

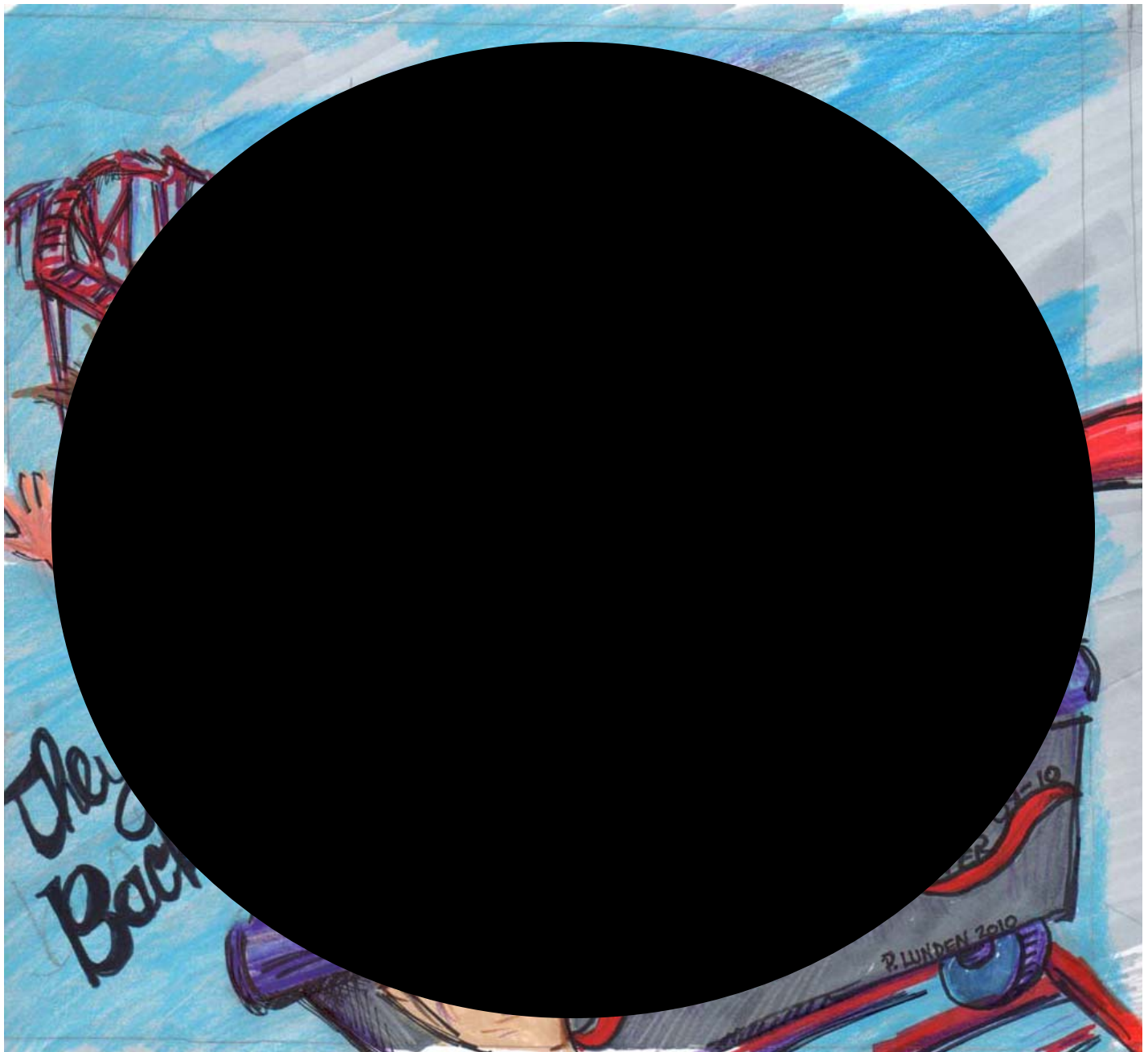
VC ECHOES

Volume 14, Issue 1

Valley Central Teachers' Association

September 2012

INTO THE ABYSS: A TALE OF TWO COVERS (PG 10)



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



Volume 14, Issue 1
September, 2011

Valley Central Teachers' Association

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President, Tim Brown (HS)
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Vice Pres., Patti Behr (HS)
Secretary, Christine Mello (HS)
Treasurer, Jennie Sexton (HS)

***Contribute to the next issue!
Articles or
Contributions
should be sent to
Meghan Riley, HS, by
30 September 2011***

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• Berea: Lisa Daily, Robin Scott, Deborah Simons
• E. Coldenham: Cathi Heil, Laura Casey
• Maybrook: Linda Draughn, Jeanne Cassel
• Montgomery: Gail Nozell, Andrea Turso, Susan Page
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• Middle School: Chris Arndt, Sonya Berger, Joe Collins, Anne McKallen, Derek Devoe, Pat Weigel,

• High School: Nancy Brother, Deborah McKenney, Antoinette Oakes, Melissa Verlin, Meghan Riley, Scott Warner
• Secretarial Representative: JoAnn Cassisi (HS)
• Paraprofessional Representative: Kathy Lennon (W)

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.

Donate Your Old 35mm Cameras!

The VCHS Art Dept is seeking 35mm Single Lens Reflex Manual Focus cameras to use with our photography program. These are the "old school" cameras before digital technology came along.

If you have one that you are not using and would like to donate it to us, we would be very grateful! It doesn't matter the condition. We will prepare a donation letter from the district to you so that you can use the donation for tax purposes.

If you have any peripheral equipment that goes with it (lenses, cases, flashes, meters, filters, tripods, or darkroom equipment) that you would also like donate, we will happily take that stuff as well.

Contact Patti Behr or drop off in Main Office or in Room 99. Thank You!
—Patti Behr (Lunden) and Trisha Appel

It's All Fun & Games Until You Lose Your Rights

Welcome back to another great year of putting children center. Putting children center does not and should not translate into being “doormats” for those who would like to erroneously blame the middle class along with educators and other public workers for our current economic woes. I would like to remind you that the USA is the richest nation on the planet which begs the question: why are we in the shape that we are in?

- It would be wonderful to be able to tell all of you that support for education is in a great place. It is NOT!
- It would be wonderful to be able to tell all of you that compassion for the poor and support of the middle class was ideal. It is NOT!

It would be wonderful to be able to tell all of you that organized labor, the single most important contributor to the creation of the middle class, is strong and respected. It is NOT!

Educators and other public workers, unions and their members, along with the middle class are all being vilified and scapegoated by SOME of our more greedy corporations and their hand picked elected officials. To be very clear, I am not attempting to paint all of big business as the enemy (we need big business and some are strong supporters of their communities and our nation) nor do all elected officials sell out to the highest bidder. In fact, I'm sure all NYS elected officials are altruistic; all of the bad ones must be in Wisconsin and New Jersey. Unions have NEVER been the highest bidder when it comes to lobbying efforts. Unions contribute approximately 7% to political campaigns through the use of VOTE-COPE, while corporations contribute approximately 77% to political campaigns without the need to fund raise through a separate process—after all, corporations are people too!

Some of the recent vilifying we see of educators in states like Wisconsin, Ohio, New Jersey and, yes, in New York as well, are, in my opinion, mean spirited and intentional on the part of their governors. As for the regionally elected

representatives in each state—many of them are still supportive and, therefore, it is important to not paint them all with the same brush. Others are simply afraid to speak up against the avalanche of negativity directed at educators and other workers. Others, unfortunately, are happy to see negativity focused on groups such as us because it indirectly protects them. Some of these officials are life-time politicians that cannot escape the fact that they have been a part of the problem for decades and, while scrambling to deflect attention away from their own culpability, have embraced these attacks on the newest scapegoats.

Although most elected officials are courteous and show some deference to lobbyists regardless of the issue being discussed, this mutual respect or civility is slowly deteriorating, in part due to the polarizing effects of our stagnant economy and in part due to the large amounts of money that corporations can now funnel to these elected officials anonymously. “Progressive tax” bills, more popularly known as the “millionaires’ tax,” are often rejected due to this influence. MSNBC provided numbers regarding what impact one version of a progressive tax proposal would have on those making over \$250,000. EVERYONE would pay the same rate on the first \$250,000 and EVERYONE would pay the same rate on income above \$250,000. What would this really mean? It would mean that those making over \$250,000 would pay \$30 extra in taxes per \$1,000 earned above that \$250,000 benchmark. So if I made \$300,000 per year I would pay \$30 x 50 (for the \$50,000 that was beyond the \$250,000 benchmark) or an extra \$1,500 per year in taxes. I would like to go on record now that if the BOE is willing to pay me \$300,000 per year, unlike some of the mega-rich and not-so-mega-rich, I will not complain about the additional \$30 per thousand that I will pay in taxes (source for \$30 calculation: MSNBC). Why is \$250,000 considered too small a number for progressive tax calculations when it comes to *(cont'd on page 4)*

It's All Fun & Games... (continued from page 3)

protecting the “haves” while salaries and benefits of public employees that are far less than this \$250,000 benchmark are simultaneously being portrayed as “excessive?”

Warren Buffett, a multibillionaire capitalist, was recently criticized and vilified by FOX News for his support of a progressive tax and, therefore, his support of lower and middle class families. In his NY Times article, Buffett stated: *“OUR leaders have asked for ‘shared sacrifice.’ But when they did the asking, they spared me. I checked with my mega-rich friends to learn what pain they were expecting. They, too, were left untouched. While the poor and middle class fight for us in Afghanistan, and while most Americans struggle to make ends meet, we mega-rich continue to get our extraordinary tax breaks. Some of us are investment managers who earn billions from our daily labors but are allowed to classify our income as ‘carried interest,’ thereby getting a bargain 15 percent tax rate. Others own stock index futures for 10 minutes and have 60 percent of their gain taxed at 15 percent, as if they’d been long-term investors”* (source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/15/opinion/stop-coddling-the-super-rich.html>).

Some naysayers might argue that many average Americans do not pay enough—that everyone should pay before the rich are progressively taxed. Let me be clear about whom they are talking about—because it is not you. You pay more than the rich. They are talking about the poor—defined as a family of four or more earning less than \$22,350 per year. This income benchmark could represent a mammoth \$5,587.50 per person within those families. FOX News is “right,” these families are clearly moochers and parasites. Of course, that number represents gross income. After paying excise, payroll and Medicare taxes the poor

have even less disposable income to utilize.

You know, the “poor” really aren’t so “poor” anymore. The “poor” have a tremendous amount of technology that they certainly couldn’t afford if they were really “poor.” Did you know that, according to FOX News, 99.6% of the poor own a refrigerator; 48% own a coffee maker and 25% own a dishwasher? They are so lucky. 25% of the poor now have the ability to come home from their dishwashing job and put their own dishes in their fancy dishwasher while just sitting back and enjoying their obvious wealth and the prestige that goes along with it. These, “poor” people, the bottom 50% of Americans, control a whopping 2.5% of the nation’s wealth. View the chart at the following link: <http://www.businessinsider.com/15-charts-about-wealth-and-inequality-in-america-2010-4#half-of-america-has-25-of-the-wealth-2>).

While the bottom 50% of Americans control 2.5% of the wealth, the top 1% control 38% and the top 10% control a combined 71.5% of American wealth. In fact, income inequity is so bad in the US that we rank 64th in this category, just ahead of Uruguay, Jamaica, and Uganda (source: Daily Show).

But, in fairness there is another side to this national debate; in fact, I experienced some of the very same pain that the top 10% of Americans feel every day with regard to the poor. I was traveling down the street when I heard the Salvation Army bell ringing in the hopes of collecting money to help the needy. I pulled out my wallet and graciously placed a dollar in the cup. But then I noticed a guy sitting on the sidewalk, not a care in the world, just enjoying the sun, and I thought...well...this is not right. I just gave up one of my hard earned dollars. What did this schmuck do? If he’s not going to give, why should I? I went back and retrieved my dollar from the cup—after all, life needs to be fair. This guy that gave nothing was just sitting there, holding a sign that said he would work for food. (continued on page 5)

It's All Fun & Games... (cont'd from page 4)

What a freeloader, he should pay for his food like everyone else. I'll bet he doesn't even have a decent job! I wonder if he was laid-off or excessed? I wonder if his unemployment benefits ran out? I hear these types of things are happening a lot lately. Is it too much for him to ask for a new job—one that would enable him to feed his family? We would never find ourselves in that position—would we?

Speaking of unemployment benefits—who needs them: *"Unemployment insurance is [nothing more than] a pre-paid vacation for freeloaders"* (California Governor Ronald Reagan, in the Sacramento Bee, April 28, 1966). Let me show you how many freeloaders VC has released into the world recently by taking a look at our current PEL list:

- Lisa DeBeauvernet
- Kerry Devine
- Kimberly Pucci
- Jennifer Jackson
- Kelly DiBernardo
- Julia Budd
- Suzanne Henson
- Jenna Risco
- Rosalba Nytko
- Janet Ganzer
- Kimberly D'Alessandro
- Michelle Wittman
- Deborah McKenney
- Melanie Conklin
- Pamela Smith
- Katrina Devoe
- Kristinna Crowe
- Michael Sgro
- Jennifer Neenan
- AJ Nappo
- James Murray
- Jaqueline Burns
- Meagan Rabinowitz

Some PEL members have been brought back to serve in LOA positions or to teach in other certification areas. I would like to thank our administrative staff who has been in constant communication with other

school districts to support our laid-off "freeloader" members with recommendations during these difficult times and who have also worked hard to bring some of our laid-off "freeloader" members back to VC in whatever capacity was feasible as positions became available. I would also like to thank our BOE who, upon receiving our request, considered and granted early tenure to many of our recipients, thus improving their odds of reemployment elsewhere should the need arise. To date, over 50 teaching unit positions have been cut in the last three years. Although this represents a financial savings to the district in a time when the state and federal governments are cutting education funding, the cost to our students may not be measurable for years to come.

Many of the benefits that organized labor has gained for American workers are under attack. The pendulum is swinging in the opposite direction. I am neither blind to the shortcomings of unions nor the shortcomings of corporate greed. But without organized labor fighting for workers' rights, workers would have no rights. The chart at the following link shows a correlation between a decline in union membership and the shrinking middle class: <http://thinkprogress.org/economy/2011/01/20/173738/report-incomes/>. It is the intent of some corporate and political leaders to make all states "right-to-work" states—wonderful words with a horrible meaning. It is simply code for "no union or worker rights," just like "No Child Left Behind" is code for "let's sabotage public education." In NYS the NYSSBA has taken an official position to support an initiative to end the protections of the Triborough Amendment. This would mean that when a contract expired, an employer would no longer be required to honor the old contract until (cont'd on pg 6)

It's All Fun & Games... (continued from page 5)

a new one was agreed upon. Salaries could be cut in half (or worse), your health benefits could be cut or even eliminated, your work day and work year could unilaterally be modified and, of course, the list could go on. To my knowledge, our local school board has not endorsed their state organization's position with regard to this and I certainly hope that this will never happen.

Let me caution each of you. The attacks are working. Organized labor and the working class do not have the money to compete with corporate America when it comes to propaganda or getting the message out. And the truth is—advertising works; if you hear a message enough, it becomes the perceptual truth. The middle class is shrinking and those of us in this very auditorium represent a small percentage of the middle class that still remains. The middle class is shrinking and the poor are increasing while *“the gap between the richest 1% of Americans and the rest of us is wider today than at any time since just before the start of the Great Depression. **Writing for Forbes.com, Eva Pereira noted recently that since 1983, 43% of all financial wealth created in America went to the top 1%, 94% went to the top 20% while the remaining 80% of Americans were left to divvy up just 6% of the wealth created since the early 1980s. As a result, the Website econ-proph.com pointed out, income inequality in America is even greater than in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen, nations that revolted in part because of income inequality”** (<http://garthright.blogspot.com/2011/02/american-federation-of-scapegoats.html>).*

I would like to leave you with two quotes from former presidents. Andrew Jackson (7th President) and James Polk (11th President). That's 7/11; so you know it will be good. Andrew Jackson said: *“It is to be regretted that the rich and powerful too often bend the acts of government to their selfish purposes. Distinctions in so-*

ciety will always exist under every just government. Equality of talents, of education, or of wealth can not be produced by human institutions. In the full enjoyment of the gifts of Heaven and the fruits of superior industry, economy, and virtue, every man is equally entitled to protection by law; but when the laws undertake to add to these natural and just advantages artificial distinctions, to grant titles, gratuities, and exclusive privileges, to make the rich richer and the potent more powerful, the humble members of society — the farmers, mechanics, and laborers — who have neither the time nor the means of securing like favors to themselves, have a right to complain of the injustice of their government. There are no necessary evils in government. Its evils exist only in its abuses. If it would confine itself to equal protection, and, as Heaven does its rains, shower its favors alike on the high and the low, the rich and the poor, it would be an unqualified blessing.” This is why VOTE-COPE initiatives exist; VOTE-COPE is a means to unify and provide a voice to those whose voice would otherwise be negated by the “rich and powerful.” VOTE COPE, while a major contributor through your voluntary contributions, is seriously outspent each year. For example, Governor Cuomo, via *The Committee to Save NY* which is primarily funded by realtors, business councils and hedge funds, raised \$10 million dollars in just four weeks—that's \$10 million in just four weeks for a single politician—while NYSUT raises a mere \$8 million throughout the entire year to be utilized for ALL political action. 2012 will bring more cuts to public education impacting our students and staff. There are more calls for pension reform; a proposed Tier 6 will require new public employees to contribute 6% of their pay to pensions, early retirement incentives will not be allowed and the new retirement age could be raised from 55 to 65. On top of that we face calls for “mandate relief” (*cont'd on page 7*)

It's All Fun & Games... (continued from page 6)

which is often code for repealing Triborough, and eliminating step raises. We are still in the middle of this storm and it's going to continue until we change policy-makers in Albany and DC. We can't do that without VOTE-COPE resources.

James Polk, in his 1845 inaugural address, said: *"Melancholy is the condition of that people whose government can be sustained only by a system which periodically transfers large amounts from the labor of the many to the coffers of the few."* In modern language, the mid-

dle class rescued corporations from their own greed but corporations in turn are reluctant to invest in their home country, the nation that saved their butts so they can now make record profits. The USA is still the richest nation on Earth. The major reason behind our recession is corporate greed, not a real lack of capital. I wish I had a more positive message, but sugar-coating a message is not my way. I would ask all of you to remain vigilant and active.

—Timothy Brown, VCTA President, HS

Political Button = Political Voice

Last spring I chanced upon a political button being sold on-line. It simply stated TEACHERS AGAINST CUOMO.

Event 1 – I bought ten buttons.

Event 2 – Once they arrived I wore one and decided to give away the others to anyone who openly expressed an interest.

Event 3 – They were gone within the next 3 days.

Event 4 – I felt less angry and more empowered.

Event 5 – The 20-something adult at the card store register read my button aloud. He asked me why it was that teachers earned more money than correctional officers even though correctional officers clearly had a more difficult job.

Event 6 – I asked the 20-something adult how much he thought teachers earned. He had no idea. I asked him how much a correctional officer earned. He had no idea. I asked him what each job entailed. To his credit, he admitted that he really wasn't sure. I suggested a little fact gathering before we continued our discussion. I felt empowered.

Event 7 – The young cashier at a local take out place read my button aloud and respectfully asked me why I was against Cuomo. I responded that in my opinion Governor Cuomo was not supportive of public education or workers' rights. I

suggested that the cashier find out more about our governor in order to form his own opinion, and yes, I felt empowered.

Event 8 – Over the summer, I noticed from time to time as I passed by people in public places, someone would appear to look at the button and give it a moment's thought without comment. This may happen more often, but I forget sometimes that I am wearing the button.

So... I would recommend a political button to a friend, relative, or colleague. They occasionally give people a moment's pause to stop and question their own points of view. They sometimes even promote political discussions that are not the product of hired spin doctors or media campaigns. It's low tech. It's not shiny. But for a small item, it can carry a great deal of weight.

Side note: If you happen to share my political button view, you can purchase a button of this type at the following site.

<http://irregulartimes.com/index.php/archives/2011/03/18/teachers-against-cuomo-parents-against-cuomo-students-against-cuomo/comment-page-1/#comment-707146>

--Linda Lettieri, Berea Elementary

Stand Up For Our Profession—Mike Bellarosa

The other day a friend of mine said that he believed in the saying “the more things change the more they remain the same.” I’m not sure..... maybe he’s right. But like it or not things do change. Personally I’ve gone from being called “the pup” by some of my colleagues when I first began teaching to “grandpa” today. This is I guess my 25th or 26th Welcome Back Superintendent’s Conference Day. When someone asked me what I did for a living back in the 1980’s and I said, “I am a teacher” a normal response was a very respectful, “Really?” Unfortunately what we do as educators doesn’t always reward us with a response that carries the same level of respect today.

Because of what we do for a living, we understand that we have the same problems in our schools that we have in society. It would be ridiculous to expect otherwise. Nevertheless, as far as the media is concerned, “failing schools” makes an attractive headline and politicians are opportunistic enough to offer that the problems can be solved if school districts are simply held “accountable.” An even more creative opinion is that holding schools accountable can help solve economic problems as well. So they are sponsoring a “race to the top” to explain away their failure with “no child left behind.” These are all things that are to an extent far beyond our control. But, in my opinion, it is time to circle the wagons and stand up for our profession because teachers are still our country’s greatest resource and 4000 kids will walk through our doors on Tuesday as proof of that. So we will need to ignore the background noise and give them our full attention.

No matter what our role is, being in education is unique in many ways. Next week we begin a new season and every teacher, every

coach, every administrator and every other school personnel knows that opportunity is sacred.

I need to ask you to do something. Could you please, right now, think of the person who, as a teacher, had the biggest impact on your life? What was it that made them so great at what they did?

Wouldn’t it be great to ask the same questions to our leaders at the National and the State levels who are lobbying so hard on things like APPR? Who were the teachers who had the biggest impact on their lives and exactly what “data” are they using to help them to determine that?

I guess the argument is that great teachers will have great data but how ironic is it that they insist on using science to determine what makes a great teacher when everyone of us knows that teaching is an art?

Kevin McFadden says that you must ask yourself the hard questions. Did learning take place today? Why or why not?

There is a short story in an 8th grade English text book that I used years ago. It’s one of those stories that I would skip over in my first few years of teaching because the plot was deadly boring to an 8th grader. I will probably butcher this because it has been awhile but the basic plot was about a young boy who gets his first job working for an elderly, but very intimidating woman. His job is to mow her lawn. They agree that the salary for a perfect job should be somewhere around 6 dollars but the woman points out that perfection is very difficult to achieve and in actuality his pay will be somewhat less than 6 dollars - depending on the quality of the job. (*cont’d on page 9*)

Stand Up For Our Profession (cont'd from pg 8)

The first time the boy mows the lawn the old lady asks him what kind of a job he thinks he did. He looks closely at his work and has to admit that even though he worked hard the results are not exactly perfect and he settles for a salary of somewhere around 4 dollars. He cuts her lawn for years. Sometimes he does a better job than others and this is reflected in his pay. On his best days he earns over 5 dollars but never achieves perfection - even by his own standards.

This is a story of real accountability. When we have time to reflect we are tougher on ourselves than any teacher evaluation or court of public opinion.

Valley Central is a great school district and we have great teachers. We have great school support staff and administrators. We

have an outstanding and supportive Board of Education. Valley Central has a great community. We know that if we teach our kids how to hit a baseball it doesn't matter who is pitching against us that day. We know that if we teach our kids to read and write it won't matter how many times the State changes the ELA. And we should know that if we live up to the standards that we set for ourselves, it won't matter how we are evaluated.

Don't underestimate the importance of that first day of school or any other and let's make sure we earn our 6 dollars - its worth a gallon and a half of gas or 3/4 of a beer at Yankee Stadium!

Best of luck to everyone on Tuesday and here's to a great school year!

—Mike Bellarosa, VCAA President, HS



'See a bully, Stop a bully' conference

**November 14th, 2011
Albany, NY**

To register and for more info visit: <http://tinyurl.com/bullyconference>

Scheduled Workshops Topics Include the following: school climate, cyber-bullying and sexting, bullying legislation, parent roles in bullying prevention, among others.

Into the Abyss: A Tale of Two Covers

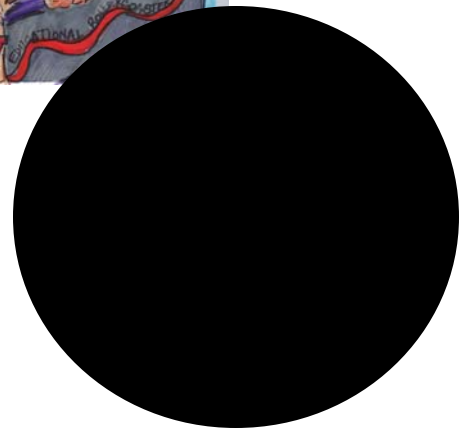
Our first ECHOES cover of the 2010-11 school year was inspired by the emotional rollercoaster that our new teachers, low on seniority lists, went through as our district abolished their positions and then restored them 8 weeks later in the spring and summer 2010. At that time, it was probably one of the worst years most of us remember in education. It was hard to imagine how 2010-11 could be worse, but as the funding crisis went national and educators suddenly became the favorite scapegoat for short-sighted politicians and the privileged few who control them for personal profit, it made 2009-10 feel like we had been riding a kiddie rollercoaster at the amusement park.

This year's cover is an artist's statement on the abyss that we face as we look into the future of education as a district, a state and a nation. It represents the darkness of a rollercoaster tunnel—the terrifying moment of total darkness that quickly overtakes us in surprise catching you off guard no matter how prepared you think you are for the plunge. NYSUT has advised us that the crisis in funding we are about to face is poised to be the worst yet, devastating NY's public schools due to the property tax cap/state aid cap law made effective last June. It certainly is a very dark era for American public education and a disservice to a generation of American citizens age 3 to 22. Politicians have turned their backs on the very ideals of a democratic society where every citizen is given a quality public education to strengthen the human infrastructure of the very fabric of the citizenry. And so where does that leave us? We (which means all stakeholders—educators, support personnel, parents and community members) are the only hope for our children and our future. We must be the change we wish to see. Doing an excellent job in the classroom is not enough, we must be willing to work outside of the classroom to turn this tide as quickly as possible to ensure the damage to the system has the least effect.



Left: That was then...

Right: This is now.....



We must not look for the light at the end of the tunnel, we must walk over, find the switch and turn it on. The only way to do that is to rage against the dying of the light with one voice. We cannot shake our heads and say "they just don't understand," it is our job to make them understand. **WE CANNOT** sit back and wait for someone to do something. **WE MUST** do something. There are no greater advocates for children and education than teachers and teacher unions—this is more than just our mission statement. It must become our creed and our battle cry as we carry forward putting children center inside and outside of our classrooms everyday. — *Patti Behr, VP (HS)*

Facebook: When Perception Becomes Reality

The world of Facebook has reached into almost every home in America. It is a great way to share family events with family and friends whether they are near or across the world. It is also a great way for labor to get out information to its members. The AFL-CIO, AFT, NEA, NYSUT, and soon the VCTA will have Facebook pages.

So with all of the benefits that Facebook has to offer, why was I at a NYSUT Leadership Conference this summer that had a 3 hour workshop on the dangers of Facebook? The simple answer: when you put something in writing it is there forever and it is open to the interpretation of the readers. Pictures are worth a thousand words. What you share is not always kept between your Facebook friends.

You may write a comment that you feel is innocent, but can seem insulting or inflammatory to someone else. Venting about having a horrible day at work may seem normal. However if a parent of one of your students sees your venting, especially if it is frequent, it could become a serious issue. He or she may even begin to question the education their child is receiving. If you often talk about meeting friends for drinks or refer to alcoholic beverages it is possible that a reader, perhaps a parent, the principal, the superintendent, or a BOE member may gain the perspective that you have a drinking problem.

During these difficult economic times teachers are an easy and favorite scapegoat. You hear the negativity about how we only work 10 months out of the year and how we chose an easy career path. Then we become our own worst enemies. I can't count how many teachers had a posting on their wall the last day of school that said something along the lines of "Here comes the 8 week weekend." During the summer, the number of teachers posting about spending another Monday at the pool or beach seemed to increase daily. Now I know that the majority of us spent the summer working on lesson plans, project ideas, taking workshops on

improving student performance, sitting in graduate classes to maintain our certification, spent countless days setting up our classrooms and the list goes on. However, it just isn't something we would post on our wall. So when you think about it, we have helped the group of naysayers reinforce their erroneous perspective that we don't do anything over the summer.

Pictures are worth a thousand words. Remember, odds are that even if you don't have a Facebook page there are pictures of you tagged with your name on a page of a friend or relative or perhaps someone you barely know. There may be a picture of you at a restaurant or bar down by the river and behind you on the other side of the bar in the picture is a student of yours holding a beer. Were you out drinking with that student? Absolutely not! Did you even know that student was at the bar? No! Can this picture impact your employment? Yes! How many of us have friends who have posted pictures of us from High School or College? Are these all pictures we would be proud to have on the internet as the professional we are today?

What you share on Facebook is not always, if ever, kept between you and your Facebook friends. What did you think that "Share" button was for? So you can easily share what one of your friends posted with all of your friends. With the smart phone we can now post to our wall on the go. I'm sure none of us in our District would be posting or looking at Facebook during the work day, however even great teachers like we have in Valley Central have made some mistakes. Have you ever done a project with your students and it turned out so well that you just did what comes naturally? You took a picture of the finished project with your phone and immediately posted that picture to your wall. After all you have been planning the project for weeks and have talked your family and friends(*cont'd on*

Facebook: Perception (continued from page 11)

pg 12) to death about it, so sharing in its success is a natural conclusion. Can a friend of yours forward or share information from Facebook with your Principal, Superintendent, or BOE member? Yes! Can they show these people your Facebook page using their phone, I-Pad, or even the old-fashioned method of printing out your page? Yes! Has this happened here in Valley Central? Yes! Can Facebook impact your career? If NYSUT felt it important enough to run workshops on the dangers of Facebook—I would say the answer is Yes...it can impact your career. I have a Facebook page and plan on keeping it, however I am overly cautious as to the who, what, when, where, why, and how when it comes to posting and responding. Be careful: the perceptions of other people can quickly become your nightmare reality.



—Rich Steger, VCTA Vice President, EC



MAKING STRIDES Against Breast Cancer

**Sunday, October
16th
7:30 am**



2 LOCATIONS

- ~ **Woodbury Commons**
- ~ **Dutchess Stadium**

4 Ways to Lend Support in the Fight against Cancer

- ~ **Buy a Making Strides t-shirt** (goes to Breast Cancer)
- ~ **Buy a LIVESTRONG bracelet** (goes to general Cancer)
- ~ **Buy a Ribbon Card** (goes to Breast Cancer)
- ~ **Participate in our Dress Down for the Brittney Miller Foundation** (supporting families dealing with pediatric cancer)

Play the Sunset

Mr. Holland's Opus" is a 1995 movie that tells the story of music teacher Glenn Holland played by academy award winning actor, Richard Dreyfuss. It is a wonderful back to school movie. It helps to remind us of why we are in this business.

Holland is a frustrated professional musician who falls back on his teaching certificate to pay the bills until he publishes the great American Symphony he is writing. The typical Hollywood stereotyping of teaching as a career for "those who cannot do" would seem to be the initial premise of this movie. However, the movie chronicles the thirty year career of this man who comes to embrace and embody the art of a true teacher. It shows his triumphs with his students as he strives to teach them about music and life, dealing with the struggle to balance family and career and the frustration with a system which eventually forces him into early retirement as his HS music program is eliminated due to budget cuts (*eerily and sadly, this is too close to life 15 years after its release*).

Parker Palmer, author of The Courage to Teach, describes the relationship between student/teacher and subject as the "wild triangle". It changes with every student since no two students are the same (*shhhh! Don't tell the authors of Common Core standards as they don't seem to have grasped this concept*); it changes with the life experience of the teacher and it changes as the teacher's experience with the subject deepens through their continual learning (*shhhh! Don't tell the authors of LIFO legislation as they think "veteran or old" teachers are lazy and ineffective*). There is a wonderful scene in "Opus" where Holland first engages in this "wild triangle." Overachieving Trudy Lang is frustrated that she isn't good at playing the clarinet (*her self-evaluation*) and always chokes and squeaks when she plays. During a lesson, she tells Mr. Holland that her sister and her brother both have things they are really talented and good at and

she just wants to be really good at something too. He asks Trudy what she likes about herself. She tells him she likes the color of her hair because her father tells her it is the

color of the sunset. He tells Trudy to close her eyes and "play the sunset." Hesitantly, she does this and it is the first time she is able to play her clarinet without squeaking. A teaching triumph and breakthrough moment for Trudy when she not only conquers the clarinet but she also conquers her self-doubt.

We see Trudy two more times in the movie, as a graduating senior in cap and gown playing in the band at her graduation ceremony and then again at Mr. Holland's retirement thirty years later where hundreds of his former students are gathered in the high school auditorium to honor him. Trudy, now governor of the state, was the keynote speaker. Here is her speech from that part of the movie:

Lang: *Mr. Holland had a profound influence on my life, on a lot of lives that I know. And yet I get the feeling that he considers a great part of his own life misspent. Rumor had it he was always working on this symphony of his. And this was going to make him famous, rich, probably both. But Mr. Holland isn't rich and he isn't famous, at least not outside of our little town. So it might be easy for him to think himself a failure. And he would be wrong, because I think that he's achieved a success far beyond riches and fame. Look around you. There is not a life in this room that you have not touched, and each one of us is a better person because of you. We are your symphony, Mr.*



(continued on page 14)

Play the Sunset (continued from page 13)

Holland. We are the melodies and the notes of your opus. And we are the music of your life.

[http://
www.americanrhetoric.com/MovieSpeeches/
moviespeechmrhollandsopus.html](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/MovieSpeeches/moviespeechmrhollandsopus.html)

What a testimony to a great career and a highly effective teacher! Of course, if Mr. Holland was teaching in NYS in 2011, it's not clear if he *would* be considered a highly effective teacher. After all there was no rigorous standardized pre-test of Trudy when she was all freaked out and squeaking her clarinet. Imagine how terribly he could have scored her! And then of course there was no post-test after Trudy figured out how to "play the sunset." Because poor young Mr. Holland would have had to envision what Trudy's issue with squeaking was about before she explained her lack of self-confidence which he could have only anticipated had he completed a psychological study of Trudy and her family issues in order to create an effective post-test of the anticipated learning. (*Along with, of course, psych studies of the other 40+ members of his orchestra since all learning needs to be differentiated although the Common Core Standards self-admittedly do not know how to tell teachers how to do this.*) And then it is obvious from Trudy's speech that the impact of Holland's lesson that day wasn't truly realized until thirty years later...which is way too late for the value-added measure system of teacher evaluation that requires a teacher to show growth from one point in a school year to another point in the same school year.

So if Glenn Holland was a teacher in 2011 in NYS, he probably would be rated ineffective or hopefully developing which would mean that he required a Teacher Improvement Plan. With some work on Madeline Hunter, Bloom's taxonomy and a review of Harry Wong, hopefully he would have a shot at becoming a

great teacher. Though, sadly, since his area doesn't have any state testing, right now he is looking at best 80% (effective) ; and that is only if he is perfect. Of course, no real need for him to worry because now that NYS has legislated the gross underfunding of public education in the future, he likely is out of a job in the near future (*again, since his department was already cut out in 1995! Education is truly cyclical!!*) Maybe he will get lucky and find a job in a charter school where none of this applies.

All tongue in cheek aside, we are facing a challenging time as public educators in NYS. Recently a teacher asked me, "How are WE supposed to do our best for each kid in our classroom when THEY are doing so much to work against us?" A question that certainly has validity in every classroom across the state.

Principal Jayme Ginda-Baxter told the HS staff at her opening day faculty meeting that we must look within ourselves and remember why we are here—because we love our kids. And she is right. The answer lies within each of us. Connecting the student, the subject and ourselves is essential now more than ever. We must stand up like Governor Lang did and explain to this state and this nation what great teaching is really all about. Lastly, we must listen to Glenn Holland and we must close our eyes and play the sunset.

—Patti Behr, VP (HS)

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

The Bell is ringing. Another year is about to start. My hope is that it will be a year during which schools will prove once again that the education of our children will be in the hands of dedicated, capable, caring professionals and not in the hands of politicians and pundits. It has been my view that the P and Ps know zilch about the art of teaching. However, let me speak with a positive more positive note—I wish everyone a new year with the possibility of it being the best one ever. All the best.

—Some retiree news...

—The retiree luncheon will be held on Wednesday, September 7 at Spruce Lodge. As I write this on August 23, we have 40 positive responses and 20 who can't make it. My hope is that we will receive some more "yes" notes in the next two weeks.

—Some who can't make it took the time to write notes with updates on their retirement activities. I spoke with Don White and Marlea Smith—both are very active and enjoying activities and families.

—I have received letters from Bruce Seguin (up in COLD country), from Fred Radl in New Paltz, Trudy Flax in Jersey, Marilyn Smith in Florida. All are well. I'll pass on info from the luncheon in the next ECHOES.

—I have heard great things about the Alumni gathering for all classes which was held in July. I was away and am sorry I missed it. This Saturday brings about the reunion of VC's first 11 classes (1959-1969). This is the second time that these VC "Pioneers" have held a reunion. I attended the first, but am unable to make this one. The classes of '65, '66, '67, '68, and '69 were my first at VC and hold a special place in my heart. I'll be with them in spirit.

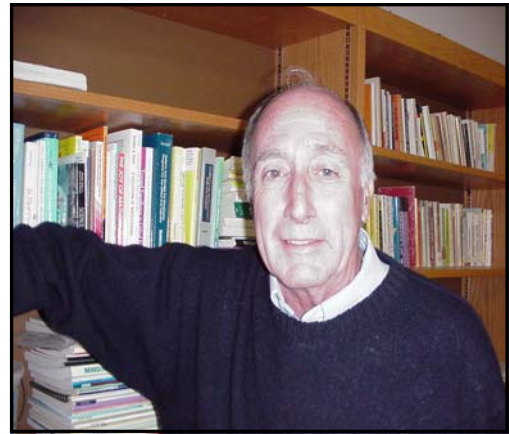
—Amen!

A happy, healthy year to all retirees and active staff. Until next time, keep pushing back the barriers of ignorance in whatever venue life

finds you —and thanks for turning to the back pages. Peace.

—Mac (AKA Kevin McFadden)

Retiree Representative and Beloved Scribe



"If kids come to us teachers from strong, healthy functioning families, it makes our job easier. If they do not come to us from strong, healthy, functioning families, it makes our job more important."

—Barbara Colorose



SAVE THE DATE

October 21; 3:30—7:30

DJ, Food & Door Prizes

Dancing if you DARE!

Location & Cost: TBA

Details to Follow via Email

Please make payments to the following by October 14

- **High School: Nancy Brother**
- **Middle School: Derek Devoe**
- **Berea: Lisa Daily**
- **East Coldenham: Laura Casey**
- **Maybrook: Jeanne Cassel**
- **Montgomery: Gail Nozell**
- **Walden: Susan Driscoll**

