

VC ECHOES

Volume 11, Issue 3

Valley Central Teachers' Association

December, 2008

Barack Obama Makes History





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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 January 16th, 2009*

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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.

NYSUT-Endorsed Candidates Fared Well on Election Day, Nationally and Locally!

In addition to the historic Obama-Biden win, NYSUT-Endorsed candidates locally claimed victory in nearly every race. In fact, only two local candidates did not win—Tom Kirwan and Richard Randazzo. Hopefully, this will mean that education and labor issues will be a top priority in the coming years. Remember that NYSUT's endorsements are not party-based, they are issues-based and cross party lines.

On the national level, Barack Obama and Joe Biden are taking the reins at a time when our economic security is in grave danger, our education system faces serious challenges and obstacles, and our country is still embroiled in two wars on another continent. Their position is not an enviable one. Obama has already assembled a transition team as well as a Cabinet. Optimistically, this get-moving attitude will carry on throughout his presidency.

In the current economic climate, it is more important than ever to work to ensure that our children and their education are safeguarded against short-sighted, knee-jerk reaction-style cuts that typically occur in times such as these.

We have been told again and again along the campaign trail that education is important to the nation's future and that teachers are instrumental. Let's hope that this attitude prevails now that the votes have been cast. Our children deserve the best that we can do for them.

—Meghan Riley, HS, Soc. St.

TRS: Is Our Future Secure?

The question most delegates at the recent annual meeting of the delegates of the NYSTRS wanted answered was: How secure is our future? Outside of having a crystal ball, our future is very secure. Our fund is well divested in many different investment structures and, while it has decreased in overall value as has everyone's investments, we have fared better than the overall market—a sign that our investments are solid.

Our liability per year is still a very small portion of our overall assets and because our plan is a defined benefit plan (i.e., retirement benefits remain tied to our FAS regardless of market performance), our retired members can rest assured that their benefits are safe. There is no reason for a member who is planning to retire this year to be fearful—the benefit you are entitled to is the benefit you will be paid.

Enhancements were also a topic of discussion. Generally, enhancements are legislated when financial times are good. The last time we received an enhancement was eight years ago in 2000. While NYSUT will continue to lobby for enhancement initiatives ratified at the 2008 RA, it is unlikely that any enhancement legislation will be passed by the legislature in the near future. However, there was some buzz at the meeting that the legislators may be inclined to create a short-term 55/25 window to encourage retirements in the face of state budget cuts. Be sure to check the NYSTRS Legislative and NYSUT Legislative web pages to follow any such development.

Finally, a new teacher member was elected to the NYSTRS delegate board—Paul Farfaglia, president of the Jordan-Elbridge Teachers Association. He fills the seat vacated by Joe McLaughlin who decided to not seek reelection after serving as a member of the board for the past 18 years.

—Patti Lunden, NYSTRS Delegate

Is the sky falling?

The stock market crisis and major company failures have many Americans wondering just how shaky our financial ground is.

Our stock market has plummeted and soared, major companies are folding and we have all been warned to avoid buying gift cards as stores may not be in business after the holidays. Cuts in this year's budget have been averted, but NYSUT has warned all locals to brace for cuts like we have not seen before. NYSUT President Dick Iannuzzi is urging Governor Paterson to focus on increasing state revenues through a "more fair and progressive tax system" and by encouraging the governor to tap the "Rainy day fund" rather than slash education budgets.

Certainly President Iannuzzi's plan is more palpable than is Governor Paterson's. Much of education is already unfunded in the form of federal and state mandates that must be met despite district budgetary restrictions. To then slash a budget simply means one of two options—passing costs on to the local taxpayers or trimming back budgets which will affect children and their future. The volatility of the stock market has financial forecasters predicting that our economic crisis could turn around as early as the second quarter of 2009. Unfortunately, any slashing of education budgets will be felt long after that date. While our federal government is bailing out banks and car companies with CEO's making multi-million dollar salaries, it will be important to keep in mind at a federal, state and local level, as we enter into the budget season, that the education of America's children is surely the best investment we can make. Our children cannot compete globally if they are held back locally. There is no sure way to predict when the financial ground underneath our feet will become more stable, but we will need to know how to find stability on the ground no matter how it shifts. The futures of the children in our classrooms depend on it.

—Patti Lunden, Vice President

Sometimes a Scarf is just a Scarf

Valley Central High School became a media target recently when the administration decided that page 26 of the student handbook which described outerwear items not allowed to be worn in school also applied to fashion scarves that many students sport daily. Students didn't understand the reasoning behind the rule although they were told that the scarves were a safety hazard and that they were affiliated with gangs. Some students were suspended for refusing to remove the scarves and many teachers were left confused by the interpretation as they were not really informed of what was seen as a new rule, if not a new interpretation of the dress code in the Code of Conduct until after the fact.

Sixteen students went to the November 10 BOE meeting and presented a case questioning the rule. They asked many thoughtful questions and sought the reasoning behind the decision. The BOE listened to the students, asked some questions and promised to look into it. Meanwhile, the next day, ABC, CBS and NBC showed up at the HS to ask questions about the gang-related scarves. Valley Central made the news, not for all the great things that go on in this district from data-driven decision making and accountability task forces to literacy collaborative classrooms—we made the news for a fashion faux pas. Many of the teachers questioned the direction of the rule and by 7:40 am the next morning they had an answer.

On the morning announcements, Principal Joanne Avella directed teachers to check their email. It stated that after negotiation with the student council members, the scarf ban was lifted. This was a relief for the students, many of whom showed up in scarves that morning (and the mornings that followed) and for teachers who knew they had to follow the directive of administration. In the end, scarves are again allowed at VCHS and flow freely off the necks of students once again.

All of this begs the question: why was the scarf the issue to begin with? According to administration at CO, there are scarves that are associated with gangs—they are “Palestinian scarves.” They typically have a checkerboard pattern of color with tassels and are readily sold on the streets of NYC. Like bandannas (which **are** banned by the VCSD dress code) they are associated with gangs and therefore should be banned from school so that students are not showing gang colors which puts themselves and others in danger. As far as the safety reason for banning scarves, that hasn't been as readily explained. The issue of the scarves is really deeper than the fashion aspect presented on the news and by the students who became the spokespeople against the ban.

The issue has much more to do with the education of students, faculty, and administration. After all, if a student is showing gang affiliation through an article of clothing then this should be explained to the student so they can understand the risk they run in wearing the clothing in the wrong place. And how about some anti-gang education? Are there gangs at VC? Of course, there are – there are gangs everywhere. Are there wanna-be gangs at VC—yes, and these are often worse than real gangs. Is there gang education at VC? Not in a long time—and it shouldn't just be at the HS level—gangs typically target elementary and middle school level children. Faculty and staff also need to be educated in these same topics. They need to be informed by the administration before a new rule or twist of a rule is to be imposed so that all are on the same page.

If this does not occur, teachers are put into difficult positions when rules are questioned by students and the teachers are unaware of the rule change. Lastly, the administration at the HS needs to be educated so that they realize that the staff they manage has valuable insights into the history, tradition and culture of the building and is their best resource in trying to carry the HS forward as we all continue to put children center together.

—Meghan Riley, Soc. St., HS

Kids Helping Kids

It all started back in the year 2000, when John Van Frandenburgh brought in an old banana seat style bicycle that he found in the dump in Sullivan County. Van Frandenburgh had the idea to teach the four students from Trinity Alternative Program in his ninth period class a hands-on approach to practical skills in Technology. Van Frandenburgh wanted to teach the students the skills of tool safety, gears, gear ratios and bicycle repair. What he started turned out to be so much more.

Mike Presutti, a veteran teacher, saw the unbelievable transformation of the banana seat bicycle that the four students from Van Frandenburgh's class had completely repaired. From there, Mr. Presutti and Mr. Van Frandenburgh decided to continue repairing bicycles and when completed, they would be donated to children in need from the Valley Central community. That is how "Kids Helping Kids" was created.

Without the help of the whole Technology Department, which includes Van Frandenburgh, Presutti, Bill Bacon and Nick Longo, and the middle school students, these bicycles would not get repaired. These Technology teachers at times give up their lunch periods, come in early and stay late to finish repairing bicycles.

Kids Helping Kids has continued to grow from the 18 bicycles that were completed and donated from September to Christmas in the year 2000, to the 25 that were completed last school year September 2007 to June 2008. At this time 170 bicycles have been donated to needy and deserving children. Presently there are 50 bicycles in the technology classrooms at Valley Central Middle School ready and waiting for deserving children.

If you are wondering how this all works, well it goes like this: Let the community know you need broken bicycles and when you get to work in the morning there are a bunch of broken bicycles at the back of the school. Let students know that you need some extra hands to help repair and clean up

some bicycles to help needy children in your community, and you will get students coming in on their lunch periods and bringing friends with them to help. Call a local store to see if you can get a discount on bicycle parts and you get a phone call back making sure you can bring two trucks to pick up 24 damaged bikes that need repair. Call New Windsor Cycle and ask for a discount and you get boxes of bicycle parts. Teacher Linda Cavanaugh, now retired, saw the potential and rallied the Middle School staff with a flier requesting support of this program. Results were donations of money, used bicycles, special tools and bicycle parts to help keep the program running.

What is the lesson that is learned? Not only have the students learned how to problem solve and have basic mechanical skills while repairing bicycles. Presutti says one of the most memorable moments in the program was when a student said "We learned how to help people." Who knew that the name of the program, "Kids Helping Kids," would really be the lesson learned?

Donations of bicycles, bicycles parts or money for Kids Helping Kids can be dropped off in the technology classrooms at the Valley Central Middle School. For more information on the Kids Helping Kids program or you if you know of a child who is unable to afford a bicycle, please get in contact with Mike Presutti at 845-457-2400 ext. 6152. —Erin Davis, Phys Ed, MS



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 NYSUT Leader 11/24/2008, NYT 11/20/2008, UFT's NYT 11/20/2008, American Teacher 12/2008-1/2009, and The Edge 11/2008.

Midyear Cuts Averted: (NYSUT Leader, 11/24/2008; NYT, 11/20/2008, p. 8; UFT's NYT, 11/20/2008) Public schools, higher education systems and health care escaped midyear cuts that could have devastated their ability to provide needed services. This year's reprieve, however, will not prevent inevitable cuts projected for the governor's 2009-10 executive budget proposal scheduled to be released on December 16, five weeks earlier than required by state constitution to provide districts with more time to plan. According to Governor Patterson, this year's \$1.5 billion deficit could increase to a \$15 billion dollar deficit by next year and NYS is forbidden by law from operating at a deficit. NYSUT has been promoting multiple initiatives that could raise up to \$9 billion in needed revenue. One recommendation includes utilizing the states Tax Stabilization Fund. This "rainy day fund" could provide \$1.2 billion in needed revenue. I think it is safe to say it is raining; in fact, this may be the biggest economic downpour we have seen since the early 20th century according to some economic experts. Other recommendations include "imposing a temporary income-tax surcharge on those earning more than \$1 million per year (\$2 billion to \$7 billion—NOTE: Patterson's proposed cuts did not require "the wealthiest New Yorkers to shoulder any burden during this economic crisis"); closing loopholes in the state's bottle bill (\$200 million); reducing outsourcing of state work (\$100 million), and bulk purchasing of prescription drugs (\$100 million)." NYSUT has also recommended that the governor request "federal aid to help offset problems caused by the Wall Street crisis."



*Brown Tackles
the Issues*

Rich Steger Weighs-In On Men Who Teach:

(American Teacher, 12/2008-1/2009) Only one of every four public school teachers is male. Weighing in on what unique contributions men make at school and in the classroom, VP Rich Steger was quoted in the AFT's American Teacher: "The impact of a male teacher is not limited to the classroom. Interactions in the hallway, cafeteria, playground, etc., have impacts that are priceless." According to the article, "surveys indicate that the percentage of men who teach continues to bump along near a 40-year low. And gender disparity is even greater for those who teach the very young..."

Health Insurance Open Enrollment Package:

Open enrollment starts 11/22 and ends 12/22. Visit our [Health Insurance](#) page at www.vcta.net for a summary comparison between the OUSDHP, GHI/HMO, MVP and Empire HMO. Reminder—the VCTA does not endorse any particular plan. Members should consult with plan member services to ensure accuracy of information and plan benefits.

NYSUT Music Celebration: The current music that callers listen to when calling NYSUT headquarter will be replaced by musical pieces written by our own students throughout the state. Submission deadline is January 9. For more information visit our [Announcements](#) page at www.vcta.net.

Individual Health Insurance Markets Fail Women:

(The Edge, 11/2008) "Nowhere to Turn: How the Individual Health Insurance Market Fails Women," a report released by The National Women's Law Center, "found that gender rating is permitted in most states and women face higher premiums than men." Some of the more disturbing findings include a lack of maternity care coverage or (continued on page 7)

In the News... *(Cont'd from pg 6)*

expensive maternity riders that require “high levels of cost sharing for the patient,” the rejection of coverage for previous caesarean patients as well as women who have been the victim of domestic violence. Visit our [Announcements](#) page at www.vcta.net to access the NWLC’s full report and press release.

The Truth About Member Liability: (*The Edge*, 11/2008) Some VCTA members expressed concern about their potential liability with regard to legal representation after hearing comments at a staff meeting that led them to believe they would be on their own if legal action was taken against them. There are specific regulations regarding employee rights with respect to this. *The Edge* recently published an article titled, “Indemnification: Protection of School Employees Against Legal Action,” in which the following information was shared: “School districts are required by Education Law to provide an attorney and pay legal fees in a case where civil or criminal action is brought against a teacher or SRP who, in the discharge of his/her duties and acting within the scope of his/her employment, faces legal action arising from disciplinary action taken against a student

(Education Law 3028) or faces a claim of alleged negligence resulting in bodily injury to a student (Education Law 3023). Education Law 3811 covers general indemnification for reasons other than criminal action arising from matters other than student discipline or negligence. Each statute specifies that a school employee must send copies of the legal papers served on them in the criminal or civil proceedings to the school district and request indemnification, in writing, within 10 days (3023 and 3028) or 5 days in matters covered by 3811. ‘*The Edge*’ suggests that we err on the side of caution and request indemnification within 5 days.” Furthermore, if the District takes action against a VCTA member that could potentially result in termination of employment, NYSUT will provide this member with legal representation for any subsequent disciplinary proceedings.

USA/Union Made: During this shopping season consider buying goods made by union and/or USA workers. Our [Member Discounts & Savings](#) page at www.vcta.net has multiple internet sites that offer products that fit this criterion. —Tim Brown, HS

CSE Meeting Reminders

Everyone is reminded that **all** members of a CSE meeting have equal weight in what is decided for a child’s education regardless of the member’s position/title within the district. Also, everyone is reminded that the scope of services cannot be limited for a child due to budgetary or scheduling concerns. For example, if it is determined that a child would best be served in a 12:1:1 setting as the least restrictive environment for the next year—that setting cannot be denied to the child because it is not available in the next grade or because the district is trying to meet a quota for children in CTM settings. It is also recommended that members check with the child’s current special education teacher to gain insight into the needs of the child before the meeting begins.



VCTA Holiday

Food Project:

Dress Down Day:

Friday, December 12

To benefit the Montgomery Food Pantry which serves the entire Valley Central Community.

The most important times to give are those times when the need is greatest.

Please give back to our community during this time of recession.

Reminder:

**Health Insurance
Open Enrollment**

**This year the open
enrollment period is:**

**November 22, 2008 -
December 22, 2008**

NYSUT Music Celebration:

The current music that callers listen to when calling NYSUT headquarters will be replaced by musical pieces written by our own students throughout the state. Submission deadline is January 9.

Visit www.vcta.net and select the Announcements link from the home page for more info!

UNION SPOTLIGHT



Know Your Contract:

Want a new challenge? Need a change of pace? Did you know that you can make a request to change your assignment next year?

Article X, Section A on page 10 of your Collective Bargaining Agreement states:

"Members will make known any preferences or requests for the coming school year's assignments not later than March 1st on a form made available in each building and on the District's website."

See Article X for more information!

Using What We Already Have

On November 19, 2008, the High School PTSA held its first Student Achievement Recognition Night for this school year. This is such a fantastic program and a lovely evening for the PTSA, the students, their families, and their teachers.

Unfortunately, once again administrative, faculty, and staff participation was less than stellar. Each administrator, teacher, paraprofessional, and secretary in the high school was given a nomination form. Actually two of them. This includes over 130 people in total. The total number who nominated a student? 46. That is well below 50% participation. Now that is some telling data.

Data is a huge focus for our district. What we must remember is that behind those numbers are over 1700 children in our charge. It is a beautiful thing when we can use the data to really make a difference for our real, live kids. This is one of those times. One of our goals is to promote an atmosphere of academic excellence, another is to provide a safe

and innovative learning environment. If we could work together to increase faculty, staff, and administrative participation in this special evening, it would make a difference for many children and help us to meet our collective goals.

The PTSA sponsors a second Student Achievement Recognition Night in the spring. Please take the time to nominate a student. Teachers are very busy people, but we can all manage to do this. If you can attend the evening, you will find it to be quite moving. I have gone to each one, each year and this is the first time that the students that I nominated actually attended. It was amazing! To see the students' smiles and to see their family's pride and gratitude was invigorating and helped me remember just how simple it is to make a lasting memory for a child.

Please, let's use the gifts that we already have to achieve our mission. Let's aim for 100% participation in the spring Recognition Night.

—Meghan Riley, HS, Soc. St.

School Related Professionals Recognition Day

November 18th, 2008

The VCTA would like to salute all of
VC's hardworking and dedicated
School Related Professionals on a job well-done!

We appreciate you each and every day!!

2009-10 Budget: Facing our Fears Together

Dick Iannuzzi, President of NYSUT, addressed local Orange and Rockland County Teacher Union leaders on December 4 at Hotel Thayer. The topic of his discussion revolved around the governor's budget proposal which is due on December 16th. This is six weeks earlier than the governor's proposal is usually released. Much attention has been focused on the state budget since the governor called for mid-year cuts. Those cuts have been averted for this year according to Iannuzzi. This address occurred on the same day that VCSD employees received a memo from Dr. Richard Hooley, Superintendent, which stated that "While the decision to institute these cuts has been deferred to January, we believe real cuts to state aid are imminent."

When VCTA President Tim Brown asked if there would be cuts in January for this year, we were assured by members of NYSUT's Board of Directors that there will be NO cuts for this school year. Despite these assurances, many superintendents continue to proclaim a need for mid year cuts. With regard to next year's budget, however, the verdict is still out. The Governor's office is working on next year's budget proposal that is due to be released on December 16.

There is a lot of nervousness about job cuts, and rightly so. Unfortunately, at this point much of it is speculation. A local school budget is built using the executive (i.e, governor's) proposal which is usually the worst case scenario for aid. Remember that the governor doesn't have sole control over the budget. The legislature will give its proposal following the Governor's submission. Historically, the legislature gives more aid than the governor. The final budget from the state is usually a compromise, but the state aid numbers are traditionally higher than what the governor proposes.

Much of the fear that is buzzing through our buildings about budgeting for next year cannot be

allayed at this time, simply because we don't know what the numbers are. Many districts are already talking about cuts. For example on December 9, 2008, the Times Herald Record published an article entitled "Schools fear for the worst" where some superintendents have already started to talk about programs that could suffer cuts. While it would be prudent to begin thinking about possible cuts, it is dangerous to base any program decisions on the current perception rather than actual numbers. NYSUT President Dick Iannuzzi reports NYSSBA (New York State School Boards Association) is going out of its way to get superintendents stirred up to create lists of things that they can cut to demonstrate their willingness to cut. They are hoping to get locals to accept cuts and even possibly renegotiate contracts early. President Iannuzzi advised locals to NOT indulge these fears with thoughts of a "fire sale" simply because someone is yelling "fire."

Exacerbating the nervousness over the state budget is the report from the NYS Commission of Property Tax Relief which recommends: (1) the Triborough Law be repealed for teacher unions, (2) all school employees be required to make set contributions to health insurance despite contract bargaining, (3) the creation of a Tier 5 in the Retirement system, and (4) policies that would essentially eliminate special education and class size limits. The frightening thing about this commission's report is that it focuses on cuts that hurt children and working families rather than looking at raising revenues.

"The state cannot simply cut its way out of this crisis," said NYSUT President Dick Iannuzzi. "There must be a focus on the revenue side." (NY Teacher, December 8, 2008) Iannuzzi suggests:

- ⇒ Tapping the \$1.2 billion now in the state's "Rainy Day" reserve fund.
- ⇒ Imposing a more progressive income tax structure that would include a temporary surcharge on New Yorkers earning more

2009-10 Budget: Facing our Fears Together (cont'd from pg 10)

than \$1 million annually. The surcharge, according to estimates, could generate between \$2 billion and \$7 billion in additional revenue for the state treasury. (cont'd on pg 11)

- ⇒ Raising \$800 million by expanding the bottle return law, reducing the outsourcing of state work, and making prescription drug purchases in bulk for Medicaid and other state programs.

It is important to consider all sources. For example, Dick Iannuzzi told us at the December 4th meeting that the Board of Regents is proposing \$1 billion worth of cuts to education—(typically the average increase in education is 9%, so a \$1 billion cut may still result in an overall 3-4% increase). We may be talking about a decrease in an increase to funding. As President Iannuzzi told us, “That is still something to worry about but it is not the end of your school district.”

NYSUT is already looking toward the federal and state level for support for education and gearing up to help every local. It is important to take solace in the fact that NYSUT is a STRONG force locally, state-wide, and on the federal level. Severe cuts to education were averted in 2003 through NYSUT's effort in organizing the “March on Education”. The mid-year cuts this year were also averted through NYSUT's lobbying efforts. (VOTE-COPE is more important than ever).

Our job at the local level will be difficult as we go into the discussions of the 2009-10 budget. We have to be pro-active. We have contacted Central Office to schedule additional meetings devoted to this topic alone. We are encouraged that Dr. Hooley's memo spoke to “maintain(ing) the integrity of our K-12 instructional programs.” It will be important to proceed cautiously with real rather than perceived realities. We will also need our members to be willing to step up to do whatever is needed as we always remain mind-

Make sure your voice is heard!!!

Send a fax to elected officials

Visit www.vcta.net, select Affiliations, select NYSUT. Once on the NYSUT home page, select Legislative Action, then select Contact Your Elected Officials

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

The date tells me that it is November 18th, but there is snow on the ground. What-ever happened to late autumn and no snow until December? I'm sure the kids are looking out the windows to see if the buses are arriving to take them home early.

Thanksgiving approaches, and again I take stock in all the things and people I have to be thankful for: Ginny, the ever-patient wife and loyal friend; three kids who continue to be a source of pride to me at the ages of 42, 39, and 38; Nate, Meg, Claire, Joe, and Ian—five grand grandkids and the next generation, the hope of the flock! And finally to you, the active and retired teachers of Valley Central who continue to have my utmost affection and respect. Thanks and Happy Thanksgiving.

⇒ Nobody asked me, but...

—In this dark time, with the economy in the toilet and educational cuts being the favorite topic of politicians who just a little while ago were telling us how important we are to the well-being of the country, it brings me joy to reflect again on the fact that we teachers continue to “do the job” day in, day out, to be people for others.

—As you know, I can be a Melancholy Mick, but, with the change in government in Washington, I am hopeful that there will be a breath of fresh air for our public schools, that NCLB will cease being the punch line of a joke.

⇒ Life after VC (Some notes re: Retirees)

Orin and **Nancy Segall** had another busy summer with family visits, etc. at their home on Cape Cod. **Frank** and **Mary Digilio** are busy with gardeninng, walking, the Palm Beach Pops concerts, reading, etc. — both very happy in retirement in Boca Raton. **Joan Holland** greets us all from her home in Little River, South Carolina. **Joe Bayno** is spending time at his daughter's winery and happy that son Billy has taken

the head basketball job at Loyola-Marymount University in Los Angeles (a fine Jesuit university!!). **Marion Underhill** sends word that she is always with us in spirit. Oops! Another voice from Little River! **Sara Ackerson** wishes health, happiness, and humor to all retirees. A nice note from **Chris Verlezza** both a VC alum (Chris Duffy) and Walden retiree. **Jim Lignori** is wandering the Adirondacks. **Alice Gutter** is keeping mentally fit with courses in Shakespeare (Yes!!!) and opera. She celebrated 91 and does a “few” crossword puzzles per day. Wow! **Dora Blizard** says “come on down” to Venice, Florida. **Bill** and **Becky Tucci** are happy in North Carolina (I saw them at **Peg Kennedy's** wedding—a great party!). **Ed Hart** always drops a line from Phillipsport. **Marilyn Smith** visited the area from her home in Haines City, Florida. **Marie Nash** was visiting in North Carolina at retiree luncheon time.

⇒ Amen!

Thanks for visiting the back pages. Have pleasant holidays. Stay loose and keep pushing back the barriers of ignorance in whatever venue life finds you. Peace.

—Mac, AKA Kevin McFadden

Retiree Representative



Mac counts his blessings. Don't forget Mac, you are one of the VCTA's most cherished blessings!



What's all the Buzz about?



You might have heard your colleagues talking about MAP, the Member Assistance Program available from NYSUT Member Benefits Trust. Or maybe you've already joined. But if you haven't, you may want to once you read about MAP's benefits.

By joining MAP, an e-mail based program, you'll be among the first to hear about new, endorsed programs and program updates. You'll receive special offers and reminders from Member Benefits or from providers of its endorsed programs. Your opinions will be solicited on new programs under consideration for endorsement. When possible, you'll help Member Benefits test potential new services and provide feedback.



Often, MAPers are entered into drawings for prizes donated by providers of endorsed programs and Member Benefits. Since MAP's introduction, MAPers have entered drawings for a Bose® Wave Music System, free admissions to the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, 100 gallons of heating oil from Heat USA, a summer fun pack filled with a variety of items, a DVD player and OfficeMax gift cards. In addition, new MAP enrollees and existing MAPers are automatically entered into quarterly drawings; to date, prizes included digital cameras, a cross-cut shredder and an iPod nano.

MAPers receive e-mail communications from Member Benefits and occasionally from

its providers of endorsed programs. On average, a MAP e-mail alert is sent once every three weeks.

Rest assured, Member Benefits will only share your e-mail address with endorsed program providers and then only under controlled circumstances. Once a program provider receives approval from Member Benefits to send you an offer or information, the vendor will be required to destroy the e-mail listing after sending the communication.

This exciting program allows you to help shape future programs and services exclusively available to you and your colleagues.



Help make a difference. Become a MAP team member. Enroll on our secure page by logging on to www.memberbenefits.nysut.org and clicking on the "MAP Sign-up" navigation tool on the left-hand side of our home page.

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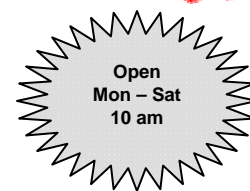
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