

VC ECHOES

Volume 13, Issue 5

Valley Central Teachers' Association

May 2011

WE ARE ONE: NYC RALLY 9 APRIL 2011



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

Valley Central Teachers' Association

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Vice Pres, Richard Steger (W)
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Secretary, Scott Warner (HS)
Treasurer, Jennie Sexton (HS)

**Contribute to the February issue!
Articles or
Contributions
should be sent to
Meghan Rilley, HS, by
25 May 2011**

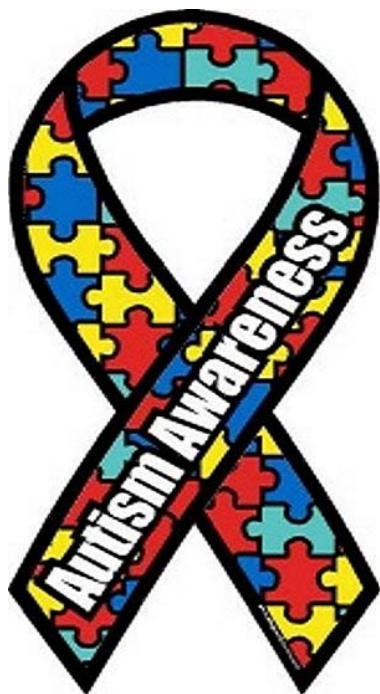
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- Maybrook: Linda Draughn, Donna Lloyd
- Montgomery: Brian Ackley, Gail Nozell, Andrea Smyth
- Walden: Mary Ellen Kawauchi, Janet Malloy, JoAnn Sweikata
- Middle School: Chris Arndt, Sonya Berger, Mary Bleau, Tammy Coleman, Joe Collins, Frank Di Pasqua

- High School: Jedd Beukelman, Nancy Brother, Roberta Betanzos, Deborah McKenney, Christine Mello, Antoinette Oakes, Beverly Risco, Melissa Verlin, Keith Sexton (A)
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The VC Echoes is the official publication of the Valley Central Teachers' Association—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.

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



In honor of Autism Awareness month, Berea Elementary held a dress-down day Friday, April 1st. Through the generosity of our staff we raised \$250 to benefit the Autism Society of the Hudson Valley.

—Lisa Daily, Berea Bldg Rep

Reciprocity at a Rally

I attended the April 4, 2011 local rally as well as the New York City April 9, 2011 rally with some trepidation. Despite being a “child of the 60s,” these were my first rally experiences and I really wasn’t sure what to expect. I was impressed by all that I saw on both occasions. This was the best of what working people have to give: cooperation, diligence, strength, determination. This was a community working together for the sake of communication. This really was a chance for many voices to be heard as one.

But, the rally in New York City was something more: As leader after leader took the podium, it became clear that while they spoke to inspire block after city block of union members, our very existence at that time and place was an inspiration to those who take on these important leadership roles. As having a huge crowd in a limited space made it relatively impossible to separate ourselves into labor units, what these leaders looked out upon was an ocean of dedicated people from many walks of life, standing together, cheering together, and supporting each other’s rights as well as their

own. The speakers lifted my spirits, but I could see on each of their faces that we lifted their spirits as well. With each cheer of “We are one,” we surely felt inspired, but we also assured the people who look out for us and our families that we believe in the cause for which they speak and shout on our behalves, that we appreciate the time and the effort that it takes to unify a mass of individuals, and that while they’ve got our backs, we’ve got their backs as well.

I walked away feeling stronger and more hopeful than I have in months, but also grateful. I was grateful for the opportunity to lighten the load of our leaders as part of a massive unified group voicing a willingness to share in the pushing back of adversity, the carrying of burdens, and the lifting of hopes. Our leadership deserves to see and feel the force that stands right behind them as they continually fight to protect what is ours. The rallies are a great chance to take a stand, but also an important opportunity to give our support. —*Linda Lettieri*



Linda Lettieri and Debbie Simons at the We Are One Rally in New York City, April 9th, 2011

School Budget Vote: May 17

It is with a heavy heart that the VCTA Executive Council approaches the proposed 2011-12 VCSD school budget proposal. As is the case with many districts, the VCSD budget proposal will result in the loss of members and, more importantly, the loss of some programs and services for kids. The VCTA, in collaboration with other locals throughout the state, lobbied for a restoration of education funds, resulting in a \$670,000 compensatory change to the state's devastating cuts to the VCSD. Although this small restoration is less than what was hoped for, it is more than what was originally allotted in the governor's initial budget proposal. These funds were solicited for the sole purpose of supporting programming for children. Once, however, this money is allocated to districts, those of us who lobbied for these funds have no practical control over how a district chooses to utilize them.

The VCSD has chosen to apply most of these funds to lower the tax levy. Although we understand the BOE's political motivation for doing this, it certainly does not place the district in a good light to elected officials who were told that these funds were needed to service children. After two years of being negatively impacted by Gap Elimination Aid, the VCSD is placing itself in a position to be punished by the state once again and even more severely for its actions, regardless of the fairness of this financial funding formula. Nevertheless, the VCTA supports the children of Valley Central and, therefore, will support this budget despite obvious concerns for future ramifications.

The District has chosen a tax levy of 6.44% with a contingency of 6.2%. This community has historically supported its school system and many seem to be aware of the GAP Elimination Formula's impact on schools like Valley Central. The good news is that the VCSD's reserve fund increased by \$1.6 million last year which could partially account for the chosen tax levy along with the District's choice to apply new

state aid support to the tax levy rather than staff and programming.

It is important to note that the VCTA has taken steps to be supportive of the community in the past few years by making multiple concessions which included an increase to health contributions, a compromise on the school calendar in 2 out of the last 3 years, multiple program concession (i.e. Literacy Collaborative, Induction and Mentoring) and a teacher unit contribution of \$127,500 to the District last year. The VCTA was the only teacher unit in the area last year to make such a concession to its employer. NOTE: The VCAA also participated in this concession. Furthermore, the VCTA Paraprofessional unit accepted a mere six-tenths of 1% raise this year in light of the District's gloomy economic projections. However, after receiving these concessions from the VCTA last year, the District still chose to apply \$400,000 to the tax levy, essentially indicating that these concessions were unnecessary.

Finally, I would like to remind all staff to vote on May 17 regardless of your school district residence. Each teacher association in Orange County has endorsed their respective proposed school budgets. Your support is important and needed. Be an active participant in the political process. Remember to thank Board of Education Members and Central Office Administrators who have a difficult job trying to do the right thing by many constituent groups. Whether we agree or disagree with their final decisions, our organizational endorsement of their proposal indicates an appreciation, trust and support for both the process and end product of their hard work.

- The VCTA Supports the Children of Valley Central
- The VCTA Supports the 2011-12 School Budget
- Support Public Education on **May 17**

Political Manipulation—Voter Beware



According to MSNBC—Rachel Maddow (4/11/2011), the Republican majority are now proposing for next year's budget the reduction of the tax rate paid by the richest people in this country to its lowest level since 1931. YES—let's move back to the great economic inequalities of the Great Depression! The republican proposal wishes to reduce taxes on the richest people in the country by 29%. This wealthy welfare program would cost 2.9 trillion dollars over 10 years. Who will have to pay for this? The middle class, of course—assuming there is any middle class left to pay for this wealthy welfare program.

When Americans were asked in an NBC/Wall Street Journal Poll how they would cut the deficit, 81% of Americans said they would lower the deficit via a surtax on millionaires. The Republican proposal would do just the opposite by cutting taxes by approximately \$200,000 per millionaire. The proposal for reducing the deficit that was least liked by respondents of this NBC/Wall Street Journal Poll was turning our current Medicare Program into a voucher/coupon system. This, however, is the proposal most embraced by the Republican Party. To summarize, the most beloved idea for reducing the deficit (i.e. a millionaire's tax) was rejected by the Republican majority, whereas the most hated idea for reducing the deficit (i.e. the Republican's proposal to kill Medicare by turning it into a voucher/coupon system) was embraced by the Republican majority.

What are the majority of Democrats doing while all of this is happening? Cowering as usual! I wonder how public employees and unions will be blamed if this economic proposal becomes a reality? Don't laugh...I can hear it

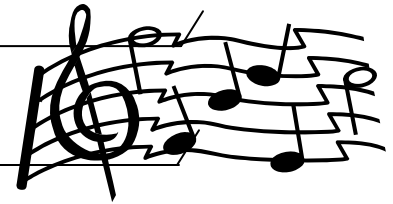
now...unions and the working class did not fight hard enough as the wealthy and privileged have taken advantage of America and caused the 2nd Great Depression.

The truth about corporations is that 2/3rds of major corporations pay no taxes, including GE. You would assume by the rhetoric being spread by Wall Street and these corporate leaders that bankruptcy was around the corner for all of them. How can that happen when the American middle class tax payer keeps bailing them out. Recently, Wall Street traders have been driving the price of oil and gas up; it is not Middle Eastern nations doing this. Wall Street's manipulative speculation is causing this with intent and malice. What a horrible time to "screw" the American people—but, of course, some of these corporate leaders are still betting on a third world USA caste system taking hold...and if it does, I'm sure unions and the working class will be blamed again.

In an article entitled "Greater Equality" that appeared in American Educator (Spring 2011), it would appear that a nation's health is related to its distribution of wealth. Although America is home to more than half of the world's billionaires, we are much healthier than many other developed nations. "The big idea is that what matters in determining mortality and health in a society is less the overall wealth of that society and more how evenly wealth is distributed. The more equally wealth is distributed the better the health of that society" (*cont'd on page 7*)

"What a horrible time to "screw" the American people—but, of course, some of these corporate leaders are still betting on a third world USA caste system taking hold..."

Band Together & Sing



The recent deluge of discouraging news has prompted me to share something positive that is happening here in Valley Central. Some 4th and 5th grade band students have been making a difference in the school community through a music outreach program at Berea & Walden Elementary Schools.

We started by asking classroom teachers in grades K-2 to choose a day and time that fit in their schedule. Each week a different lesson group comes to the classroom to make music with the students. The band students play while the primary students sing along and play the games. The band students learn songs like “London Bridge”, “Itsy Bitsy Spider”, and “Bingo” with the younger students in mind. Repertoire was even voted on by the band, choosing which songs they thought the Kindergarten would prefer.

The outreach has become a win-win situation for band and primary students. The band students have an opportunity to share what they are learning with others in a safe environment. Missed that B-flat? The first graders sang and smiled anyway. The players have the chance to do something positive for others. One 4th grader asked “Why does the fun stuff go by so fast?” after outreach. Band students have told me that after a visit the younger children will wave at them in the hallway, or even give them a hug.

Our primary students now make music in a social setting. A Kindergarten teacher told me that her students sing our songs while they work. “Anytime the band was playing in another classroom and we could hear it, the kids in my class would get excited and sing along.” The music started in class has been heard on buses and at the playground. The community that we reach is still expanding.

This year faculty and staff were invited to play with the 5th grade bands in the winter concerts. We were joined by teachers, a custodian, a counselor and even a Principal! A student told

me that she enjoyed making music with her teachers. “It feels weird to see what teachers do after school. We don’t think about that. It’s cool to play flute, and find out that your teacher does too.” A teacher who played in the concert said: “I think [students] benefit greatly from seeing adults in their lives that also value music and took the time to learn an instrument.” Another felt good to show students you can “enjoy music for a whole lifetime.”

At the 4th Grade Spring Concerts this year, older brothers and sisters will be invited to join in for the first time. I look forward to playing alongside some former students. Who knows, siblings making music together may become a regular occasion at home. One parent already told me that her sons are excited to play together. They were talking about starting a family “jam session” on their own.

Some comments from students and teachers participating in the outreach program:

Band Students:

- That was fun! Can we do it again next week? – 4th grader
- It’s fun to watch the kids have fun while we play. – 5th grader
- When I play my clarinet at home, my baby brother always falls asleep. – 4th grader

Primary Students:

- When are the band kids coming? – K
- I like the kids playing music for me. – K

Adults:

- The children sing the songs they have learned throughout the day. They play the games we have learned at recess. Some of them pretend to play the instruments.
- The children are always curious as to what instrument they will see or hear next.
- All of the children like being active participants in each music session. I think that the dancing and moving helps the children get some “wiggles” out too. (*cont’d on page 7*)

Band Together & Sing (continued from page 6)

Thank you and your band students!

- I know the students whom I have had stand tall and proud as they play their instrument and many even stop me in the hall and ask how they did!
- Social interaction was a big thing. It also got them up out of their seats to start the day in a different kind of way.
- I am now going to try to play with my husband and son at home. It builds family connections and makes family time more memorable. Having a hobby that you all share can be a rewarding experience as well.
- It's community building at its best!

I would like to thank the teachers and primary students at Berea and Walden for making music with me and the band students. It is truly the highlight of many school days. As my teacher

Dr. John Diamond wrote, "There is More to Music than the music, and it's the More that makes all the difference."

—Debbie Simons, *Music, Berea and Walden*



The students in Mrs. Bromm's Kindergarten class play "London Bridge" as some 5th grade baritone horn players lead the song.

More photos and student drawings at: www.vcsd.k12.ny.us/Berea/teachers/Mrs.Simons/outreach

Political Manipulation—Voter Beware (cont'd from 5)

(quoted in article from Richard Smith's article "Editor's Choice: The Big Idea," *The British Medical Journal*). Health and social problems such as "lower life expectancy, higher rates of infant mortality, shorter height, low birth weight, AIDS and depression...are more common in countries with bigger income inequalities." It is less about the US not being rich enough than it is about the material differences among people in our society. Greater income inequalities result in a number of problems, including higher imprisonment rates, homicides, teenage births, obesity, as well as lower levels of trust and social mobility. In fact, mental illness is three times higher in most unequal societies. "If keeping taxes and benefits down leads to wider income differences, the ensuing social ills may force [a] raise [in] public expenditure to cope." Since the 1980s when corporations were exempted from

many tax burdens, income inequality increased dramatically in the United States. I wish I could sell the truth as well as Wall Street sells the lie! —*Tim Brown, President*



Political News from NYSUT

Committee of 100 Rally: On Monday, May 9th Committee of 100 participants and other activists rallied around the state Capitol at 7:45 p.m. to light up the night with wave glow sticks and cell phones to illuminate the debate on the best ways to repair some of the damage in the 2011-12 state budget plan; schools are being closed, programs are being cut. This event highlighted the union's fight to convince lawmakers to supplement the budget approved earlier this month. The best way to do that is to continue the income tax surcharge on the wealthiest New Yorkers and share the sacrifice. (The Assembly extended the surcharge for those earning \$1 million or more annually after deductions. This alone would generate about \$750 million in state fiscal year 2011-12. So far the Senate and governor have not signed on.)

Aid Restorations: After a two-week break, the state Legislature returns to Albany on Monday, May 2. NYSUT's Legislative Department will keep pressing for state aid restorations and several measures that could lessen the need for painful layoffs—including a 55/25 retirement incentive and legislation that would allow school districts to spread out spiking pension costs. An action letter on an early retirement incentive can be accessed on the NYSUT website. NYSUT Executive Vice President Andy Pallotta said the union's fight to convince lawmakers to continue the income tax surcharge on the wealthiest New Yorkers is not over. The state income tax surcharge expires December 31, so there's still time to urge lawmakers to do the right thing. NYSUT activists made these points and more at the Committee of 100's

legislative advocacy day May 10.

May 17—School Budget Vote: On May 17, vote for what kids need in their classrooms, in their schools and in their communities. That's the message NYSUT will broadcast in regional radio ad campaigns, starting May 9, to encourage the public and especially its members to vote. "Voting is an important part of the process this year and NYSUT locals must make voters aware of the impact a 'yes' or 'no' vote can have on kids and programs," said NYSUT President Dick Iannuzzi. When budgets fail, districts are allowed one revote, or they may simply adopt a contingency budget. Union members need to educate voters on the impact of the proposed cuts, as compared to what would be lost under a contingency budget. "A 'no' vote could mean an even more draconian budget situation," said Executive Vice President Andy Pallotta. The VCTA and other local teacher unions have reached out to union members

**“The state income tax
surcharge expires
December 31, so there's
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lawmakers to do the right
thing.”**

via newsletters and rallies. Despite concerns about programming, NO local is opposing its proposed school budget this year.

Realtors Association & Tax Caps: In response to a new advertising campaign launched by the New York State Association of Realtors to build support for a property tax cap, NYSUT has posted a sample letter for members to send to realtors in their communities on its website. The message counters the state realtors association's claim that high property taxes are depressing the housing market in New York. In fact, research shows good schools are one of the biggest factors cited by buyers when they decide to buy.

Political News from NYSUT

Wisconsin Union Buster Hired in Hudson Valley: When the Katonah-Lewisboro school board decided to offer the superintendent's job to Wisconsin's Paul Kreutzer, his reputation as a "union buster" immediately raised red flags throughout the region. The local union reached out to the labor family, to the metro area media and to parents in the community to protest the move. The people responded. *The Journal News* described it as a "sea of teachers" that turned out to protest the hiring. The local union sent out a media release to announce plans to protest and established a (*cont'd on page 9*) Facebook page to keep members up to date and circulated an online petition. Grassroots video coverage showed up on the Internet overnight. The *New York Times* had more in-depth coverage and Kreutzer's promise that "I'm not coming here as a union buster." Despite pro-

tests, Kreutzer was hired.

TSOs Unionize: In one of the biggest union elections in recent years, nearly 85 percent of transportation security officers (TSOs) voted to join a union. AFGE, AFL-CIO, led the voting and will face a runoff with another, unaffiliated union to determine who will represent the 43,000 TSOs at 450 of the nation's airports. No date has been set for the runoff. The AFL-CIO is asking union members to speak with TSOs whenever you're in an airport and urge the workers to "Vote Yes for AFGE."

Visit www.vcta.net to find links to NYSUT's Legislative Action Page where you can contact your legislators.



Valley Central Teachers' Association
and the VC Peer Leadership Council
**13th Annual Community
Blood Drive**

- **When: May 18, 2011**
- **Where: VCMS Library**
- **Time: 12:00 to 6:00 pm**

Make Your Appointment Today!
Call or e-mail Kathy Manning, R.N. (VCMS)
kmanning@vcmsd.ouboces.org
457-2400 ext. 16700

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

The State's Budget Woes

While accolades are being thrown at Gov. Cuomo for passing the 2011-2012 budget on time, there is much that is disconcerting about the budget. Although the budget calls for a 2% decrease in spending with no new taxes or fees, eliminated from this year's budget is the Millionaire's Tax, which is set to expire in December. Currently, anyone making under \$200,000 gets taxed at 6.85%, while any earnings made above \$200,000 are taxed at 8.97%. That means if you make less than \$200,000, you will now get taxed at the same rate as someone making above \$200,000. Why the problem?

The biggest reductions in this year's NYS budget are \$2.38 billion in state spending on Medicaid and \$2.85 billion in aid to schools—only \$270 million were restored (that's only \$0.27 billion). The elimination of the Millionaire's Tax means a \$5.4 billion in the loss of school aid and Medicaid, with another \$44 million left over (factoring in the restoration of the \$27 million). Because of the Millionaire's Tax expiration, school districts are forced to cut programs, teachers, and tax payers are expected to choose between higher taxes or less educational opportunities, which will result in bigger class sizes, fewer upper-elective college courses, music & art electives, and the elimination of extra-curricular activities. Also, those who are lower income are going to receive even less coverage for healthcare and medical coverage, resulting in a larger amount of patients in urgent care and the emergency room. The only ones who are going to be well-off are those making above \$200,000.

For example, under the Millionaire's Tax rate, anyone making (say) \$300,000 would get taxed on the last 100K at 8.97%, equaling \$8,970. Now, they will only get taxed at 6.85%, equaling only \$6,970, which means paying \$2,000 less in taxes; equivalent to saving only a 1.5% of his/her income. Now compare that to your salary. Does a 1.5% savings in your salary

equal \$2,000? When you earn over 200,000 a year, paying an extra 2% in salary "above" the \$200,000 threshold is miniscule!

At the national level, the top 1% corporate profits per employee are the highest on record. At \$1.6 trillion, third quarter corporate profits were the highest figure ever recorded since record keeping began 60 years ago. The top 1% of the population had 17.1% of total after tax income in 2009, the highest figure for at least 30 years. A recent Siena Research Institute poll showed that 71% of New Yorkers support asking millionaires to share the pain and help alleviate the worst of the budget's cuts. But at the end, it is the middle class tax-payers, as well as school districts, colleges, and state employees, who will be on the losing end of this budget because of the loss revenue from the expiring Millionaire's Tax, as well as less school funding. For another year, more teachers and state employees will join the increasing rate of unemployment and school districts will close community schools and eliminate necessary programs like music, art, athletics, and other intervention services for special ed and gifted students, as well, while those who can pay their fair share at a higher rate continue to live in the lap of luxury on the backs of Middle Class America.

—Brian Ackley, Montgomery, Bldg. Rep

*Originally appeared in the Walkkill Valley Times
April 20, 2011*

**Don't Forget to Vote
MAY 17th in whatever
school district you re-
side! Support public
education!**

New financial education services offer something for everyone

If you're looking for information on financial services available to you as a NYSUT member, NYSUT Member Benefits may have something just for you. Considerable efforts have been put forth in creating new printed material as well as new presentations. Both in-service and retiree members can benefit.

403(b) Field Guide. This booklet covers all aspects of 403(b) plans and includes information pertinent to members not yet contributing to a 403(b) plan, those who are contributing, those nearing retirement, and those already enjoying retirement.

To get the free guide, you can view and print a copy from the Member Benefits website, www.memberbenefits.nysut.org, hit the "Contact" option on the site to send an e-mail request, or call **800-626-8101** for a copy to be sent to you.

403(b) Provider-Specific Workshop. Member Benefits contracted with the provider of its endorsed Financial Counseling Program, Stacey Braun Associates, Inc., to conduct these workshops upon request from local leaders. The workshop covers detailed information on five 403(b) providers chosen by the local leader from a list of 10 popular 403(b) providers. Workshops review the features of each plan, comparing fees and benefits. These workshops are designed for in-service members.

For information about these programs or about contractual endorsement arrangements with providers of endorsed programs, please contact NYSUT Member Benefits.

Agency fee payers to NYSUT are eligible to participate in NYSUT Member Benefits-endorsed programs.

Workshops have a registration fee of \$20 per participant and a minimum requirement of 30 participants. A local could schedule this workshop as a webinar for a fee of \$250.

Workshops will not address specific questions pertaining to an individual's 403(b) plan. Members with questions regarding personal 403(b) accounts or other financial planning issues will be directed to speak with their 403(b) adviser or their financial planner. For those who don't have an adviser or planner, information on the endorsed Financial Counseling Program will also be available.



Financial Planning Puzzle Workshop. Today's economy has clarified the need for a financial plan; unfortunately, for many, beginning a financial plan remains a daunting task.

This two-hour workshop, designed for in-service members, outlines the process, covering cash management, risk management, savings, retirement and estate planning.

The Challenging Times of Financial Management – The Retirement Years. Financial planning doesn't stop at retirement. This one-hour presentation discusses the various investment options you may face during retirement along with helpful information regarding your 403(b) plan, Social Security benefits, income taxes and more.

**MEMBER
BENEFITS**
nysut
Working to Benefit You

UNITED WE LEAD ARE ONE

