

In the News...

This issue's column focuses 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 January 18, 2007 New York Teacher, January 2007 Elmsford Edge and the Winter 2007 Edition of NYSUT's Health & Safety Newsletter.



Brown Tackles the Issues

Mental Health Parity: Timothy's law (no jokes at my expense please) now requires insurance companies to provide equal coverage for mental and physical illnesses. We are slowly emerging from the dark ages as mental illnesses are gradually being "destigmatized." Group and/or HMO plans must "provide at least 30 inpatient days and 20 outpatient visits per year for mental health treatment. Large employers must "provide unlimited treatment for adults and children who have biologically based mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, major depression, bipolar and delusional disorders, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, bulimia and anorexia" (NYT, p. 2). Thank goodness teaching is such a cushy job involving primarily eustress (as opposed to distress) that this new law will probably not benefit us or our families in the least.

Work Violence & Clinical Depression: A recent study indicates that employees are at increased risk of clinical depression if they are subjected to work place violence. Health, education and social work employees are at greatest risk. The study found that: (1) "exposure to violence increase the risk of depression by 45% in women and 48% in men... (2) stress-related disorders were around one-third more likely in women and 55 percent in men. (3) Threatening behavior boosted the chance of depression by 48 percent in women and stress-related disorders by almost 60 percent in men" (H&S, p. 2).

Sptizer's Education Goals: Elliot Sptizer proposed: (1) a 6 billion dollar property tax cut; (2) increased funding to decrease class size, increased time in class and improved teacher quality; (3) implementation of universal pre-K; (4) investment in "proven programs to

adapt to 'the innovation economy' based on intellectual capital and new ideas" and (5) promised the release of a new and clear school funding formula (NYT, p. 3). Unfortunately, our new governor has not been sold on the pitfalls of charter schools and plans to support opening of 150 more of these abominations. Research indicates that less than 13% of charter schools actually do better than their public counterparts. This is an 87% failure rate. Perhaps NCLB should address this failure on the part of these private for profit charter schools with as much enthusiasm as it does the public schools. This failure rate is achieved while stealing money from public schools that are struggling economically. These charter schools service "far lower percentages of economically disadvantaged children, English language learners and students with disabilities than district schools in the communities where they operate" (NYT, p. 6). Let's hope that our new governor will become as tough on charter schools as he is on many other issues for which we can admire him.

IEP Woes: IDEA regulations now permit changes to be made to a student's IEP with a simple phone call if the parent agrees. These regulations took affect October 13, 2006, effectively permitting the exclusion of general education teachers, special education teachers, as well as other CSE members from the decision making process. "Unfortunately, now that the USDOE has adopted its final regulations, state laws and regulations must conform to them" (EE, p. 1). SED guidance memoranda regarding these new regulations will be forthcoming.

(cont'd on page 5)

In the News... (Cont'd) from pg 4)

What does this mean to those of us working in the trenches on behalf of children? It effectively opens the door to tremendous manipulation of the CSE process—Parents Beware! It also means that management no longer has to even give the appearance that they value teacher input.

Privatization of SUNY Hospitals: What is the problem with privatizing SUNY's hospitals? (1) Millions of NY residents have no health insurance. Where will they go for care? (2) Privatizing means prioritizing profit above all else. This will result in cuts to needed services. (3) There are already recommendations to downsize and/or close some of these hospitals. Where will these patients go? (NYT, p. 5) It would appear that the Commissioner has once again failed to see the big picture. A national or state health plan should become reality before relegating our most needy citizens to a financial death sentence because they have lost their jobs or cannot afford insurance because of our new "Wal-Mart" economic policies.

—Tim Brown,
VCTA President

Professional Development Concern

It has been brought to the attention of the Professional Development Team that there have been many teachers who sign up for in-service courses and workshops, but then fail to attend.

There is a significant financial commitment on the part of the district to offer many of these courses. This is why the district requires that a certain number sign up before they can offer a course. Some presenters come at a cost of \$5,000 or more. Unfortunately, there have been instances where 10 or more teachers who pre-registered did not bother to show up.

The district is making a commitment to bring quality professional development opportunities to our members. Please understand that when you sign up for a workshop you are making a commitment to be present. If the district is going to continue bringing in these presenters we need to show up if we sign up. We understand that emergencies do occur, however we need to do our best to follow through on our professional commitments.

—Rich Steger, VP

Attention! All Employees Considering Retirement

Retirement Seminar

Date: Monday, February 12, 2007**

Where: Central Office Boardroom

Time: 4:00 pm

Presented By: Peter Roden and Betty Olsen

For more information, please call x 8122

Union officers and TRS reps will be present

**** (snow date Tuesday, February 20, 2007 in Berea Elementary Library)**

Union Research Report Looks at Charter School Comparisons

Most charter schools are underperforming the traditional public schools in their districts, according to a report released by NYSUT during the Legislature's special session in December. The report, whose findings contradict statistics previously released by charter school advocates, found fewer than 13 percent of charter schools had shown higher academic achievement than their public school counterparts.

It was released as the Legislature was considering bills to allow 150 more charters. The state reached a statutory cap of 100 in 2006.

Truth in Numbers

"The numbers don't lie," said NYSUT President Dick Iannuzzi. "It's clear that the performance of charter schools has been lackluster at best. Increasing the number of charter schools in New York State may serve some political agenda, but it won't serve the needs of our students."

The NYSUT report, *Broken Promise: How the charter school experiment is falling short*, compared the results of 2004-05 state assessments for fourth- and eighth-grade students at charter schools with comparable public schools in the district.

The report examined test results for local public schools with the same or a higher percentage of students eligible for free lunch as the charter schools. Fewer than 13 percent of the charter schools had better test results than the traditional public schools.

The report also found that charter schools tend to serve students who are more advantaged than the general population of the district they're located in, and charters also have one-sixth the number of English language learners and far fewer special education students. NYSUT Executive Vice President Alan Lubin noted that charter schools have drained tremendous resources from local public schools, particu-

larly in Albany and Buffalo.

"Charter schools were created to be better than traditional public schools," Lubin said. "That's just not happening. And who knows how much better public schools in cities like Albany could be performing if they hadn't been devastated by cuts made to pay for charter schools."

Lubin said the goal of the study—sent to the governor and every legislator—was to ensure that the Legislature had a clear picture of the poor performance of most charter schools before they returned to Albany for December's special legislative session.

"New York State hasn't received much bang for its charter school bucks," Lubin said. "There should have been a Hippocratic Oath applied to the creation of charter schools: 'First, do no harm.' Unfortunately, a lot of harm has already been done to public schools."

Charter schools were set up to encourage the use of new and innovative approaches to education that could be replicated in other schools, NYSUT Vice President Maria Neira noted. "This report shows the educational programs offered by charter schools are already being used in public schools throughout the state."

For a copy of the full report, go to www.nysut.org, and click on "media releases."

—From *New York Teacher*,
January 18, 2007

Note: The Legislature did not reach agreement on raising the cap in December's special session. The issue will not rest for long, however—Governor Spitzer supports extending the cap.

Charter Schools are not Smarter Schools for New York

After reading NYSUT's *Broken Promise: How the charter school experiment is falling short*, I decided to read more about charter schools in New York State. After all, anytime you read something, you must consider the source and the possible inherent bias. It seemed prudent to learn more about how the system works in New York before passing judgment based on the NYSUT report. Though *Broken Promise* provided some serious food for thought, further investigation sounded even more alarms.

The NYSUT report deals with the most important factors regarding charter schools: how they are affecting students and school districts. NYSUT compared charter schools with comparable schools in the same district. Comparability was determined by using the figures from the 2004-05 School Report Cards regarding the number of students eligible for free lunch. As Tim Brown stated in "In the News," only 13% of existing charter schools are outperforming their comparable public schools. Even more disturbing are the figures concerning student demographics. Charter schools serve much lower percentages of students requiring free and reduced lunch (63% compared to 80%). English language learners comprise 2% of charter school population, while ESL students make up 12% of the home district's population overall. Only 8% of charter school students are in Special Education, compared to 14% of their home district counterparts. In short, charter schools are generally serving lower percentages of at-risk students than are public schools. The NYSUT report points out that NYSED, in its Annual Report "chose to compare the charter school test results with the test results for the entire home school district." How can you realistically or accurately compare them to public schools knowing these discrepancies?

Moreover, comparisons become even less valid when you know that 17 out of the 61 charter schools in operation in 04-05 did not participate in state testing. How is this possible? These charter schools "have avoided the state accountability system by not offering the fourth or eighth grade in their first year of operation." These NYSUT statistics were intriguing enough to the Legislature that they did not

come to agreement on raising the charter school cap in their December special session.

Besides the fact that charter schools are not living up to their promise for our children, they are also not optimal from a union-based perspective. Did you know that up to five or 30% (whichever is less) of teachers in each charter school can be uncertified? Educators who teach courses outside of their certification area do not count in these numbers by the way. How does this policy ensure teacher quality? If a charter school has over 250 students in its first year, then the teachers are recognized as a stand alone unit in the existing association of the home district. The charter school and the unit must negotiate a separate contract. They are not held to the agreement of the home district. In charter schools with enrollment under 250 students union representation is not mandatory. Right now, this might not seem to be of much consequence. However, if the cap is lifted to 250 and beyond in the future, we could see even more devastating financial effects. As it is, districts like Albany and Buffalo are being bankrupted by the proliferation of charter schools in their district. If charter schools force districts to compete for highly qualified teachers with higher salaries, the results could be far-reaching. How will already financially-burdened districts cope with these problems while trying to serve the needs of our children?

Our new governor, Eliot Spitzer will propose raising the cap for charter schools to 250. To his credit, he acknowledges the need for funding reform with regard to charter schools. He says in *A Contract for Excellence*, that "subject to implementing these key reforms, I will strongly push for raising the current cap on charter schools." Though his desire to reform the system is admirable, is it really responsible to push this in light of the facts presented by NYSUT? This experiment needs more trial time at best before expanding it.

—Meghan Riley

Sources: www.nycsa.org

www.nysut.org

www.ny.gov/governor/

TRS Patties ... What you need to know about NYSTRS

This is a new column by Patty Joy (Walden) that will focus on retirement issues and questions about the New York State Teachers' Retirement System. It will be beneficial to members at all stages of their careers. Please send in any questions you may have regarding the NYSTRS and Patty will answer them in her next issue.

How Can I Get The Highest Pension Possible?

Your annual pension equals your Final Average Salary (FAS) multiplied by your Pension Factor. There are a few key strategies for improving your Annual Gross Pension. One way is by understanding and maximizing your *Pension Factor*.

Things to know about your

Pension Factor:

- It is based on total years of service credit.
- It is 2% per year if "unreduced."
- It is *reduced* to 1 and 2/3% per year if you have less than 20 years of service (Tier 3 & 4).
- It will also be *reduced* by an "age factor" if you retire prior to age 62 with less than 30 years of service, as long as you have reached age 55 (Tiers 2-4).
- With 30 years of service, and age 55 or at age 62, (with any number of years of service,) there is no age reduction (Tiers 2-4).

Keeping these factors in mind, consider these examples:

Retiree Age 62, Tier 3 or 4

Final Average Salary of \$60,000

19 vs. 20 Years (*Remember at 20 years of service your pension factor goes to 2%*)



Wow! The Difference a Year Can Make!

Years of Service	<u>19</u>	<u>20</u>
Pension Factor	31.7%	40%
Annual Pension	\$19,200	\$24,000

Retiree Age 55, Tier 2-4

Final Average Salary of \$60,000

29 vs. 30 Years (*Remember at 30 years of service there is no longer an age reduction*)

<u>Years of Service</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>30</u>
Pension Factor	42.3%	60%
Annual Pension	\$25,400	\$36,000

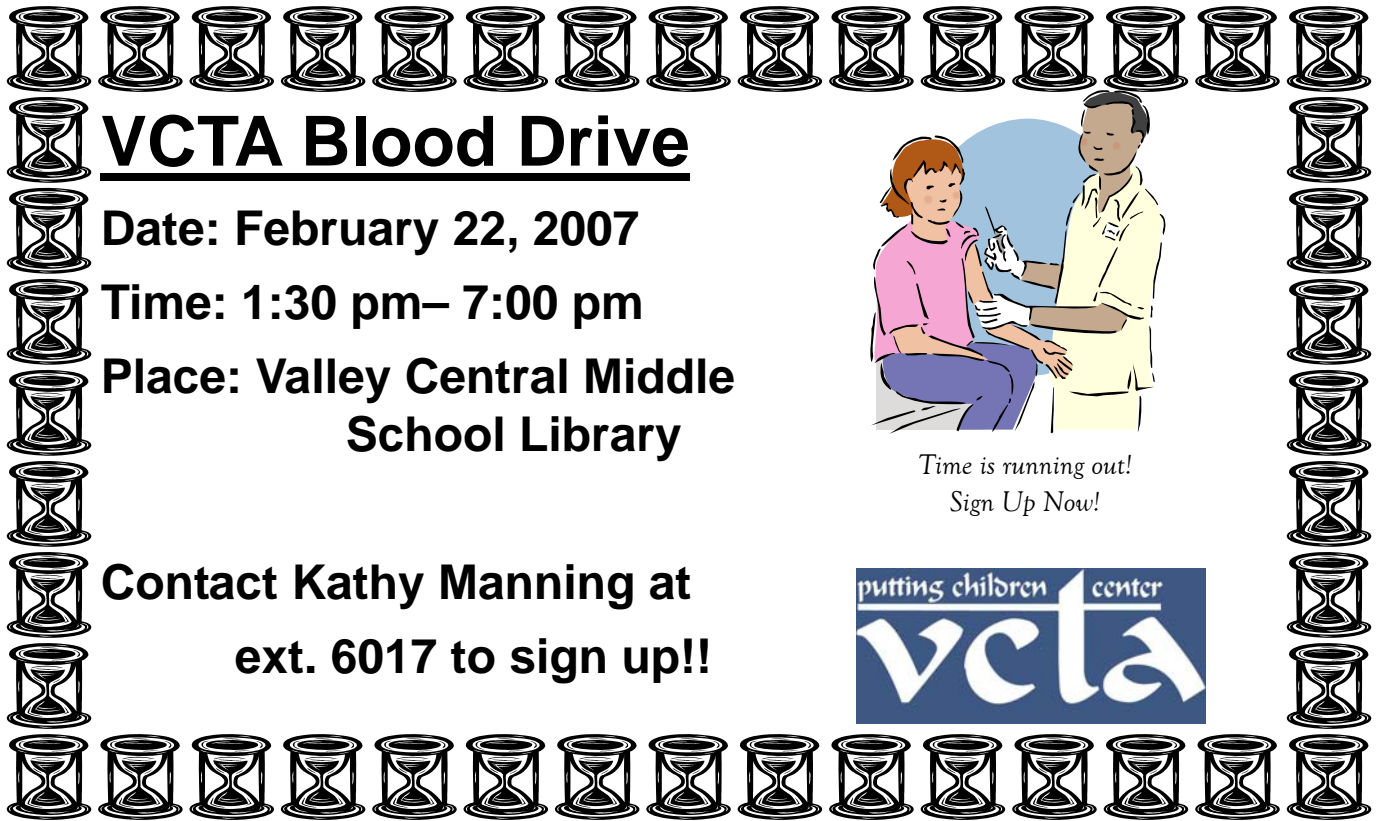
The information in this article can be found at www.nystrs.org

Next issue: Final Average Salary: Making the Most of It!

If you have questions about the NYSTRS and would like them answered in this column send them to Patty Joy at pjoy@vcmail.ouboces.org or Patty Lunden at plunden@vcmail.ouboces.org, your NYSTRS representatives.

—Patty Joy, Walden Elementary
NYSTRS Representative

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!!



*Time is running out!
Sign Up Now!*



Do You Travel Between Buildings....?

As of January 1, the IRS increased the mileage rate for the use of a car to 48.5 cents per mile for business miles driven.



Attention all teachers involved in the grades 3-8 state English Language Arts and Math assessments!!!

Please go to www.nysut.org and complete the union survey. It is not time-consuming and will be accessible throughout the testing period.

Educating a New Generation

"One of the greatest gifts a caring teacher can contribute to children is to help them learn to sit when they feel like running, to raise their hand when they feel like talking, to be polite to their neighbor, to stand in line without pushing, and to do their homework when they feel like playing by introducing procedures in the classroom, [I] am also introducing procedures as a way of living a happy and successful life." ~

Harry K. Wong

This quote from Harry Wong's book, The First Days of School was on the blackboard behind the desk of a first year teacher at the high school. It was presented in a magnetic frame to all the first year teachers at the Viking Induction Program. Without a doubt, Harry Wong has good ideas for classroom procedures and certainly as any teacher knows, procedures are important on the first days of school. What about the 80th day of school? Do we really want children to sit when they feel like running? When viewed during mid-term week what is striking is what this quote may really be saying about the state of education overall.

Recently in a conversation, an English teacher spoke with great sadness with regard to the impact that our new emphasis on writing has had upon many of our students' perceptions of books and reading. Reading is too often utilized educationally as means to an end rather than an enjoyable activity in and of itself. Students are primarily required to listen, read and write for the sake of information. Can these students also express original ideas? Can they form original opinions and/or opinions on the knowledge that we impart to them on a daily basis. Students should also read for enjoyment, growth and personal fulfillment. Why do children relish shared moments of reading with their parents, only to become indifferent and/or disaffected with reading as they grow older? Children are pushed into formulaistic writing exercises to improve standardized test scores. Creativity has been pushed to the wayside in the rush to move students to a higher middle grade on the grading rubric. Is this truly education at its finest? Talk with any teacher, or administrator for that matter, burdened with the stress



of test scores and their implications under NCLB and New York State Standards upon their school and you will hear a level of frustration about their impact. Testing students has never been a bad thing—we must test them to gauge what they have learned and haven't learned so that we may help them grow educationally. Testing them so we may rate the success of our schools based on bogus benchmarks robs our students of that educational growth.

Much lip service is given toward preparing children for the twenty-first century as we prepare them to compete in a "global economy." Certainly it is true that our children will live in a world far different than we live in today. Will it matter much in ten years what a child's score on the ELA in 4th grade was? I'm sure it would if that test measures his/her ability to think and to dream. But if that test is simply being used to judge schools' successes or failures through twisted statistics, we have failed to educate this next generation properly.

Thomas Friedman's book, The World is Flat, looks at the significant changes wrought worldwide by two dates; 11/9 (the fall of the Berlin Wall) and 9/11. He lays out ten "flatteners" that have created a global economy and then talks about how America should learn to adapt, not only to survive, but to thrive in the twenty first century. The concluding paragraph of his book addresses the next generation and advises that they must be, "the generation of strategic optimism, the generation with more dreams than memories, the generation that wakes up each

(cont'd on pg 11)

Educating a New Generation (cont'd from pg 10)

morning and not only imagines that things can be better but also acts on that imagination every day." (Friedman, p.469)

Do we encourage the next generation to imagine when "we help them learn to sit when they feel like running, to raise their hand when they feel like talking, to be polite to their neighbor, to stand in line without pushing, and to do their homework when they feel like playing?"

Are classroom procedures really enough to ensure they will live a happy and successful life? It is much more important that we encourage them to imagine and to dream and to learn to not care if it is on the test.

As we move to the 100th day of the school year, I would offer this re-write to Harry's quote for our new teachers:

One of the greatest gifts a caring teacher can contribute to children is to help them learn to run faster and further when they feel like running; to make themselves heard when they have something to say; to be willing to stand up with and for their neighbor; to understand that not everything is instant and sometimes they have to wait for things; and to find time everyday to play especially before doing their homework. By encouraging children to dream and to imagine I am hopefully giving them the keys to leading happy and successful lives.

- Patti Lunden, Vice President



Jersey Day
January 19, 2007



Supporting Tyler Ryan
"FORTITUDE"



Most of us have far more courage than we ever dreamed possible.

The VCTA collected \$1000 in four days
toward this community-sponsored fundraiser!



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

Happy New Year! Today the thermometer reads 7 degrees. It is the 26th of January and the coldest day of this winter season. Actually, we have been lucky. Very little snow, maybe two dustings. Of course, were I still teaching, I would probably be bemoaning the lack of a snow day or two. This winter also spares everyone the ongoing wonderment concerning possible "give-back days" due to exhausting the snow day supply and what effect that would have on plans for spring vacation travel! Ah, those halcyon days in the faculty room downstairs in the high school. (Now even that room is a mere memory and the home of the technology crew.)

A great number of retirees have retreated to winter quarters in warmer climes. Golf courses in the Carolinas, Florida, and Arizona are playing host to some of Valley Central's finest. The winter has been so crazy that golf courses here have apparently remained open. On my way to my teaching gig at Mount St. Mary's Des-

mond Campus, I noted several foursomes at Powelton just last week.

I trust that those of you who access ECHOES electronically (wow!!) will do so from your winter digs. This is probably a good place to remind retirees to inform our beloved editor of address and/or e-mail changes lest you miss a Musing! (Sometimes I even amaze myself at my incredible humility.)

This time of year also brings the seasonal sicknesses, and we are also more aware of the serious illnesses of some of our VC family. I usually mention no names because our folks are pretty private, but I know that you will keep them in your thoughts and prayers.

Good News re: the contract settlement for the Paraprofessionals, a fine and deserving group of people. As I write this, I am hoping that there has been (or is close to) a settlement for the custodians who are also most deserving. (Editor's Note: custodians have also settled, See story page 2.)

I am anxiously awaiting Governor Spitzer's first moves on state aid, testing, charter schools, etc. I also am hopeful that the

Assembly will get off the dime and move the "Forgotten Mommies" legislation. I'm also hopeful that the new year will wise up the media re: reporting of test results and how unfair it is to refer to schools as failing (in big letters) when only a small segment of a population has not met a pre-determined goal—sometimes due to absence from testing. This is incredibly unfair to both students and teachers. No child left behind, indeed! Dare I also hope that Washington wakes up...?

—Amen

Having vented. I return to hibernation. May '07 be the year that all school constituencies work together in harmony. Until next time, keep pushing back the barriers of ignorance in whatever venue life finds you. Peace.

—Mac

(AKA Kevin McFadden)

Retiree Representative

PS— If you are planning to retire, make certain that you meet all local and state deadlines.



Mac leaves hibernation for this installment of Mac's Musings!

"This time of year...we are also more aware of the serious illnesses of some of our VC family... I know that you will keep them in your thoughts and prayers."

Contacting the New Governor:

Write Him:

Eliot Spitzer
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Web/E-mail:

www.ny.gov/governor/

NYS Legislative Session Information Page:

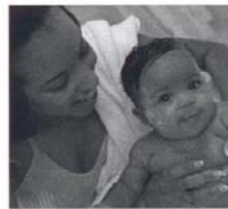
<http://public.leginfo.state.ny.us>

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.

Working to Benefit You!

Every program endorsed by NYSUT Member Benefits Trust is researched, designed and monitored to enhance your lifestyle.



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Car Rentals - Alamo, Avis, Budget & Hertz
Six Flags
The Buyer's Edge Buying Service
Heat USA

Other Services

Consumer Credit Counseling Service
MetDESK (Division of Estate Planning for Special Kids)
Payroll & Pension Deduction
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To request more information, please call:

(800) 626-8101

E-mail us at: benefits@nysutmail.org or visit us

on the Web at www.memberbenefits.nysut.org.

Some benefits may not be available in all local associations.

For information about these programs or about contractual expense reimbursement/endorsement arrangements with providers of endorsed programs, please contact NYSUT Member Benefits Trust or refer to your NYSUT Member Benefits Trust Summary Plan Description.

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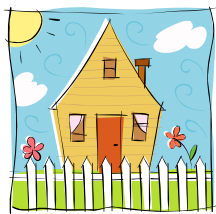
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The VCTA and the Joy Insurance Agency have collaborated to provide members with the following new discount on Travelers Auto & Home Insurance rates: 5.5% discount on auto insurance and 7% on home insurance.

These additional Travelers discounts for VCTA members are available exclusively through the Joy Insurance Agency. Specific information and forms are available on the web at www.vcta.net. Select "Member Discounts and Savings" under the "Health and Finance" category on the home page.

The Joy Insurance Agency is a member in good standing with the Better Business Bureau. Owner Christopher Joy is a Valley Central graduate and Valley Central School District resident. His office is located at 639 East Main Street, Middletown, NY 10940. Phone (845) 342-4888; Fax (845) 342-9117.



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TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION



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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 March 23, 2007.

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

Got Stress...?

In light of the fact that it is now February and there has been nary a snow day, it's probably the perfect time to talk about teacher stress and burnout! Everyone knows that being a teacher is, though a wonderful and rewarding job, one of the most stressful occupations there is. Some days are absolutely inspiring and others are, well, ...not so much! Further contributing to the stress factor is the isolation that accompanies the job. Of course, you interact with your students all day, but you can't discuss your stress level with them (and if you do, you might need a break!). Even if you teach collaboratively, there are few opportunities during the day to interact with adults on an adult level. Perhaps this is why when teachers get together outside of school, teaching is all they talk about!

The causes of teacher stress are many. From challenging your students to think, to dealing with discipline issues, keeping up with the never-ending stream of seemingly useless paperwork, to grading all of your students' work, returning parent phone calls, and ~ oh yeah, teaching~, the days are quite hectic. Thankfully, most teachers are lucky enough to have kind and understanding administrators who have been there, done that. Those who aren't so blessed have the added stress of dealing with unreasonable and demanding supervisors and an uncomfortable, tension-filled work environment. When you bottle all of that negativity up and don't talk about it, it will take its toll. If you find yourself going home stressed more often than not, it may be time to make sure you are taking care of yourself.

In an article on www.educationworld.com (address below), the signs of stress are identified as:

- Physical/emotional exhaustion
- Short fuses
- Repression of feelings
- Lethargy
- Depression
- General lack of resiliency
- More frequent absences
- No sense of humor
- Difficulty being organized
- No time to listen to anyone
- Frequent illness

If you start to suffer from any of these stress symptoms, there are many ways to cope. Some successful strategies (from helpguide.org) include exercising regularly, eating right, developing a support system and sharing feelings, and making sure to do one thing just for yourself each day. Stress isn't only physical, so it's also important to try and change some basic mental attitudes as well. For instance, try to have realistic expectations. It doesn't matter how many hours you spent planning that lesson, the students might not respond with an enthusiastic round of applause. Instead of getting frustrated or angry, try to find the humor in a given situation. Try to change the way you look at problems, view them as opportunities instead of obstacles. If you think that you have gotten to the point of burnout you might want to consider seeking professional help, taking a leave, or, in extreme cases, job change.

Stress is an inherent part of teaching and most other professions for that matter. How you manage stress will ultimately determine how it affects you, your students, and even your family. —Meghan Riley

The Employee Assistance Program can help with stress too.
<http://www.eapworks4you.org> Toll Free # 1-800-962-7487

Sources: http://www.education-world.com/a_admin/admin/admin413.shtml

http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_management_relief_coping.htm