

VC ECHOES

Volume 11, Issue 5

Valley Central Teachers' Association

April, 2009

BUDGET TRAIN THREATENS TO DERAIL OUR STUDENTS





Volume 11, Issue 5

April, 2009

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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
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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.*

In Memory of Yvonne Wilson

Our beloved cafeteria worker, Yvonne Wilson, was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident last July. Yvonne was known by all of our students at Berea. Not only did she prep, serve and clean, she was the person the students paid if they bought lunch on the north lunch line over the past 8 years. It was amazing how she not only knew all of the students by name, but knew something about them that would spark a conversation as they went through the line. Yvonne had a passion for animals, especially cats, and was very involved with The Walden Humane Society.

To honor her, the Berea staff conducted a dress down day in which they collected \$400.00. The cafeteria workers, district-wide, collected an additional \$70.00. We donated the \$470.00 to The Walden Humane Society. They put up a plaque in her honor and dedicated the "Cat Palace" to Yvonne's memory.

Yvonne truly enjoyed our students and would often repeat an anecdote they'd shared with her. Our hearts go out to her 2 daughters, Ashley and Stephanie Wilson, and to her husband, Dan. She is really missed by her friends here in the Valley Central School District.

—Denise Bromm, Berea

Forecast: Overcast with Breaks of Sunshine

Weather people are to be admired. They stand in front of local maps with shiny smiles and tell us what to expect in weather for the next 5 days or so. It's a great job because people usually only pay attention to the next day's forecast. We all know that the farther out the forecast is projected, the more likely it is to change. However, weather people generally don't get fired for predicting a blizzard that instead results in one inch of snow the following day—even if stores were packed the night before with masses of consumers buying snow removal equipment or that gallon of milk that would surely save them from the impending desolate storm. To the contrary, if the forecast is incorrect, the weather person simply stands in front of the map with a shiny smile pasted on his/her face and says, "Oh well, the winds shifted" or something to that effect, and we all go on our merry way.

This year the budget process throughout the state has been like a farmer's almanac forecast for a bad winter published months in advance. The budget process is always a fluid process of numbers that dance, shift and change through the winds of politics. This year was unusual because our governor decided to predict the storm of the century early in this political process—and everyone paid him much attention. First, he talked in late November 2008 about mid-year cuts for 2008-09. But those cuts never came to fruition. Then he made "deficit reduction" cuts from this year's numbers for next year's state aid numbers. But late in February he announced that those deficit reduction cuts would be restored. It then appeared that we would not only receive the same amount of state aid we had this year, but possible a 6-8% increase to those numbers! Shortly after this new optimistic forecast, the skies became cloudy with a chance of rain: the forecast had changed from the



previous 6-8% to a mere 1% increase over last year's state budget numbers. Oh my, how the forecast has changed since this process all began—or maybe, it depends on which weather person we listen to and at what time/day the forecast is broadcast. Unfortunately, the most recent news is for cloudy skies.

We are also still watching what happens with the MTA payroll tax. If this tax is imposed, schools will not be exempt from paying a payroll tax for every employee. Early estimates had Orange County Schools paying over \$2 million dollars toward this MTA tax, which translates into another cut to school budgets.

Union leaders generally turn to NYSUT for budget forecasting. On December 4, President Dick Ianuzzi told a room full of Orange and Rockland union leaders that there would be no mid-year cuts. He also told us that he ultimately believed we would face a "decrease to our increase" from Budget year 2008-09 to budget year 2009-10. Throughout this process, the VCTA leadership looked to NYSUT for guidance as we spoke to our membership about the budget process, seniority and any proposed cuts. We lobbied and rallied and kept pushing for more revenue increases and all that Dick Ianuzzi predicted appears to be happening, although to a much lesser degree than was hoped.

We are fortunate at Valley Central that the relationship between the VCTA leadership and Central Office administration is not contentious. Throughout this entire process our two sides have been in constant communication and both sides have repeatedly stated that we share the desired goal of keeping the integrity of our educational programs in tact for our children. We have utilized the CABC process in a new way this year. Instead of talking about building programs, we discussed what programs were essential to our students and what efficiencies could be found in a historically tight-belt budget.

(cont'd on page 4)

Forecast: Overcast with Breaks of Sunshine (cont'd from pg 3)

At the time of this printing, the state's budget forecast is cloudy, but not stormy. The VCTA will continue to monitor the unpredictable winds by asking questions about programs, activities and any proposed staff cuts so that we can react and offer counter-proposals if appropriate. The VCSD budget is scheduled to be adopted on April 20.

We are already hearing forecasts for the budget of 2010-11. We can assume right now that we may be going through a very similar process in the coming years. We will continue to advocate for a steady course throughout any forecasted storms

—Tim Brown, Patti Lunden, Rich Steger

Walden Wins Viking Van-Gogh at Spring Fling



The March 27 Spring Fling at the Otterkill Country Club was a great success. Walden Elementary won the Viking Van Gogh Award for the highest percentage of participants by building. To view photos from this event, visit our website's Photo Gallery. Fifteen \$20 gift certificates to local restaurants were awarded as door prizes. Winners are listed below along with the local restaurants at which these certificates can be redeemed. Please support the merchants in our local community. Visit our Community page to explore our local town/village websites. Also view our Discounts page to see what savings are being offered to staff.

- Kathy Gasperetti, HS, Carmela's
- Linda Weiner, MA, Cascarino's
- Chris Cozzolino, HS, Copperfield's
- Brian Ackley, MA & MO, Daxxon
- Christine Mello, HS, Daxxon
- Heather Vasquez, HS, Dunkin' Donuts
- Carlos Zayas, HS, Dunkin' Donuts
- Andrea Chochi, WES, Iron Cafe
- Katie Stoker, MA, Pazzo's
- Gina Calli, MO, Rick's Runway Cafe
- Robin Scott, B, Sweeney's
- Cheryl Weiner, MA, Sweeney's
- Jennifer Mendelowski, WA, Tarantella's Pizza Alley
- Jane Kirk, MO, Walden Diner
- Nicole Sosler, B, Walden Frostee Freeze

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 New York Teacher 3/19/09.

Kudos to BOE and CO: I would like to thank and congratulate the BOE and CO Administration for their calm and rational handling to date of our current economic uncertainties. Rather than panic, a wait and see approach was adopted to ensure a more accurate and measured response that kept children center, while simultaneously preparing for the worst case scenario without creating widespread panic. In December, rumors of mid-year state aid cuts led some school districts to slash programs and services. NYSUT President Richard Iannuzzi assured locals on December 4th at our area Election District meeting that these mid-year cuts had been averted. Likewise, NYSUT's encouraged calm regarding next year's projected federal and state aid packages has been prophetic to date. The federal stimulus package has been signed by President Obama and Governor Patterson has "...announced he would use funds from Washington to restore K-12 school aid to current levels—still \$1 billion shy of the aid needed to sustain essential services and more than \$1.8 billion less than what schools were promised" (NYT, 3/19/08, p. 5). Nevertheless, this represents an improvement to the bleak outlook that public education faced a few months ago. In the meantime, we must all remain patiently optimistic and politically active as our VOTE-COPE contributions are utilized to lobby on behalf of public education funding. Following are the highlights of our current economic realities as presented in a recent NYSUT Budget Advocacy Briefing Bulletin:

1. NYSUT Efforts Result in Hard-Won Protections in State Budget—After a grueling budget season fraught with financial uncertainty, the 2009-10 state budget is at the



*Brown
Tackles the
Issues*

printer, with the Legislature expected to vote by the April 1 deadline. In this tough economic climate, the hard-won protections in this budget are a testament to concerted union action. Thanks to an unprecedented NYSUT lobbying effort, our action helped defend education from freefall during this constantly deteriorating economy. In the three-way budget agreement forged over the weekend, state aid to education remains essentially flat, as legislators failed to provide additional state funds to move forward with foundation aid. State school aid will total approximately \$21.9 billion in 2009-10, an increase of \$405 million or 1.9 percent. Thanks to the leadership of Senator Schumer and Chairman Rangel, the budget preserves last year's record aid as a result of federal stimulus monies designated to save education jobs. The budget includes restorations to SUNY, CUNY and the community colleges; an increase in the state income tax on the wealthy, being hailed as a win for labor; supplemental grants to specific districts seen as high need; a freeze on per-pupil tuition payments to charter schools that will mean significant savings, approximately \$43 million statewide, to districts; and a restoration of \$40 million for teacher centers. NYSUT is concerned that the state intends to ignore its court-ordered responsibility to move forward with an increase in foundation aid, a move that undercuts equity and derails progress to closing the achievement gap. The budget, however, is also notable for what it doesn't include: There is no Tier 5 and no provision to seek give-backs from higher education employees.

(cont'd on page 6)

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

2. **An All-Out Lobbying Push As the Clock Ticked Down**—As state leaders rushed to meet the April 1 budget deadline, NYSUT pulled out all the stops in a campaign that included round-the-clock lobbying by legislative staff; an escalating round of phone calls and visits by PAC members, who were mobilized by an e-alert; and an eleventh-hour statewide radio ad blitz, put on the air in less than a day to hammer home the need to support education. Although NYSUT doesn't always see eye to eye with the New York State Council of School Superintendents, labor and management teamed up to sound the alarm on the urgent need to avert layoffs. NY-SCOSS released a report estimating nearly 8,000 school employees could face layoffs through budget shortfalls - a number that does not include projections for the Big Five city schools. Although the federal stimulus goes a long way to preserving jobs, superintendents believe a flat state aid number means some layoffs. NYSUT will analyze the runs as soon as they are available.

3. **Stimulus Money goes to Preserve Education Jobs**—It is crucial that we work closely with the district on the appropriate use of federal stimulus funds. Some school boards are talking about using stimulus funds to reduce property taxes, which is not allowed. Meanwhile, President Obama has been clear that stimulus funds are intended to keep educators working; that is the commitment in the state budget and NYSUT will be scrutinizing the state budget line by line to ensure that the funds are used as intended.

4. **Fair Share Tax Reform**—The union-backed effort to raise revenue by raising taxes on the wealthiest—an approach favored by an overwhelming majority of New Yorkers—is part of the three-way budget deal, hailed by media

pundits as a win for labor and our allies. This will help stabilize revenue and will make the tax system more progressive. An estimated \$4 billion will be raised by increasing taxes for those earning \$200,000 in adjusted gross income as single filers and \$300,000 as joint. This is a gain for the budget overall, but bittersweet, as NYSUT believes the Legislature should have allocated a significant portion of these funds to move forward with the foundation formula. Rich Steger, Patti Lunden and I attended the Fair Tax Rally on March 5th in White Plains (see photo on back cover). Equal is not always fair and our current tax system exemplifies this. Passage of this bill may generate as much as \$6 billion in revenue. This revenue could help to restore and maintain critical programs and services, representing crucial reform that could offset “the fact that the stimulus funding is temporary” (NYT, 3/19/08, p. 12). Lee Cutler, NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer, addressed the need for long-range planning and funding reform at the February 26th Election District 14 Meeting. The need for funding reform that will deemphasize property tax revenues has been promoted by NYSUT, discussed in Albany, and summarily dismissed and/or ignored by the majority of our elected state representatives for the past 40.

5. **The 8,900 State Layoffs Don't Affect SUNY, CUNY**—After Governor Paterson called for the elimination of 8,900 state employees last week, NYSUT and our higher education union leaders made it clear this affects state employees under the direct control of the state—not employees of SUNY, CUNY and community colleges. NYSUT and our higher education union leaders worked relentlessly behind the scenes to successfully achieve budget restorations *(cont'd pg 7)* for the state's college and university systems.

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

It's worth noting that many critics viewed the governor's layoff announcement as a negotiating ploy to force state employee unions to agree to concessions.

6. Tier 5 Derailed For Now—Our letters and lobbying prevailed in the fight to beat back the creation of a Tier 5 for new employees. This proposal would have been bad for current as well as future educators: creating an inferior Tier 5 would have hurt morale and recruitment efforts; it wouldn't save any money for at least 10 years; and it would create a climate conducive to dismantling hard-earned benefits in existing contracts.

Committee of 100: The lobbying agenda at the March 24 Committee of 100 included Health Care, Labor, Education (K-12, CUNY, SUNY), and Retirement Issues. To view the complete lobbying agenda utilized on March 24, please visit our VOTE-COPE page at www.vcta.net/votecope.htm and select March 24, 2009 in the right column under the heading Committee of 100 Lobbying Agenda.

Scott Murphy Endorsed: Scott Murphy was endorsed by NYSUT and the NYS AFL-CIO in his bid for US Congress—House of Representatives (20th Congressional District). This seat was vacated by Kristen Gillibrand, who was appointed to the US Senate earlier this year. Murphy supports the Employee Free Choice Act, the Federal Stimulus Package and favors fixing the flaws in NCLB (NYT, 3/19/09, p. 10). NOTE: At the time of printing the results of this election are awaiting the count of absentee ballots.

Contact Your Representatives: Technology has made contacting our local, state and US representatives as easy as “clicking the mouse.” Visit the VCTA’s Legislative Action page at www.vcta.net/legislative_action.htm to send letters and faxes about issues/concerns important to union members. In addition to the faxes available through NYSUT, you may also select the following links that will take you

to other sites to send faxes regarding these important issues:

- Employee Free Choice Act (NOTE: Your AFT Local number is 3076)
- Restore Pre-K Funding
- Stop Sullivan & Orange/Ulster BOCES Merger
- WDI Funding at Risk

Employee Free Choice Act: Select this link under Contact Your Representatives to support this bill. The message that is sent will read: “I urge you to enact the Employee Free Choice Act immediately. This crucial legislation will protect workers’ freedom to choose a union and bargain, without management intimidation. Allowing more workers to freely join unions and bargain with their employers will help rebuild the middle class by expanding healthcare, improving retirement security and raising the standard of living for America’s working families. My bargaining rights are worth working for and voting for!” This site also gives participants an opportunity to send a personal comment along with the preset message. The following comment is one that I sent last week: Union membership stimulates the economy by ensuring workers receive wages that support their families. Union membership combats the rising disparity between the “haves” and the “have-nots.” Why are many corporate leaders fighting this bill? Perhaps they are afraid that workers being able to feed their families and pay their mortgage/rent will cut too deeply into record corporate profits. I wonder if these executives have considered where they will live after “Rome” has burned. Public schools often pay subpar wages because their hands are tied due to a lack of adequate funding and/or unfair funding formulas, whereas corporations such as Wal-Mart pay subpar wages simply because they can. History has repeatedly demonstrated, however, that the serfs/peasants will eventually revolt if the masters become too gluttonous.

—Tim Brown, VCTA Pres, HS

Give the Gift of Life!!

The Valley Central Teachers'
Association sponsors the
11th Annual Community Blood Drive!

When: May 27, 2009

Where: VCMS Library

Time: 1:30 to 7:00 pm

For an appointment, call or see:

Kathy Manning, RN (VCMS)

457-2400 ext. 6017



Donating blood qualifies you for a chance to win exciting raffles!

Local Honors

VCTA Awarded 5 Journalism Awards: The VCTA is the recipient of five New York Teacher Journalism Awards. These awards will be presented at the 2009 NYSUT Representative Assembly in Buffalo on April 3rd. The VCTA was awarded 1st place in three categories, while receiving a 2nd and 3rd place honors in two others.

- First Award, Best Original Cartoon, "Schools vs. Prisons," June 2008
- First Award, Best Article on Health Issues, "Making Strides," October 2007
- First Award, Best Website, www.vcta.net
- Award of Merit, Best Feature Story, "Meet VCTA's New Treasurer, Erin Davis," October 2007
- Honorable Mention, Best Front Page/Cover, "VCTA Putting Children Center," September 2007

Congratulations to Editor Meghan Riley for her hard work and successful efforts.

Founders Awards: Congratulations to Joe DeVenuto, Nancy Brother and Maureen Wiseman who were honored by their respective Parent-Teacher organizations with the 2009 Founder's Award. Joe teaches English at the VCMS, Nancy Brother is the high school's registered nurse and Maureen Wiseman is a paraprofessional at the Montgomery Elementary School. Please read the articles on pages 7-12 for more details.

NYS Teacher of the Year Nomination: Congratulations to Debra Calvino, recent recipient of the MHSSC Dean's Award for Excellence in Teaching, on her nomination for New York State Teacher of the Year. Debbie is a math teacher at the high school and is also the Secondary Math Department Supervisor.

—Tim Brown, HS

Nancy Brother Receives Founder's Day Award!

On Thursday February 5th, 2009, the Valley Central PTSA awarded Nancy Brother, our district health coordinator, its Founder's Day Honorary Life Membership Award. It was a very special evening that exemplified Nancy's commitment to the health and well-being of our students and staff. There were many highlights to the evening, but the presence of her family, especially her granddaughter, Gwen, who Nancy gushed over all night, made it even more special.

Speakers included Chris Mello and Frank Jordan who spoke about Nancy's unique and diversified roles as health care provider and trusted confidante. A letter from Marie Fasulo was presented which outlined all the positive ways in which Nancy blesses the lives of students and staff members alike. Then several current and former students came forward to share their thoughts on such a special person. Dan Devito, a senior and president of our local SADD chapter, spoke about Nancy's passion for helping students make healthy choices and her timeless involvement in VASA and, of course, the VASA coffee house. Shavasia Faggins, another senior, thanked Nancy for making her feel welcome when she transferred to Valley Central and providing encouragement and support in times of need. Former student and current police officer, Mike Taback, thanked Nancy for believing in him when others didn't.

Also presented was a letter from Julianna, a student in SUNY Orange that graduated from Valley Central last year. This letter was especially poignant in that it articulated how grateful this young woman was to Nancy for her compassion and concern. In her words, "when I was alone and scared to talk to anybody, she held out her loving hand and never gave up on me. When practically nobody believed in me, Nancy never lost hope. Whenever I needed someone, she was there willingly with the best



Valley
Central's
Nancy
Brother:
A Class
Act

shoulder to cry on." Julianna continues, "I am now attending SUNY Orange and majoring in Psychology thanks to her. I can only hope to touch someone's life like she did mine."

The evening concluded with a performance of James Taylor's "You've Got a Friend" performed by her son, Dan Brother, along with Buddy Sherry and Jim Hession. The song was a fitting tribute to someone truly deserving of the title and the award presented.

It was indeed a very special evening for all who know Nancy and her commitment to putting children center.

—Jim Hession, Student Assistance Counselor, HS
Frank Jordan, School Psychologist, HS

Marathon Woman

Jen Neenan, Special Education teacher at Berea and Most Precious Blood, competed in the ING New York City Marathon November 2, 2008. She raised \$2,850.00 for the National Ovarian Cancer Coalition in honor of her mom. Jen finished the race in 3 hours, 58 minutes. Congratulations, Jen!



Founder's Night at the Middle School—A Happy Celebration!

On Wednesday, March 4th, the Valley Central Middle School Cafetorium was packed with faculty, staff, family members, and friends of several school personnel to celebrate awards presented by the Middle School PTO, for service and volunteerism.

The first award of the evening was presented to Mrs. Dolores Mundy for her many hours of hard work coordinating activities between the middle school and the PTO. (See accompanying story on page 11).

A second recognition was lauded to Mrs. Donna Marie McCarthy for her volunteerism with many projects and activities that benefit our school environment. (For more, see article below).

VCTA Celebrates a Shining Star!

On this year's Founder's Night, our PTA recognized Donna Marie McCarthy as a Shining Star. This honor was awarded to her for her tireless work to improve both the Middle School and the district as a whole. It was especially appropriate since Donna Marie initiated and coordinates the Student of the Month recognition breakfast, using the "Shining Star" theme for our middle schoolers.

In addition to Student of the Month and all the help she gives our PTA, Donna Marie serves as a member of the School Alliance for Continuous Improvement training group, the Performance-Based Incentive Program Committee, the Citizen's Advisory Budget Committee, the Restructuring Committee, and the Accountability Task Force. She is a co-coach of the Beautification and Development Team and WEB coordinator as well as the person who sends out all the cards for the Sunshine Committee. As if that weren't enough, she has written a grant for Lowe's Toolbox for Education to improve our court-

The PTO's mega award of the evening, the Founder's Award, was presented to an English teacher, Mr. Joseph DeVenuto. Joe is an individual who has devoted his energies and talents to many students in the middle school, making him a deserving recipient of the recognition and gratitude this award bestows. Many presenters spoke on behalf of Mr. DeVenuto, making this night truly memorable and special. (See page 11 for more details).

On behalf of the VCTA, we would like to thank these award winners and hope they continue to remain close to our students, school, and community. Congratulations to all. We're proud to call you our own!

—Mrs. Shawn Carrozza, MS, Bldg. Rep.

yard, helped plan Payback Night, and chaperones numerous after-school activities.

Donna Marie was certainly surprised to earn this honor, since she was at Founders Night to speak on behalf of Joe DeVenuto, the Founder's Award recipient. Happily, our PTA is using the opportunity to recognize more of our heroes!

—Kathryn Phillips, MS



Dolores Mundy Honored at Founder's Night

The Middle School PTA honored Dolores Mundy with the PTA Shining Star Award on March 4th, 2009 during our annual Founder's Night Recognition Celebration. Dolores received this award for her outstanding service to our Middle School PTA. She has been a dedicated member of the Middle School staff for fifteen years, the past five of which have been as Mr. Hayes' secretary. She has always found the time to assist the PTA in addition to her many duties. Congratulations on a well-deserved award for going above and beyond to help our students in the Middle School.

—JoAnn Capozella, MS, Bldg. Rep.



Joe DeVenuto Receives Founder's Night Award

The Middle School PTA provides many good things for the students and entire Middle School Family. One of these good things is the annual Founder's Night. People honored have shown a commitment to students and staff of the Middle School that goes way beyond their job description or expectations of what people consider excellent job performance.

The very deserving honoree this year was Joe DeVenuto. Many people spoke for Joe and people who couldn't attend sent in letters to be read. During the evening, with all the varied speakers, the same themes kept recurring: Joe's incredible work effort, his dedication to his family, his students, and improving his craft. Our lives are enriched by the efforts and example of people like Joe DeVenuto. We should all be thankful to Joe for making the Middle School a better place and our lives a little brighter.

—JoAnn Capozella, MS, Bldg Rep.



The VCTA congratulates all Founder's Award Recipients! Thank you for representing the VCTA with such dedication. You are role models for us all.

Maureen Wiseman: Montgomery's Founder's Night Recipient

Mrs. Wiseman is more than likely the first person you see when you enter through the front doors of Montgomery Elementary. She is always happy to see people when they pass through those doors. She has the uncanny ability to place the faces of parents to their children and ultimately knows EVERY parent and child as well as most grandparents and siblings who currently attend or have attended this school in the past. Every child who walks past her at the Greeter's Desk is deserving of a sticker and/or a hug for whatever task they have completed, whether delivering the attendance folder to the office or escorting a classmate to the nurse's office.

We received a letter from a parent recently that read"Five years ago, I was a nervous kindergarten parent new to this school and community. Mrs. Wiseman, with her professionalism, kindness, and sense of humor put me at ease immediately. I felt through her that my child would be safe and happy at Montgomery Elementary School. That was six years ago. I am sure that I echo numerous parents when I say that Mrs. Wiseman is an asset to Montgomery Elementary School and to our community. Our school shines brighter and laughs richer because of her."

Mrs. Maureen Morrissey Wiseman, wife, mother, sister, daughter, friend, singer, guitarist, performer, college grad, baseball fan, part time horticulturist, greeter, chaperone, volunteer, basketball time keeper, laminator fixer, keeper of the reading stars, fun, life loving, advocate for the less fortunate, always available, always reliable and the list could go on and on.

Mrs. Wiseman wears many "hats" in her life and indeed in ours. Rumor has it that she was such an annoying, over-involved PTA mom and room parent, always hanging around the school, that the Principal decided to put her to work and that is "how" she became a member of the MES family. As a teenager, Maureen became a surrogate mother to her 5

younger siblings while their single mother Kitty returned to college. She would entertain them with her renditions of popular songs changing the lyrics to personalize them to each of her siblings.

Maureen's entire life has revolved around her love of music. Maureen and her older sister Lynne would spend hours in the upstairs hallway (because it had good acoustics) harmonizing to whatever song was on the radio at the time. Her older brother, Larry, had a large collection of 45's (those are vinyl records that played on record players for our younger audience members) and when he went out....Maureen and her sister Lynne would sneak into his room and listen to his records. One of their favorites was Rockin' Robin. However, one of the drawbacks of vinyl records is that they had a tendency to skip and would repeat the same section over and over again until you tapped the needle to move it from that spot. The skipping record never bothered Maureen and her sister....they would just continue to sing along....sing along.....sing along....sing along .

For those of you who don't know, Maureen is quite the word '*aficionado*'. She has a huge vocabulary and loves to impress us in the office with all kinds of facts and figures and her vast knowledge of the human language. She enjoys treating us to "the word of the week" which is when she picks out a word and writes it on the board in the office and we get to guess what the meaning of this word is. By the end of the day, she usually feels sorry for us and tells us what the word means. Then throughout the week we try and use it in sentences.....really just to impress her. When she chuckles at us, we usually know that we used the word incorrectly.

During the turbulent 1960's Maureen learned to play the guitar. (cont'd on pg 13)



Maureen Wiseman (continued from page 12)

She spent hours strumming the chords until her fingers were too sore to play. She pretended to be Joan Baez or Buffy Saint Marie and played many of the popular folk songs of the era. The first song she learned to play through was Bob Dylan's, "Blowin' in the Wind". For those of you who may be "unaware".....Maureen LOVES music and LOVES to sing, she will sing anywhere and anytime whether anyone asks her to or not. Luckily for all of us she has an amazing voice. She has sung at many PTA functions and school events, she has been known to grab a guitar from the music room and sing holiday songs at the Greeter's Desk.

Maureen graduated from SUNY Albany with a degree in Music Performance. One day she saw an ad in the newspaper that read, "Two former country squires seeking vocalist to form working country western combo". Knowing NOTHING about country music, but needing a job Maureen answered the ad. Armed with most of the lyrics from "Ode To Billy Joe" she auditioned. The bass

player was not the least bit impressed, because she did not know any Tammy Wynette or Dolly Parton songs, so he gave her a tape to learn and sent her on her way. Maureen thought the bass player was stuck up and nasty but took the tape anyway. At the next audition Maureen sang a version of "Stand By Your Man" that caused the guitar player to out vote the stuck up bass player and the band "Red Dworkis and His Opal City Poker Chips" was born. Last August, Maureen and that stuck up, nasty bass player (Wayne Wiseman) celebrated their 27th wedding anniversary. Their son Zachary, an alumnus of MES, now attends VCHS. Maureen and Wayne have traveled the US and Maureen has sang in several groups and performed at various venues throughout the years.

Maureen is very special not only to the staff at MES but to the children and the community here in Montgomery. Thank you for sharing your life and love within the walls of our school.

—Joan Grippo

VCTA Paras Attend NYSUT SRP Convention in Cooperstown

Eight paras from Valley Central attended the NYSUT sponsored School Related Professional (SRP) Convention at the Otesaga Hotel in historic Cooperstown, NY on March 7th and 8th (see photo on back page). Those attending were Danielle Amen, Kathy Caltavuturo, Michelle DiPierro, Kathy Lennon, Janean Patterson and Wenda Heaney from Walden Elementary, Diane Savage from the Middle School and Patty Williams from the High School. The conference offered many various informational workshops ranging from Classroom Strategies to Building the Union Connection. Saturday we attended workshops such as "All These Side Agreements", and "Aides and Assistants: Defining the Boundaries." On Sunday we all attended a workshop on "Civil Service: Understanding the Basics"

in order to gain an understanding of our rights under the NYS Civil Service Law. Many thanks to NYSUT for providing the conference at no cost to the 180+ SRPs in attendance.

NOTE: Our SRP Bargaining Unit, led by Kathy Lennon, is composed of approximately 160 members. These members are hourly employees who work tirelessly on behalf of our children. Responsibilities include such tasks as classroom aid, 1 on 1 aid for special needs students, greeters, hall monitors, filing, photocopying, etc. Paraprofessional have become an integral part of the successful functioning of a school district.

VCTA Budget Meeting: The annual VCTA budget meeting will be held on Monday, April 20 at 8:00pm in the Union Office for any interested members.

20,000 Pennies For Peace

After reading Greg Mortenson's remarkable book, *Three Cups Of Tea*, I became inspired to help the Pennies For Peace program to raise money to promote education in Central Asia.

The children's version of Greg Mortenson's book, "Listen To The Wind" teaches the students how one man made a difference in the education system in this region. Mortenson went to climb the K2 Summit in Pakistan and ended up in a small village of Korphe, believing that he was a failure for not making it to the top of the mountain. It was there that he noticed the children sitting on the ground, doing their school work. He promised he'd come back to build them a school and this is where his incredible story begins. The Pennies for Peace organization strongly encourages an education for females in countries where teaching girls is discouraged. They have built more than 70 schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Over the past couple of months, our students have been emptying their piggy banks and bringing in handfuls of pennies to aid others. A

penny can buy a pencil in Afghanistan and with a pencil you can start an education. The students learned how they can help others, one penny at a time. Together, the Berea Kindergarteners and Berea Y-Scoop participants collected 20,000 pennies for peace.

Mr. Greg Mortenson wants children to know that they can make a difference and encourages children to decide who they'd like to collect money for. Our students decided to give \$100.00 to the Montgomery Food Pantry and \$100.00 to the Pennies for Peace Organization. While doing this, our students learned money and counting skills. They also learned that it feels good to give and that each and every one of them can make a difference in this world. My goal is to incorporate this in every grade in our school and every other Elementary School in our district.

For more info, go to penniesforpeace.org.

—Denise Bromm, Berea



Berea Elementary had three teams of bowlers participate in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters Bowl for Kids Sake fundraiser on Sunday, March 29th. Berea teams raised a total of \$1,369!

—Katie Gusmano, Berea

Thinking and Today's Techno-Happy World

A recent article in the AFT's American Educator (Spring 2009) discussed the question "Why Don't Students Like School?" This is also the title of a new book by Daniel T. Willingham. The article was fascinating and provided much food for thought. Among the most important points cited was the idea that learning facts is crucial to developing critical thinking skills.

As teachers hear over and over again, schools are failing to provide students with 21st century skills that they will need to be successful in a changing world. Our students are growing up in a world where knowledge is literally at their fingertips. Anyone can type a phrase into Google or some other search engine and receive a million answers to a question. With information this readily available, is it necessary to memorize facts?

Students live in this realm; they see little point to memorizing information when they can simply "Google it" at any time. Current trends in education also seem to lean towards the idea that we need to incorporate more technology and not require students to memorize facts. The scary part is what Willingham cites in his article: "The very processes that teachers care about most—critical thinking processes like reasoning and problem solving—are intimately intertwined with factual knowledge that is in long-term memory (not just in the environment)" (pg. 8).

Critical thinking is a skill that will never go out of style. Students will always need to be able to think. More and more of them are unable to do so effectively. They become frustrated and find it difficult to see the point, especially when they can look up the answer on the computer.

Technology is not the enemy; however, it has made teaching much more difficult. When used well, technology can hook students who wouldn't

normally be interested in a topic. It can enhance learning for all students at all levels. Moreover, students do need to exhibit proficiency with technology in today's world. The danger is when they use it as a substitute for learning or a means to avoid having to learn.

Willingham also discusses the simple fact that the brain is actually "designed to save you from having to think, because the brain is actually not very good at thinking" (pg. 5). This makes the prospect of convincing students of the importance of committing knowledge to memory that much more daunting. Technology, as kids know and use it, also makes this quite challenging. The amount of time that kids spend using technology outside of school averages about 27 hours per week, while instruction-related use of technology averages around 15 minutes a week. The problem at Valley Central and other districts is that there is still a limited amount of access to technology. At the High School there is not a single computer center that can handle a class above 25. An elementary school teacher recently expressed frustration at not even having access to a computer lab. With the forecast for the next few years looking dreary, technology access will likely not increase.

How then can we try to teach our students to use technology effectively so that we are showing them the importance of learning facts and thinking critically? Knowing that most students are not putting the latest technology to its optimum use and that they are spending about 27 hours a week becoming more proficient at using technology ineffectively is sobering. The reality is that 21st century skills are not all that different from basic skills that humans have always needed to have. It is how kids will be asked to apply those skills that they may not end up being prepared for. How can we help them get there? We have to start making our brains do what they are loathe to: Think. —Meghan Riley, HS

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

⇒Greetings!

—This morning's paperwork is divided into three parts (not unlike all Gaul— omnia Gallia, for any Latin scholars still left in the world): income tax returns to state and federal coffers, some letters and the column. Today is March 23, and I can't believe that my tax forms are being sent out closer to the Ides of March than to the Ides of April. One of the things that I've discovered about retirement is that I have raised procrastination to an art form. Of course, I was always good at it— as Joe DiBello and the late Vic Haggard would attest regarding my budget requests in my department chairman days. And so it goes.

⇒Condolences

—My condolences to Jim Eisele on the death of his wife and our colleague, Ruth Eisele. Ruth had been ailing the last few years. She was a retired teacher who taught at both the middle school and Montgomery Elementary. She died on January 13 in Florida.

⇒Nobody asked me, but...

—Special thanks and congratulations to Pat Iorlano who is retiring from the school board this year. Pat is an alumnus of Maybrook Elementary and of Valley Central in its days of centralization. After his college graduation he began a long and illustrious career at the high school as a Biology teacher. He also served as summer school principal for fifteen years and as the first Secondary Science Supervisor prior to his retirement. After retirement he ran for and won a seat on the school board. He served several terms on the board. Pat always spoke his mind and brought great balance to the workings of the board. He will be missed. Again, our thanks to Pat whose whole life has been one of involvement with the Valley Central family.

—One hopes that willing and capable folks will be interested in running for the school board. The job is a difficult one, but a very important one. Just as Pat

Iorlano always put children first, our hope is that others will continue to do that.

—Speaking of Boards, etc., I am reminded of how many VC alumni ran for office in the recent village elections. Those who won election and those who ran good campaigns but lost are to be congratulated. It is important to have willing candidates for our local offices. It has always been my feeling that Valley Central has been blessed with "good kids" who have grown into good and caring men and women. They have always affirmed for me the importance of the teaching life.

⇒ End thought and Amen

With the ongoing problems in our economy, it is most important that we support our schools in whatever district we reside. Get out and vote in May's school elections.

And as always, thanks for visiting the back pages. Until next time, keep pushing back the barriers of ignorance in whatever venue life finds you. Peace.

—Mac, AKA Kevin McFadden

Retiree Representative

*Mac urges you
to get out and
vote in May's
school elections*



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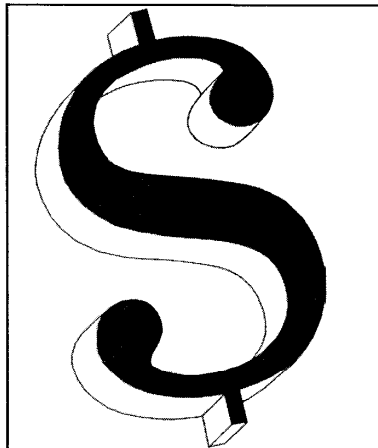
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VCTA Paraprofessionals Attend NYSUT Conference in Cooperstown: (front row) Patty Williams and Danielle Amen; (standing) Michelle DiPierro, Kathy Caltavuturo, Kathy Lennon, Diane Savage, Wenda Heaney and Janean Patterson (see page 13 for story)



Fair Tax Rally in White Plains, March 5; Pictured center with the NYSUT Banner are Patti Lunden, Carla McLaud (ED 14 Director, & Rich Steger (see *In the News...* article on pages 5–7 for more information)