

VC ECHOES

Volume 10, Issue 5

Valley Central Teachers' Association

April, 2008

REFORMING SCHOOL FUNDING: STOP CHASING OUR TAILS (PG.7)





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VC Echoes is
a NYSUT
and AFT
Award-winning
Publication!

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*Article contributions or Letters to the Editor
should be sent to
Meghan Riley, HS, by May 9th, 2008*

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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.

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

We're on the web at: www.vcta.net

Is your best friend retiring this year?

Pay tribute to him or her by writing a short biography of his/her teaching career at VC for the Retiree Edition of the VC ECHOES to be published on or about 5/27/08. Submit your bio via e-mail by 9 May 2008 to Meghan Riley, HS. Please use Microsoft Word. If submitting digital pictures, please have them in JPG format.

1. Who is this person? Where did they grow up, go to college? What brought them to Valley Central? What is his/her family status?
2. When did they begin teaching at Valley Central? Where else have they taught? What have they taught here? Have they advised or coached any extracurricular activities? Have they been involved with any aspects of the school community? (PTA, Scholarship council) Have they been actively involved in the VCTA?
3. What is unique about this person? What are the contributions they have made in their classroom and outside their classroom?
4. How has this person made a difference to VC: colleagues and students?
5. Where are they headed after they retire? Do they have any hobbies or other careers they plan to pursue? What are they looking forward to most about retirement? What will his/her colleagues miss about them? What do his/her colleagues hope for her?

PICTURES: I need at least **one** picture of each retiree. You may send pictures (by e-mail or scanner-ready). Artwork (caricatures) are also acceptable and can be scanned. It is great to have pictures from throughout a career. I will include as many as possible. Any pictures sent will be returned.

Farewell, Our Friend



A brilliant light has been extinguished in the Valley Central community. Montgomery Elementary has lost one of its most beloved family members, Beatrice Hines, who lost a very valiantly fought battle with lung cancer on March 17, 2008. Bea retired in 2002 after teaching at Montgomery for 34 years!

Bea was a fabulous teacher, a most esteemed colleague and my very best friend for 35 years.

She was a person of few words. I, on the other hand, never ran out of words...until now. Somehow now I can't find enough adjectives to describe her.

Sometimes there just aren't enough words...

Bea was my next door neighbor at Montgomery Elementary for more years than I can recall. She never uttered an unkind word and rarely complained. She always put herself "out" for others. But Bea, in her quiet, soft spoken, unselfish, easy-going manner, spoke volumes about life.

Bea was a true giver, never forgot birthdays or friends special occasions. She was full of life. She loved bright colors, playing the piano, painting, chocolate, modern furniture, fireplaces, family, fast cars and Kahlua. Bea always had the best parties and loved to laugh. She was a great godmother to my son, was always impeccably dressed and was a person of impeccable character.

She was an awesome teacher, a loving family member, a dynamic, talented person and most of all, the very best friend anyone could possibly have.

Some say you can measure a person's impact on Earth by the amount of loss felt at their passing. There aren't enough tears.

But what Beatrice Hines left us as her legacy will live on in all of us. As her friend, I can't begin to tell you how much she's given to my life.

You know, sometimes there just aren't enough words...

Submitted by Mary Monahan

*Right: Derek Taylor with
Joe DiLorenzo in 1978 at
the Senior-Faculty Tea*

Remembering Derek

I was saddened to hear recently of the passing of Derek Taylor. When I arrived at Valley Central as young teacher in 1988, it was for a part time position in the science department. It was a 3/5ths position, with 3 preps in 3 different rooms. Navigating one's way around the hallways, bureaucracy and personalities was no easy task for someone new to the building. I was one of the many new teachers that Derek took the time to mentor. He helped me understand how things worked at VCHS. Some hints were invaluable: 'Stay on Stell Schoonmaker's good side' and 'Be on time for faculty meetings or Joe DiBello will bore a hole through you with his eyes faster than a neon laser.'

During lunch I would take refuge in the science office between Derek and Wes Love's room. Derek was a wealth of knowledge about all things science. He could tell you how atom bombs, aluminum cans and mirrors were manufactured. He showed me how to get iron from breakfast cereal, test food for vitamin C as well as dozens of other demos that were of great help to me at the beginning of my career. Today finding this type of information is a simple matter of a few clicks of the mouse, but in a day and age before the Internet you needed to get information from a living breathing person. Derek was one of those guys that could give you ideas about a topic that you could work into your lesson to give it that extra 'something.' Another valuable resource I received from Derek was access to a ditto machine. Derek had saved a bunch of ditto supplies that were destined for the scrap heap when Xerox became the main means of copying materials.

On my off periods I would look out into Derek's room and be amazed by the number of students crammed into his chemistry class. There were upwards of 40 students with several sitting on the radiator in the back. Even more amazing was the fact that most were listening to his every word. He knew the importance of building a rapport with his students. He did this through his offbeat style and sense of humor. Who could forget the Grateful Dead ties or the "two by four of knowledge?" His expressions were also memorable. Students were "cherubs" or "amigos", a new or easier way to do something was invariably followed by "less work for mother."

If Valley Central had a teachers' hall of fame, or just an overall good guy hall of fame, he would definitely get my vote.

—Glenn Eckert, (HS)



Fishin' Larry

Larry treated me like a younger brother. I tagged along with him and loved him as much as my other four brothers. When he decided to become a fly fisherman, I decided to become a fly fisherman. When he was taught how to tie a Gold-ribbed Hare's Ear, I learned right beside him. I can never claim to approach his ability to routinely make a perfect cast beneath an overhanging branch forty feet across a slick flo. That fly, possibly a rusty spinner, would gently settle on the surface two feet above the trout's rise. Larry's cast will be with me on the haunts he and I trod together...Esopus, Sandbar, Beaverkill, Neversink. I like that.

Fishin' Larry and I spent many hours in a duck blind in the Hudson River marshes. No one other than a die-hard duck hunter can explain the reason for a grown man to stand in knee-deep swamp muck and water at least a half hour before sunrise until sunset. We would then have to collect our stand of decoys and paddle our canoe at least two miles along the river shoreline and up the Sparkill Creek. Just as we had fishless days, there were duckless days as well, and it didn't matter one bit. We were on, in, or near water. There's something about life and water that I know the natural biologist in Larry knew and revered. He told me several times that life is for the living. Larry lived life.

The stories I have regarding my dear friend I will treasure and share with anyone asking about a Sutter Tale. I would especially like to share something with teachers about the art. When a student awakens on a morning excited about coming to school because of one teacher, that one teacher has affected a life. Jeannie Ramundo, a retired art

teacher in the VC school district, tells of her son Michael's excitement about going to school on Sutterfic Day when he could be in biology class and lab with Mr. Sutter. I'm confident that most of Larry's students loved and respected both his subject and persona. One of his methods might be described as osmosis. Larry could say the same thing in five different ways so that the learning or principle would slowly sink in. His lessons would always be enthusiastic and often humorous. I never saw Larry sitting down or in one place in his classroom. The same could be said about Larry's approach to life. Larry lived the subject he taught.

—Bob Ciganek



1978—Mr. Sutter in his classroom, next to the chalk board that he erased double fisted so he could stuff his students' brains full of biology!

A Room Full of Light

Having Biology with Mr. Sutter in VCHS Room 210 in the morning meant the room was always full of light, even when the sky was gray and overcast. And the light source was the teacher in the room, Larry Sutter. There are teachers who are unforgettable. Larry Sutter certainly fit that description. Larry was the epitome of Parker Palmer's (The Courage to Teach) "wild triangle"—the teacher, the student and the subject. Larry loved his subject—he taught Biology to sophomores. He did more than teach Biology, he breathed Biology into his students. Any student who had Larry can remember his songs about photosynthesis and respiration, his chant that, "A day without Sutter is like a day without butter," and the twinkle in his eye when we were going to talk, "sexy-wexy" and describe the life cycle of flowers.

Larry had a knack for including all students in his biology lessons each day. He would not allow anyone to sit unnoticed in his classroom. As a shy sophomore, I preferred to sit quietly in the back of the classroom, take notes and study without calling any attention to myself. This was not going to happen in Larry Sutter's class. Instead, he drew me out of my shell with jokes and smiles that made me feel as though I were an important member of the classroom. That was Larry's gift. He made every student feel like a special part of the class. And in that classroom, he treated his students like they were all family.

Larry understood multiple intelligences long before it became educational verbiage. He bounced around the room with an unending amount of energy as he double fistedly erased the board eager to tell us more and more about the subject we were studying. He sang, he drew, he moved, and he loved to give us hands-on experiences. I will never forget how he taught me to skin the frog my lab partner and I were to dissect. Both squeamish girls, we were

just staring at this frog on the pan of wax. As I crinkled my nose and tried not to toss my breakfast, I reached out for the frog. Larry was quick to assist me. He said, "Let me show you a trick. I'll hold the frog for you." What a relief! I wouldn't have to touch the frog. Then he told to make a fist and bend my thumb. The next thing I knew he grabbed me by the wrist of that hand, put my hooked thumb into the slit that was precut in frog's skin and whisked my arm quickly so that by the time I knew I was touching that dead thing, its skin was hanging off my finger. He smiled at me with the biggest grin and told me he knew I could do it. He was right—we all would do anything for him. He made learning fun. He didn't teach us for the test—he taught us for life. And his Regents record was stellar because he knew it wasn't as much about what we learned for the Regents, but what we learned for life.

I don't ever remember a day when Larry Sutter didn't give us his all. It was apparent that he loved his subject, he loved his students and he loved teaching. He was the kind of teacher that every teacher hopes to one day be—Larry was that teacher everyday. How fortunate Valley Central is to have had Larry Sutter as part of the family imparting light and life to so many students.



NCLB Postcards: Let's Get It Right

Earlier this school year NYSUT and the AFT communicated with locals regarding the need to lobby Congress with respect to the detrimental impact that NCLB is having on education. Vice Presidents Rich Steger and Patti Lunden tackled this worthy union cause, with the support of building reps, with the passion of dedicated unionists and child-centered advocates. Postcards addressed to US Senators Charles Schumer and Hillary Clinton, as well a third postcard designed to be independently addressed to each local member's House Representative, were printed by Rich and Patti. This time-consuming project was completely funded by our annual VOTE-COPE reimbursement and resulted in over 1,500 postcards being mailed to US Congressional Representatives from VCTA members.

No Child Left Behind continues to be a thorn in the side of educational success for many of our children. This under-funded mandate uses all of the politically correct rhetoric while simultaneously providing little practical educational substance. According to H. L. Mencken: "There is always an easy solution to every human problem—neat, plausible, and wrong" ...and, according to James Crawford, "...certain to have unintended consequences." These unintended consequences may be impossible to stop in the short-term and difficult to reverse with regard to the long-term damage caused to our students. NCLB misses the mark by ignoring Albert Einstein's advice: "Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts." James Crawford believes that NCLB-style accountability is based on erroneous assumptions. For example:

- ⇒ *Schools are responsible for achievement gaps...*
 - ⇒ *failing to work hard enough, long enough*
 - ⇒ *low expectations for minority students*
 - ⇒ *resistance to change*
 - ⇒ *'making excuses' for poor performance*
- ⇒ *Solution: set high standards, test often, punish failure*
- ⇒ *No need to:*
 - ⇒ *provide substantial new resources*
 - ⇒ *address non-school factors*

James Crawford believes "NCLB justifies avoidance of inequality" issues by remaining focused on a "blame-it-on-the-schools view..." Regardless of the politically motivated rhetoric that often binds the hands of teachers and hinders effective education and social reform, our job (i.e., the VCTA's) will be to put children center every day whether it be sending postcards to congress or providing extra help to many of our underprivileged and over-tested students. To view James Crawford's PowerPoint presentation entitled "NCLB: A Diminished Vision of Civil Rights," visit the following website: http://www.nysut.org/files/nysut_gap_071026_Crawford.pdf. James Crawford was a guest speaker at the Closing the Gap Symposium sponsored by NYSUT. Crawford works for the Institute for Language and Education Policy (<http://www.elladvocates.org/>).

On a more positive note regarding NCLB, the NEA won an important lawsuit in the U.S. Court of Appeals against the Department of Education. This court overruled an earlier decision rendered by a federal judge who dismissed the suit under the premise that Washington was under no obligation to fund its mandates despite the fact that "NCLB funds have fallen \$70 billion short of what was originally promised." The new decision requires Congress to rewrite the law to make its funding intentions clear. This new ruling "... puts states and districts in a strong position to carry out NCLB directives only as far as federal funds cover" (NEA Today, 2/2008, p 13).

—Tim Brown

Citizens' Advisory Budget Committee (CABC)

What is the CABC?

The CABC is a district committee that meets annually for presentations by the District administration on the construction of the next year's budget. It is attended by taxpayers, Board of Education members, Central Office administrators, middle managers, teachers, paraprofessionals, secretaries and parents. Meetings are run in a town hall, round table format with everyone able to ask questions throughout the discussion. The purpose of the meetings is to allow administration and BOE to have input and feedback from the many stakeholders of the District as they build a budget balancing the mandates, needs and desires of the district with the cost to the taxpayers.

This year the meetings took place on February 3, 20, March 3 and 17. The District presentations covered personnel, programs, special education, operations and maintenance, and athletics. Many of the faces around the table have attended these meetings for many years and returning to the meetings is a reunion of sorts. Usually the attendance is approximately forty people of various connections to the district. Those employed by the district usually outweigh the number of parents and taxpayers. Many of the taxpayers who were angry about their taxes in the initial years of CABC, have come around to understanding the complication of school funding, unfunded mandates and property taxes. The discussion this year was also an opportunity for the District to try to explain Contract for Excellence money and required spending. We will be a Contract for Excellence school district again next year and while the money is intended to improve student achievement, the Legislature and State Education Department seemingly make up the rules as they go along and this complicates an already complicated process.

What happened this year at CABC?

During the initial meeting of the CABC some new faces joined the table—many parents of pre-schoolers interested in pre-kindergarten. The initial proposal was to utilize the pre-K money that is always included in state-aid to monitor the private providers of pre-K to 4 year olds in the district. Contract for Excellence money would be used to establish 2 half-day sections of pre-K in district targeting students in need. This plan changed to one full day section mid course, due to new restrictions imposed on Contract for Excellence money. The last CABC meeting this year happened to occur on the same day that Bear Sterns' collapse was announced. The six taxpayers who at initial meetings had been positive on spending suggestions all became much more conservative that evening and their suggestion was not to pursue pre-K or elementary foreign language at this time. They spoke about how hard it is to have taxes go up and this was the only tax they were able to control by their vote.

The VCTA has sent representation to CABC each year to make the voices of children and teachers heard. As these taxpayers talked about how they could not bear any more cost to their personal budget, it was hard not to think about how this process is a lot like a dog chasing its own tail. While the CABC process is excellent in concept and truly has made a difference in our passing rates since the days of the taxpayers association, the community is still only one opportunity to vote on taxes. They are not able to vote on the federal budget, the state budget, the county budget, the town budgets or village budgets directly.

(cont'd on pg. 8)

Citizens' Advisory Budget Committee (CABC) (cont'd from 7)

Educational Funding

Even though a school budget has 95% fixed costs by contract and mandate, taxpayers are given an opportunity to vote on the budget. They clearly utilize the opportunity to voice their frustration with taxes and the economy overall. Who is hurt by this process? The stakeholders who have no voice at the table—the children. It is their educational program that is held back by a failed budget either by having larger class sizes, less opportunities and a lack of sports/extra-curricular activities. One taxpayer said, “This year the children may just have to learn to do without.”

At Valley Central, our children have learned that lesson since the inception of the district fifty years ago. Yes, we get a lot of bang for our buck—we have great test scores and outperform neighboring districts who spend much more than we do. The question is, don't our kids deserve the same programs and opportunities as the children of those neighboring districts? Our buildings are all looking their ages. Last year an entire wall next to the outside stairs at Walden just gave way. It was promptly fixed, however that wall had been a topic of discussion at safety meetings for many years. Must we always patch our problems and beg to replace threadbare carpet? How many years does a program have to be proposed before it can be included in a budget—at VC, the average is 3-5 years from request to realization for any program. We have great ideas—but they must sit while we convince so many people that there is true benefit to spending money on them. Three to five years is too long for students to miss out on educational opportunities. Usually one good idea spirals into another—imagine if we could reduce the wait time for funding these ideas. We no longer can allow change to be slow. Our neighboring communities and global village will move too fast and certainly it will become more difficult for our students to com-

pete if they have to continually wait.

How sad that this is still the state of educational funding. Prison systems don't hold CABC meetings to discuss the salaries/benefits of correction and parole officers, prison equipment supplies, programs or operation budgets. Yet our taxes pay for our prison system. Don't our children deserve to be treated as well as our criminals?

Make a Difference

What can we do to turn this tide? We need to be the voice of the children. Five years ago NYSUT was a major force in marching on the capital in Albany to make their voices heard when the educational budget was slashed. Maybe we need to march on Albany every year—to say that current system is unfair.

As a dog chases its own tail, all it does it dig a rut in the ground. It cannot get out of the rut until it looks up. It is time that we look up and bark. We have a new governor who has always been a friend to education. Governor Paterson seems to have no problem in laying his cards out on the table. It is time for educators to do the same. Be sure to utilize the NYSUT website to send messages to our legislators at the federal and state level regarding the funding of our school system. These are the people deciding for us how we must run our classrooms—it is time we made our voices heard and remind the legislators they must fund our schools to keep children center.

—Patti Lunden, HS

In the News...



Brown Tackles the Issues

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 NEA Today 2/2008, American Teacher 2/2008, NYSUT Leader 2/1/2008, and New York Teacher editions from 1/31 and 2/28/2008.

Congress—Rights Without Responsibility: As stated in the article, *NCLB Postcards: Let's Get It Right*, federal funding has fallen \$70 billion behind its promised benchmark. However, there are other notably disastrous mandates that must also be addressed. IDEA is currently funded at only 17% despite the fact that Congress promised 40% funding when it was passed into law (NEA Today, 2/2008, p. 7). It would appear that Congress is in favor of a federal government that has unlimited rights with regard to legislation while simultaneously accepting almost no responsibility for their decisions. Perhaps Congress should look into a mirror—they might be able to finally understand why education is becoming so difficult in the U.S. We teach our students that rights must be coupled with responsibility to nurture effective citizenship and democracy. It would appear that Congress believes this tenet unnecessary for elected officials. Congress should put its money where its pen is—own your mandates or don't make them.

Balancing Special & General Education Violence: (NEA Today, 2/2008, pp. 8-9) Data demonstrates that students with disabilities account for a disproportionate number of threats and assaults in schools. Assault rates for general education students are at 7 per 1,000 students while special education students are at 33 per 1,000 students, with emotionally disturbed students accounting for most of this statistical difference as well as accounting for the most serious threats. In the state of Pennsylvania this increased differential coincided with increased rates of inclusion. Lest one immediately and erroneously assume that I am anti-inclusion, let me state for the record that I am not. Inclusion, however, must be appropriate for both the classified child and the classified

child's classmates. Many school officials misinterpret law, believing that classified students must have access to a general education classroom. This is incorrect—"they must always have access to a general public school curriculum." The 2004 reauthorization of IDEA included language "allowing for the removal of violent students to alternative education sites—with the proviso that their due process rights were preserved and their right to a free, public education safeguarded." This language was lobbied for with our VOTE-COPE contributions and is certainly a beneficial addition to IDEA; however, as long as removal of disruptive students to alternative settings necessitates the expenditure of more money and continues to negatively impact a school or district's "report card," children's needs will continue to take a second seat to the politics of money and political correctness.

Collective Bargaining: "Twenty states still prohibit bargaining for public employees." Research demonstrates that loss of worker rights increases income disparity. Surprise! Income inequity leads to a loss of "...social safety nets...vital social programs...[and increases] infant mortality" (American Teacher, 2/2008, p. 1). Before you know it the damn working class will be demanding health coverage for their families. Man—that a dangerous slippery slope. No...I wasn't pretending to be Dick Cheney. On a happier note, unions added 311,000 members nationally last year, the largest increase since 1979. Union membership in the U.S. is now at 15.7 million members (NYSUT Leader, 2/1/2008, p. 2).

Alternative Certification Routes: (American Teacher, 2/2008, p. 7) New certification regulations permitting some new teachers to step into the classroom without jumping through the same hoops as their colleagues has always seemed somewhat hypocritical in light of the recent push for higher standards within the teaching profession. According to

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In the News... (cont'd from pg. 9)

a survey conducted by NCCTQ, “only half of the alternative-route teachers felt prepared for their assignments in high-needs schools compared with 80 percent of the traditional-route teachers. The alternative-route teachers also are much less likely to see teaching as a lifelong career—only 16 percent share that view, compared with a majority of the traditional-route teachers.” Although teaching is a job that pays the bills, it is also a career and a calling. There are certainly parts of teaching that are measurable and objectively verifiable; there is also a part of teaching that is a unique art form that requires a passion for children and learning. If you do not have this—GET OUT!

Charter Schools Fear Accountability: It should come as no surprise that Charter Schools wish to be defined as public in order to receive tax dollars but demand to be defined as private when issues of accountability arise with the Comptroller’s Office. Imagine that! Charter Schools want all of the rights of public schools with none of the corresponding responsibility. I’m shocked! NYSUT is challenging these Charter Schools in court. “Court filings by the attorney general’s office say the 16 charter operators received an average of 91 percent of their annual budgets from federal, state and local tax dollars—approximately \$45 million of their \$50 million in annual spending” (NYT, 1/31/2008, p. 3).

New York State Schools #1 Again: NYT, 2/28/2008, p. 3) NYS ranks first in both the number of children who take AP Exams (35.5% NYS vs. 24.9% national average) and the percent of students who score proficiently (i.e., 3 or more—23.4% NYS vs. 15.2% national average). “Students scoring 3 or above on AP exams are much more likely than their peers to earn a bachelor’s degree in 5 years or less...”

—Tim Brown

On New Tenure Reqs...

I don’t mind if tenure’s tied to state test results
As long as I have some control
Over what happens in my classroom and with my kids.

To go with the football analogy on a pro level:
Coaches pick their people, their players and effectively
control the lives of the players during the season.

Then they’re held accountable for the results.

That’s what I want.

If you want me to be fully **RESPONSIBLE** for the performance on a test

I want to have full **AUTHORITY** in the lives of these kids.

I need to be able to:

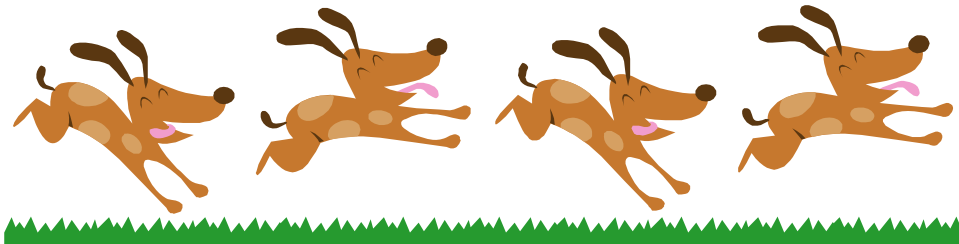
- Force attendance EVERY DAY AND EVERY PERIOD and hold parents accountable for poor attendance
- Drug test kids and mandate rehab or compliance in treatment for failing tests
- Mete out **consequences** (we never punish)
- When assignments are not complete, assign mandatory study time for low-achieving students
- Design an effective in-school suspension
- Hold parents accountable for student’s repeat poor behavior
- Know what students are doing on the weekends and have authority to crash parties, monitor myspace and make parents fully cognizant of the students with whom their children are spending their time. (in other words, fully invade kids personal space).
- And keep the lawyers out of schools....
- And to get all the support we need from parents, I think student success should be tied to school tax. Kids who don’t try and therefore perform poorly need to have a family that pays the difference. And if there’s no effort to improve, the parents would have to comply with interventions and family week.

Outrageous? Yes. But so is linking tenure to student scores as it is today.

—Jean McMahon, HS

CREDIT UNIONS CARE FOR KIDS PROGRAM to benefit the Children's Cancer Fund

It's Puppy Pandemonium!!!!!!



We are back for our 7th year—and with a new vendor!

These cute and cuddly canines are ready to leave the kennel for the Valley Central Federal Credit Union to help our designated children's charity:

Children's Cancer Fund

Each litter contains an assortment of six 8½" fluffy puppies, each adorned with their own personal bandana emblazoned with the 2008 *Care for Kids* logo.

These adorable pups are only \$5

To purchase a stuffed puppy or make a donation to the Children's Cancer Fund, please stop in at the Credit Union office or see Diane Ruggles at the high school (Room 101)

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

☛Another St. Patrick's Day

In my youth and some years thereafter, St. Patrick's Day was a time of marching and other festive activities (!!) I can recall marching up 5th Avenue with my fellow students from Xavier in snow and wind and rain and whatever else the Ides of March gifted us with. Those days are gone, the memories still bring joy, and the corned beef still tastes as good as it did when Mac was still a pup. A happy St. Patrick's Day to you all and welcome to the start of springtime. We certainly are ready for it. I've seen enough snow and ice. Bring on the sunshine, green grass and flowers! The end of March brings back many of our snowbird retirees. It is good to see them again.

☛Condolences

This winter season brought news of the passing of several of our beloved retirees. Two stalwarts of the high school science department died recently. Derek Taylor who taught Chemistry for many years and who was a fixture in Room 206 passed away in California. He had been ailing for several years and had re-located to be near his two children, Matt and Sara. Derek had a wonderful sense of humor and a great interest in many things. Our sympathy goes out to Matt and Sara.

I have said for many years that Valley Central had and has many wonderful and excellent teachers. I have also always felt that the best of the best was Larry Sutter. He taught Biology for many years and served as chairman of the science department. Autumn for me was official when Larry and his Bio students sang out "Photosynthesis!" in stentorian tones. He was an avid and expert fisherman and a fervent Yankee fan. How true were the words he would tell his young scholars: "A day without Sutter is like bread without butter." Larry died after a long illness. Our condolences to Jean and family.

Both of these men will be sorely missed, but will be alive in our memories of them.

☛Golden (or at least Blue and White) Anniversary

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Valley Central School District. There will be a celebration of this anniversary at the beginning of June. A committee is presently working on the details. Several retirees are working with the committee, including John Mirola who served as teacher, coach, and assistant superintendent and who budgeted pre-centralization and centralization. Pat Iorlano also is on the committee. Pat was a student before and after centralization, a long-time teacher and chairman and a present board member. I'll pass on more information as plans come to fruition so that those

retirees who wish to may join in the celebration.

☛New Retirees

Springtime brings with it some happy/sad news. The ranks of retirees will grow as some of our active teachers choose to retire. We take joy in the successful conclusion of their VC teaching and their entrance into a new and exciting part of their lives. The sadness is due to the fact that their talent and experience will be missing from the hallowed halls. The names of those retiring will appear in this edition of Echoes or in the next, and biographical sketches will be in the Retiree issue in May/June. Best wishes to those of you joining us retirees as you plan for your lives after VC.

☛Amen!

Thanks for turning to the back pages. It's hard to believe we are approaching the last quarter of the year and that state testing in elementary and middle schools is now past tense. I must be getting old because time is certainly flying by. Let's hope that we keep kids center as we gallop toward the end of another year.

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

—Kevin McFadden, Retiree Representative



Editor's Note: Kevin McFadden was recently honored by the VC PTA with the 2008 Founder's Award for his contributions to the welfare of children and youth. WE LOVE YOU KEVIN! For more information and photos visit our web page: www.vcta.net.

TRS Update: Is 55/25 a reality?

What is 55/25? 55/25 is a bill that has been proposed in the Senate and the Assembly. The corresponding bill numbers are: Senate S5732-A and Assembly A3607-A. These bills have been part of a proposed change to the Retirement System that NY-SUT has lobbied for through VOTE-Cope for many years. If these bills were to pass, NYSTRS members would be able to retire at age 55 with 25 years of service, or at any age over 55 as soon as they reach 25 years of service. Currently Tier 2, 3 and 4 members may retire without penalty at age 55 with 30 years of service, or at any age over 55 as soon as they reach 30 years of service.

Enhancement These bills are proposed as enhancements. An enhancement is an addition to a current benefit that would not cost the member. The last time an enhancement was signed into law was in 2000. The enhancement provided an additional service credit to Tier 1 and 2 members and stopped the required 3% contribution by Tier 3 and 4 members once they had reached ten years in the retirement system. At that time, the economy was very strong, the stock market was doing well and the employer contribution rate was low. However, today the contribution rate has risen since 2000 and given the current state of the economy and stock market, it is unlikely that these bills will receive serious consideration this year since the cost of the bills would be substantial.

Why are NYC teachers allowed to retire with a new 55/25 law? While Governor Spitzer was still in office he signed a law that gave eligible

UFT members of the NYC retirement system the option to retire at 55 with 25 years of service without penalty. However, this bill, unlike the bills proposed for the NYSTRS, requires those members to pay for that option by paying an additional contribution (1.85% of their salaries for all years of service). Therefore, this law is not an enhancement as much as an option. Additionally, the UFT agreed that in return for offering that option to current members of the system, new members would make a contribution for their entire career with a 55/27 service requirement. That means new members to the UFT will contribute for 27 years not 10. Again, this is not an enhancement nor is it an option since UFT new members are required to make the contribution.


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**Don't Forget! If you have a friend retiring this year,
the deadline for the retiree issue is 9 May 2008!**

ATF for Politicians?

No matter how disconnected you generally are from politics, or how hectic your life may have been around 10 March 2008, you couldn't avoid Eliot Spitzer's plummet from grace. The word fall simply doesn't cut it in his situation. Even among cynics, Spitzer was one of the last politicians one should ever expect to be involved in anything unsavory or illegal. His reputation was built on rooting out corruption and bringing down the bad people. In all the news coverage surrounding his downfall, what struck me most was the assertion that it was brought about by "self-destructive" tendencies. While I appreciate the fact that his life must be in utter upheaval, I strongly object to the idea that he "only hurt himself."

The idea that politicians who commit such acts are merely "self-destructive" individuals is absurd to me. Americans need to stop writing such behavior off in this manner. Perhaps if we collectively deem character traits such as integrity, honesty, and courage as necessary qualifications for our leaders, in lieu of viewing them as nice bonuses, we would fare better. In the case of Spitzer, he has not only hurt himself and his family, but he has put the future of New York State in jeopardy, especially with regard to education. He has let down all of the people of New York as well as the Democratic Party. His "self-destructive" tendencies have potentially cost all of our children a better education and a brighter future. Politicians have taken oaths to serve the people. When those oaths are broken there should be consequences beyond simply resigning.

Where are the standards of accountability for politicians? Teachers, who undoubtedly have an incredibly important job, are held to "high" standards and are accountable for their performance. Should politicians, one of the few vocations that impacts the lives of more people than educators, not have serious consequences for their failures, not to mention illegal actions?

Spitzer's actions are inexcusable. Instead of holding him accountable, beyond accepting his resignation, most Americans will probably line up to buy the book.

—Meghan Rilley

Education and David Paterson

Our new governor

has been received as almost a knight in shining armor by the State Legislature and the media. NYSUT has

also given him its endorsement and welcomed him with open arms. This is largely due to the fact that he has a reputation for being a man who can bring people together and effect real change. He is also viewed as a friend to education.



Governor Paterson has been a longtime advocate for students with disabilities. As a collaborative teacher, this is a cause near and dear to my heart and certainly wins him kudos. Paterson also has ties to the UFT (his father is on the UFT legal team) and supported Randi Weingarten as she called for caps on class size. These are education-friendly views to be sure.

On the other hand, Gov. Paterson is also a proponent of charter schools, he supported Spitzer's decision to raise the cap on charter schools, despite the fact that they have dramatically affected districts such as Albany. Additionally, he supported the proposal to allow Edison Schools, a private, for-profit company to take over some schools in NYC. Finally, the governor has backed plans to establish tax credits for parents who choose to send their children to private schools. This idea is widely recognized to be a "backdoor" means of setting up a school voucher system. Needless to say, most educators do not subscribe to these ideas. NYSUT openly opposes charter schools, school voucher systems, and businesses running schools.

In a time of such political upheaval and the need to finalize a budget, it is understandable that NYSUT wants to be optimistic about our new governor. However, this optimism must be guarded. Governor Paterson's record on education by no means puts all children center.

—Meghan Rilley

Assembly proposal would provide revenue for education, health care

A proposal by Assembly Democrats to bring in additional revenue for education and health care by passing a temporary income tax surcharge on the wealthiest New Yorkers is winning overwhelming public support.

Independent polls by the Siena Research Institute and Quinnipiac University show New Yorkers favor the so-called "millionaire's tax" by better than two-to-one margins. New York State voters support the plan to temporarily adjust income taxes for those earning \$1 million or more a year by 77-19 percent, with 4 percent undecided. Even Republicans support an income tax surcharge on the wealthiest New Yorkers, backing it by a 65-31 margin (Quinnipiac).

NYSUT analysts said a temporary income tax surcharge on those who earn more than \$1 million per year would enable the state to reverse devastating cuts to public higher education and health care, while also "keeping the promise" made in last year's state budget to school districts struggling under the burden of too few resources. If enacted, the proposal would raise an estimated \$1.5 billion for education and health care in 2008-09.

If the proposal, advanced by Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, is enacted, New York's top rate would increase from 6.85 to 7.7 percent for five years. The

change would impact less than 75,000 taxpayers - less than 1 percent of all New York taxpayers - and 46 percent of those already live out-of-state. Analysts also noted that this new top tax rate would still be significantly lower than neighboring New Jersey's top rate of 8.97 percent, helping to lay waste to the false argument that a "millionaire's tax" would drive the wealthiest New Yorkers away.

Silver is expected to address the issue at a news conference Wednesday.

Experts have also concluded that a more progressive income tax - in which those who can afford to pay more, do pay more - is the least damaging way to balance state budgets during a recession. A similar adjustment to the top rate in 2003 helped Gov. George Pataki to avoid harmful cuts to services during the last economic downturn.

And, the proposal is also generating support from some unlikely quarters. Prominent philanthropist Arlyn Gardner, who owns homes on Fifth Ave. and in Westchester County, declared herself fully in favor of the additional tax. She told the New York Times, "I say, 'Why not? We pay taxes to help those who need it.'"

Her additional share of state income tax could, for



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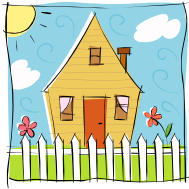


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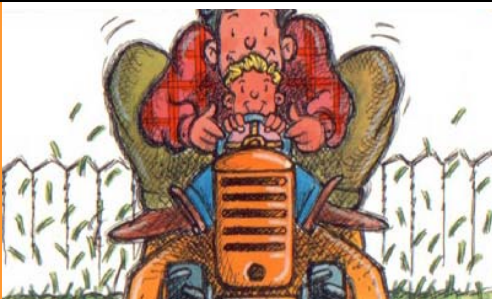
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