

VC ECHOES

Volume 12, Issue 1

Valley Central Teachers' Association

September, 2009

CHILD OF THE UNIVERSE



There are no greater advocates for children and education than teachers and teacher unions.



Volume 12, Issue 1
September, 2009

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

Valley Central Teachers' Association

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Contribute to the next issue!

**Articles or
Letters to the Editor
should be sent to
Meghan Rilley, HS, by
18 September, 2009**

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*The VC Echoes is the official publication
of the Valley Central Teachers' Associa-
tion—Local 3076—and is published
regularly during the school year.
Any articles submitted to the VC Echoes
will also be posted on the VCTA web
site.*

Putting Children Center

This year's cover represents the child of the universe—the children filling up our classrooms. While NCLB has focused education on scores and standard knowledge, educators realize our responsibility is far greater than a test. Each child is a "child of the universe, no less the trees or stars" (Ehrmann, "Desiderata", c.1920). Each has his/her own unique gifts to offer while s/he passes through this world. We must remember true learning is not measured by a mere test score. Learning is a lifetime venture to which many contribute. As Henry Brooks Adams said, "A teacher affects eternity; s/he can never tell where his influence stops."

We must put our children center everyday, and remember that we must teach them more than facts and figures; it is our responsibility to help them to grow into individuals whose dreams will carry forward the world and the universe.

—Patti Lunden, VP

Proper Gardening and Lawn Care

B*eing There*, featuring the character Chauncey Gardiner; and *Forrest Gump*, featuring a character of the same name, are two movies that symbolically made use of the therapeutic acts of lawn care and gardening. Chauncey Gardiner communicated exclusively in gardening language. Gardening is what Chauncey knew and it encompassed his only comfort zone. In fact, when the world grew uncomfortable or too complex, Chauncey Gardiner reverted to what he knew best—gardening—regardless of its relevance to the current conversation. The second character, Forrest Gump, ridiculed and demeaned for much of his life, found great comfort in mowing his lawn. Forrest spent hours on his tractor ignoring that part of the world that too often seemed cruel and uncontrollable, to take joy in his efforts to complete a project for which he was the master of his own destiny.

Most of us have experienced the satisfaction of planting and tending a garden or mowing and caring for a lawn. It feels good to step back and look at our finished task—a task for which we can control many of the variables—a task for which there is a specific beginning and end. In some respects, our individual classrooms are our professional lawns and gardens. Some think they can best protect and nurture their classrooms and offices by simply closing the door, thus eliminating the constant threat of outside influences. Outside influences are to classrooms what weeds are to lawns and gardens. Regrettably, no matter how much effort we apply toward weed prevention, our neighbors must do the same, otherwise our lawns and gardens can still be overrun despite our best efforts and intentions. Of course, we have a disadvantage as educators that Chauncey did not face as a gardener. As we all well know, educational gardeners are not permitted to pull “weeds,” nor are we permitted to put pesticides or weed-and-feed on our students. Therefore, the similarities between home lawn and garden care and school are

limited.

As educators, we cannot simply escape to our classrooms or offices and ignore the rest of the world, the district or our building. Even Chauncey Gardiner and Forrest Gump were forced to involve themselves in the workings of the world around them. We can cower in our rooms, becoming less effective each year, or we can rise to meet the challenges of diversification, accountability, progress or change, while struggling together to make a difference. The verb “cower” emerges from the noun “coward” for a reason; I do not like the connotation of either word. Success in education necessitates courage—the courage to self-reflect and the courage to change for the better those things that are within our control.

The children for whom we care on a daily basis come to us with varied experiences and expectations. We cannot change the circumstances from which our most needy students come to us each day. We can, however, change the circumstances that can influence where our students will go. A rejection of isolationism in favor of a more productive collaborative approach among workers helps to ensure that the entire Valley Central garden is producing at maximum growth. For instance, basic principles of crop rotation teach us that the rotation of crops prevents nutrients in the soil from being depleted—any of you out there ever feel depleted after a particularly difficult semester or year? If pesticides and weed and feed are banned, what are our legal alternatives? Are organics acceptable and do they really work? What has worked two doors down the hallway and can the rest of us have some of it? We'll never know if we work alone and children will fall through

(cont'd pg 4)



Proper Gardening and Lawn Care (cont'd from pg 3)

the cracks. I would like to point out that Forrest Gump had noticeable needs that should and could have been addressed if the education institution of his day was not so resistant to change.

At times, we will fail to achieve our goals; but we will also most certainly succeed at times as well. Impacting the human condition is a difficult task and a very inexact science, with many of the variables being out of our control. Individual failures do not define us or our mission. To the contrary, failures should serve to strengthen our resolve and reaffirm our commitment to making a difference in the lives of our students.

Success should be defined by our attitudes and efforts as well as our results. Consequently, our failures should never be a result of poor attitudes or lack of effort as caretakers; instead, failures should only be a result of an inability to change circumstances that are beyond our control. Would any of us want our own child treated as Forrest Gump was treated?

Forrest had obvious and undeniable limitations, but Forrest chose to not let these limitations affect the quality of his character.

We often tell our students that no one can control their attitudes, efforts and behaviors—that they are in control of their destinies—that this is their responsibility. I have seen this value demonstrated by students each year. I also understand the role that poverty and wealth play in educational and professional success; however, this factor, although strongly influential, does not predetermine the results that we realize in public education. There are children who come from horrific circumstances that are bright, caring and successful, while there are other children who come from privileged circumstances who are uncaring, self-absorbed or unsuccessful. Patterns and trends are not destiny; therefore, as

educators we must remember that all children have the ability to grow and succeed. It is our responsibility to look for solutions to support and encourage this growth without sacrificing or ignoring the rest of the classroom. As caring educators, we must not allow the excuse of outside factors to discourage us from this charge.

The ability to problem-solve and troubleshoot is a prerequisite for educational employment and success. We have been hired to nurture the garden so that we can reap a healthy harvest, not simply walk the rows of planted

“To the contrary, failures should serve to strengthen our resolve and reaffirm our commitment to making a difference in the lives of our students.”

crops in the hopes that everything will be okay. Although the causal factors of a drought or disease that damage our lawn or garden may be out of our direct control, the subsequent attitude, effort and behavior that each of us adopt after the fact is directly within the control of each one of us. One should certainly ask if there were any proactive steps that could have been taken to prevent or limit damage to our crops. For example, although a

gardener cannot make it rain, the garden could be watered with a hose if the well is not dry or irrigation ditches could be created to bring water to the garden in times of need. As with a garden, educators are charged with helping a new crop of students grow each year. It would be irresponsible and unconscionable to let rigid traditionalism or outside influences distract us from the path we know we must follow to be successful. Crops can be replanted, lawns can be reseeded—students cannot—they are a far more precious commodity. This is where the comparative symbolism breaks down. When it comes to children, we must explore all options. Wouldn't we want someone to explore all options for our own child, or would we accept an early dismissal of our own child's chances of success or survival? (cont'd pg 5)

Proper Gardening and Lawn Care (cont'd from pg 4)

If we are to place responsibility for student success at the feet of our students, I believe it is fair that we place responsibility for classroom care at our feet. I'm a pragmatist—not to be mistaken for a pessimist, although I am probably both. I may mow the lawn at home every week and tend the garden with due diligence, yet remain frustrated because weeds still grow. In fact, I'm confident weeds will grow—that's the pessimist part of me. Whether we learn by adapting to change and fixing those components that are within our control or whether we make excuses for being rigid isolationists or uncaring practitioners is a choice that is completely within the control of each one of us. The days of acting in isolation of one another in education are over. Unlike Chauncey Gardiner, we cannot revert to habits of comfort if these old habits do not best serve the needs of our students. Unlike Forrest Gump, we cannot mark our territory and mow our lawns to escape from the realities of the world when we are being paid to do otherwise.

We have unique challenges before us this year. Some of these challenges will come from federal, state and local demands and influences that will cause anxiety for those who are responsible enough to look beyond their own nose. Other challenges will be internal

and self-imposed. Unfortunately, many of these may prove to be a result of an unwillingness by some to adapt to change, which has been a chronic problem within education. Holding on to that which does not best serve our students is unacceptable. To reuse a previous example, a farmer who refuses to rotate crops because this is not the way it was done in the past risks losing the entire harvest. The questions we must ask ourselves are:

1. How badly do we want to win the modern day battle to make a difference within the lives of all of our students?
2. Are we willing to leave our comfort zones to accomplish this?

For many of us, this will require us to think and work like first year teachers all over again. As an organization that already excels within this county, I believe that we are, and I trust that we will, continue to be the staff that embraces and models productive change that benefits our students. I hope that each one of you has a great year working within and beyond your classroom or office with your friends and colleagues while consistently putting children center everyday of this new school year. Have a great year.

—Tim Brown, HS, VCTA President

**If you are injured while at work,
you *may* be entitled to
Worker's Compensation.**

**The District's Worker's Comp. carrier is:
Wright Risk Management, 377 Oak Street,
Garden City, New York 11530-6542**

Give this address to your doctor if you have a workman's compensation claim.

Marvin Anderman is a Worker's Compensation attorney. His number is (212) 227-2300.

Members should contact him (and the VCTA) if they are having problems with a workman's compensation claim.

The 2009 IRS rate for mileage reimbursement is: 55 cents per mile.

Contract Article XD: "For personal automobile use, teachers who are assigned to more than one (1) school per day shall receive the following compensation mileage reimbursement at the rate used by the IRS..."



Welcome Back, Valley Central

School years have a cycle. Research says there is a cycle for first year teachers (see chart). However, the cycle probably applies to everyone in education every year.

As the charts shows, the cycle begins with "Anticipation". It begins sometime in August, right about the same time as those joyous back to school commercials begin showing up on television. For the new teacher, the dream of finally having that classroom is near while returning educators anticipate the promise of a new year, a new chance to begin again—a new coat of paint, everything clean and ready for those introductory days.

Next, we all enter the survival phase. It begins sometime after the first week and lasts until the beginning of the holiday season. For those of us returning to our jobs we just have to learn those names and remember where we hid all of our stuff for the summer. For the new teacher, survival is the realization that all that stuff we did in theory in our college teaching seminars for our imaginary classroom will not work in our real classrooms.

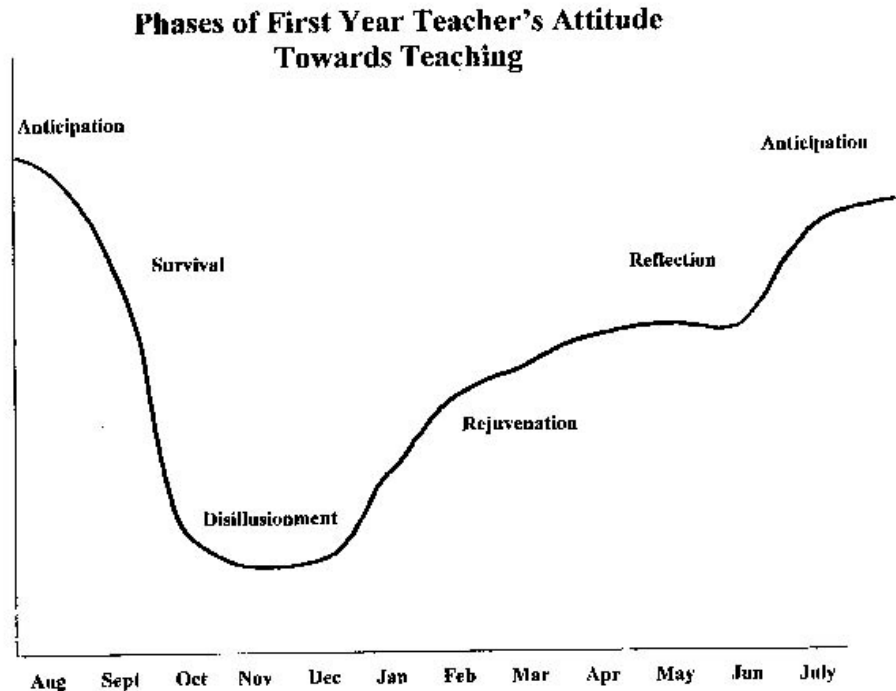
Disillusionment sets in just after Halloween when our kids have the attention spans of gnats as visions of holiday gifts dance in their heads for two months. The month of November is so broken up by time off it is hard to feel accomplished in anything. For those of you new to the classroom relax...this is normal.

After the holidays pass, we are all rejuvenated by solid time to get down to the meaty parts of the curriculum. Plus we can start to see the halfway mark.

By the time spring break passes, we know we are in the homestretch and begin reflecting on our year—what we accomplished and what we will do better next year. As June approaches our anticipation returns first for summer and then for what we do to prepare for an even better year.

As we embark on the journey of this new year, we are firmly planted in anticipation. Whether it be our first, fifth, fifteenth, twenty-fifth or last year of teaching we all anticipate the promise this year holds. May that promise be fulfilled as we head back to our classrooms for another year of putting children center.

Taken from: http://www.teachersupportprograms.org/phases_first_year_teaching/



—Patti Lunden, VP

Excellence All Around

Excellence...isn't that what we all strive for in everything? In a perfect world we would all be excellent every single day. But we all know that the world is far from perfect. Excellence should certainly be our daily goal. None of us, no matter what our role in this educational institution, should ever strive for less. I can't imagine waking up and thinking, "Wow, today I'm going to give 50%". But it is important to realize that even the most stellar amongst us cannot be excellent every moment. It is simply a part of human nature. However, it should be noted that those days should be the exception and not the rule.

The VCTA has worked with the District as promised since April 2007 on the APPR committee to address evaluation of teachers. *(A special publication regarding this work and the evaluation process will be published and distributed to teacher members in the next few weeks.)* We believe some strides have been made in the evaluation of teachers but there is still work to be done, not only for teachers but also for the evaluation of other units.

The VCTA leadership has a long history of being blunt with our membership and the district's administration. We tell the district to look hard during the tenure years and require excellence as the benchmark for granting tenure. However, it is important to remember that if excellence is a goal to strive for, then it should not be expected of someone in their first evaluation, in their first year, in their first classroom. Growing to excellence over the course of three years is the goal. As teachers continue past those first three years, there should be an expectation that they continue to grow until the day they retire. Excellence should be evident in the veteran classroom through experiential growth.

Excellence does not stop with the teachers' unit. Teachers are not the only employees from whom excellence should be sought. It takes more than just teachers to make a school district. When criticism from the public comes to a school district it is almost



always the teachers who bear the brunt of it.

Excellence should be expected from every employee no matter what their role in this institution. Each of us should come to school each day prepared to give 100% of ourselves to our children even, if we are removed from the classroom by our work. The VCTA leadership has recognized that while teachers have failed to attain tenure because they lacked a level of excellence, there are others who have lacked the same level or may even be more heinous in their job performance but are allowed to retain their jobs.

It is not just teachers who affect the children in the classroom; every employee of this district who can affect children in the classroom. Therefore, excellence must be the benchmark for every unit—custodial, nutritional, paraprofessional, secretarial, confidential, technological, teacher, administrative and central office superintendents. Our children deserve no less.

—Patti Lunden, VP

VCTA: Going Green?

This year's giveaway is a reusable shopping tote. Going green is not an option for our future but a requirement. What good is it to put children center and then use up all their resources before they grow up? The tote may not be green in color, but it is in intention. Here are some tips on going green:

- Turn your A/C thermostat up a notch. Even one degree per house will make a collective difference.
- Turn your TV off - not just on stand-by.
- Unplug your phone chargers.
- Turn your lights off when you leave the room. (There's no such thing as ghosts anyway).
- Take showers instead of baths and save nearly ½ the amount of water.
- Switch to CFL light bulbs. They use 1/3 the power of regular ones.
- Wash your clothes in cold water. Unless they were completely soiled, they'll come out perfectly clean.
- Buy local produce when possible. It doesn't have to be flown in from across the

country to taste good (and may even taste better than what you've been buying).

- **Carry reusable shopping bags instead of using paper or plastic.**

Did you know that the average family of four uses more than 500 plastic bags in any given year and recycles less than 5 of them! They end up in landfills and oceans and wreak havoc on habitats that will affect future generations for many years. We hope that you will make good use of your VCTA shopping bag this year and use it to support local business in the school community as well as your home community.

—Patti Lunden, VP

<http://ezinearticles.com/?Simple-Go-Green-Things-We-Can-All-Do-to-Save-the-Environment&id=1300957>

Collaboration Translates into Student Achievement

During the 2007-2008 school year, Chris Cozzolino (HS, Science) worked with his students on photographic submissions for a contest sponsored by the American Association of Physics Teachers. In order to choose the most outstanding work he consulted Trisha Appel, (HS, Art) who teaches photography courses, for input on the artistic elements. This initial collaboration led to a VC student placing third in the AAPT contest this past year as well as an interdisciplinary project that expanded across many science subjects.

For last year's contest, Chris and Trisha hoped to help a student submit a winning photograph. To obtain a larger pool of entries, Trisha, Chris, and Erika Harnett (HS, Art) cre-

ated an interdisciplinary project incorporating not only physics topics, but also themes from Living Environment, Earth Science, and Chemistry. Students were able to connect their learning in science with what they learned in Digital Photography. Trisha Appel felt "it also was fun to have art students, who were not in my photo class but taking physics, asking my opinion about their images and which one I thought was best and should be judged for the contest." Cross-curricular collaboration proved exciting for both teachers and students.

Working together across disciplines also benefited Chris Curti who placed third in the "contrived" division. His award-winning photo illustrating reflection and refraction of light can
(cont'd on pg 9)

Collaboration and Student Achievement (from pg 8)

be viewed on the Valley Central High School web site by visiting Chris Cozzolino's page. Chris is the son of Cathleen Curti, a member of the VCNA, our sister unit. Congratulations to Chris! When teachers collaborate effectively, all stakeholders win.

Due to the isolated nature of our profession, it can be quite difficult to work with a colleague on a project or unit. As demonstrated with this example, however, it can start with a simple contest that compels one teacher to look for input from a teacher in a different area. Over the course of two years, this led to individual student success in the contest, inspired teachers to work together to create a project that linked different subjects, and consequently afforded students an opportunity to



make connections between disciplines. When learners can apply their knowledge to a real-life application it authenticates their learning and provides powerful motivation.

In addition to motivating our students, collaboration with a colleague inspires teachers to strive for excellence as well. The old adage "two heads are better than one" comes to mind. Working closely with others often results in increased energy, creativity, and excitement about a project or assignment. It also provides the opportunity to see different perspectives

and methods that can inform future instructional decisions. Our colleagues can be our most valuable resources. —Meghan Riley, HS

Are you being paid correctly?

Look at your contract salary agreement:

- Is the salary correct? Check the column and step.
- Are your credits correct?
- Is there a longevity payment? Be sure the step on longevity matches the step on salary.
- Guidance/Pyschs— is 10% added to your salary?

Look at your first paycheck.

- Does the number listed under contract match your contract salary agreement? *(Note: if you have stipends as part of normal, it may be greater. It should not be less)*
- How many pays did you select? (22 or 26)
Divide the number under contract by the number of pays you selected. The result should equal the gross amount of the current per pay salary. If you find it doesn't, you are not being paid as you selected.



If you have an issue with your paycheck, contact VP Patti Lunden 283-4574 or plunden@vcta.net or plunden@vcmail.ouboces.org

Valley Central's Tenure Recipients 2009

<u>School:</u>	<u>Name:</u>	<u>Tenure Area:</u>
Berea	Donna Boyce Melanie Vatier	Library Media Specialist Remedial Reading
East Coldenham	Julie Ardito Mary Devitt Kerriann Holtz Samantha Michaelson Kristin Scully	Elementary Education Elementary Education Special Education Elementary Education Elementary Education
Maybrook	Tara Brown Danielle Parise Michelle Russell Katie Stalker	Elementary Education Elementary Education Elementary Education Elementary Education
Montgomery	Christine Camarra Blair Dolan Christopher Malley Andrea Smyth	Elementary Education Remedial Reading Elementary Education Elementary Education
Middle School	Frank Di Pasqua Carolyn Thorp	Special Education Elementary Education
High School	Melanie Conklin Christopher Cozzolino Betty Gaudette Linda Geiger Yuhong LaBarbera Angelo Leo Billie Matsen Deborah McKenney Rhonda Paul Eileen Purcell	Mathematics Science Mathematics Foreign Language Science Special Education Special Education Library Media Specialist Mathematics Guidance Counselor
District	Barbara Gravel	School Attendance Teacher

Congratulations!

Need information? Visit www.vcta.net!

Health Insurance Articles (Do I have to take buyout? Health FAQs)	Select <i>Health & Finance</i> ⇒ <i>Health Insurance</i> , and there is a link at the bottom of the page to the articles
CAF 125 Plan Article	Select <i>News & Outreach</i> ⇒ <i>ECHOES Archives</i> , and click on the September 2006 edition, article on pg 5
Committee Assignments for Building Reps (including Executive Council Meeting Dates)	Select <i>Local Information</i> ⇒ <i>Executive Council and Committee Lists</i> , scroll down to Committee assignments
Calendar of Events	Select <i>Local Information</i> ⇒ <i>Announcements and Calendar of Events</i>
Need a Form? Writing a child care leave letter? Many forms and templates are available on the site!	Select <i>Local Information</i> ⇒ <i>Forms, Letters, FAQs</i> , lists follow
New Member? Great resources for you!	Select <i>Local Information</i> ⇒ <i>New Members</i> , there are many useful links!

Problems for Central Office?: What to do...

If you have an issue for Central Office contact the appropriate superintendent **and**
Tim Brown, Patti Lunden, or Rich Steger.

Name/ Email Address:	Questions Concerning:
Dr. Richard Hooley — rhooley@vcasd.ouboces.org	Any questions or concerns that do not fit the following parameters
Stephen Bangert — sbangert@vcasd.ouboces.org	Business Office—payroll, TRS, insurance, purchasing
John Hunter — jhunter@vcasd.ouboces.org	Curriculum & Instruction—prof. dev., mentoring, credits
Sheila Lease-Murphy — smurphy@vcasd.ouboces.org	Human Resources—teacher files, salary contract agreements, leave requests



Top 5 Reasons to Participate in Making Strides Against Breast Cancer

5. It's a nice way to spend a Sunday morning in the Fall
4. NYSUT is a flagship sponsor at 14 of these events throughout the state
3. Money raised goes to education, research, advocacy and patient services through the American Cancer Society
2. 220,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year, 40,000 of them will die of breast cancer
1. *You or someone you know may be one of them*

How you can help....

- ♥ **Buy a Making Strides 2009 t-shirt (*t-shirt money is a direct donation*)**
- ♥ **Decide to walk on October 18th and collect money from everyone who has ever hit you up for a donation!**
- ♥ **Donate money to someone on the VCTA team!**

EVENT:

Date: Sunday, October 18, 2009 at Woodbury Commons

Time: 7:45 am Registration, Walk begins at 9:00 am

Walk is 5K and non-competitive

For more information, contact your building coordinator or check the VCTA website: www.vcta.net

Building Coordinators:

Berea: Robin Scott

East Coldenham: Holly Bacon

Walden: Rich Steger

HS: Patti Lunden

Montgomery: Gail Nozell

Maybrook: Donna Lloyd

Middle School: Maddie Brooks

CO: Janine Maridou

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

Greetings to all active and retired VC folks, and a special welcome to those just beginning their time at the hallowed halls of Valley Central.

May 2009-10 be a very successful and pleasant year. A very special hello to those VC'ers for whom this year is the first year of their retirement.

Speaking of retirement—the Retirement Luncheon, the 27th dating back to 1982, will be held at Spruce Lodge on September 9th. We always hold the luncheon on the Wednesday after Labor Day. I sent out approximately 200 notices to retirees all over the country. At this writing (August 27th) we have 55 affirmative

responses plus some 25 notes from those not able to come. It is always a pleasant gathering, renewing long-standing

friendships and telling the old stories. I'll report on the event in the next issue.

It is a pleasure to greet you again. Until next time, keep pushing back the barriers of ignorance in whatever venue life finds you. Peace.

—Mac



Temperature in Your Class

With the start of the school year we can usually anticipate a heat wave shortly after our students arrive. As teachers, we do everything in our power to make our classroom a place that is conducive to student achievement and success. Building representatives are inundated with questions regarding the legal maximum classroom temperatures as the heat rises each spring, as well as the early fall. The minimum temperature in school buildings and indoor facilities has been established at 65 degrees. Unfortunately, there is no maximum temperature in school buildings or indoor facilities.

Bill S3342 (Stewart-Cousins), proposes establishing a maximum temperature in school buildings and indoor facilities at 95 degrees. NYSUT will be asking for some revisions on the bill to be more protective of students and staff. As more information regarding this bill becomes available we may be asked by NYSUT to contact our elected officials.

Even though there is no maximum temperature, safety for students and staff is vital. Administration has worked diligently to make accommodations when possible. As temperatures rise, please keep an eye on your students and colleagues, especially those who are pregnant or ill. If you feel there is a safety concern, please inform a building rep and your administration immediately. Don't wait until the end of the day; as mentioned before, safety is a priority.

—Rich Steger



Support Our Local Businesses!



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**Just south of I-84, 2040 Rt. 208,
Montgomery**



Welcome to Our
Newest Vikings!

SAVE THE DATE! VCTA FALL FEST 2009

DATE: FRIDAY, OCTOBER 30TH

PLACE: OTTERKILL COUNTRY CLUB

TIME: 3:00 PM

MUSIC! FOOD! FUN! PRIZES!