

THE OUTLOOK

Newsletter of the Retiree Council 12

A NYSUT-NEA-AFT Affiliate

November, 2009

A message from Karen Wojcik-Hess, President of RC 12

Following the health care debate over the past several months, I began to wonder: given the current division between liberal and conservative, between Democrat and Republican, between Public Radio and Fox News, how can we possibly sort out what is untainted by political posturing?

The debate over health care reform is certainly contentious, but teachers in New York State have an invaluable resource for information, NYSUT. Why should NYSUT members support health care reform? The following legislative provisions are included in bills that NYSUT and AFT are seeking to make into law:

- No Medicare co-pays for preventive care treatments
- Steep discounts (up to 50%) to retirees for drug purchases within the Medicare “doughnut hole”
- An eventual phase-out of the Medicare “doughnut hole,” saving retirees \$3,600 every single year on prescription drug purchases
- More funding for primary care doctors and medical specialists who coordinate a retiree’s health care.
- Controls on escalating costs of prescription drug and health insurance premiums and co-pays.

These provisions won’t make it into law unless two things happen over which YOU have control. First and foremost, you need to be sure you’ve made your contribution to NYSUT VOTE/COPE, a voluntary contribution from union members and their families. VOTE/COPE pro-

vides the funding which enables our voice to be heard on the political front.

Second, you need to remind the national legislators who represent you in that you want health care reform and that you vote. Contact your legislators by making a phone call or sending an e-mail. Find out how on www.aft.org or www.nysut.org.

Or be brave by writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper or starting a discussion with friends. Enlighten them about the health care changes NYSUT endorses. Encourage them to also speak up as well.

Keep the wheels of progress for retirees turning by doing your share to gently push the health care debate forward. Now is the time to act. History will be made either way the health debate is resolved. Let us make this a history we’ll be proud of by working to bring health care reform to America.



President Karen Wojcik-Hess and Treasurer John Mazur conferring with Congressman Paul Tonko in Washington, DC

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Learning from Experience

by Betsy Batchelor, RC 12 Outlook Editor

The controversy surrounding an article that our editorial committee approved for publication and NYSUT denied publication led to a meeting between the *Outlook* editorial committee and Floyd Cameron, head of NYSUT Retiree Services, to discuss editorial policy.

It was clear that our concerns were important both to us and to NYSUT, since Karen Wojcik-Hess, RC 12 president; Bill Schultz, RC 12 consultant; Linda Stanzik, head of our area labor relation specialists; and Loretta Donlon, retiree representative on the NYSUT Board, were also present. The meeting was most productive and resulted in our having a much clearer understanding of NYSUT’s editorial policy and procedures.

One critical aspect of NYSUT policy is that NYSUT must be able to confirm or deny facts. Therefore, names and places must be clearly identified so that the accuracy of an account can be verified by NYSUT headquarters. Any article in which the facts cannot be checked will be denied publication; any article whose facts must be checked will be flagged, signaling that the article warrants further review. Since newsletters are on a ten-day turnaround, an article that has been flagged generally cannot be reviewed and revised in time for publication, so it is generally withdrawn.

What happened to the *Outlook* article that was denied publication? Understanding NYSUT policy and procedures as we do now, we could probably revise it for publication. But now the issue it addressed has evolved and the article is dated. In conjunction with the article’s author, we have chosen not to publish it but instead to acknowledge what we as teachers know so well: there’s always a lot to learn.

Check out our website

<http://ny.aft.org/rc12>

Web mistress — Gwynne Delong

Getting to Know Our Members—Karen Wojcik-Hess

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Knowing that all of our members cannot attend meetings, we would like to highlight a member in each issue of THE OUTLOOK. We hope you will get to know our members better through this series.

by **Ginni Mazur**, retired elementary teacher, Gloversville Enlarged School District

Karen Wojcik-Hess, the president of RC 12, has been involved with union activities since hearing Al Shanker speak. She was inspired by his knowledge and critical thinking ability. She served as vice-president for the Schenectady Federation of Teachers for 14 years. Even in retirement, Karen chose to run for president of RC 12 in hopes of welcoming the positive effects of change and making a difference in the lives of retirees while serving the membership.

Karen enjoyed her many years as an elementary teacher because she focused on exposing children to things that were not readily available in their own homes. She especially remembers the kindness of children, even those who were very young. A favorite memory is of a little girl from a very impoverished home who gave her a gift of a sugar bowl and creamer, wrapped in newspaper because she had no special paper. Karen displays these two pieces in her home to this day as a reminder of how important teachers are in the lives of children.

Retirement does not mean sitting around for Karen. She is actively involved in the lives of her four grandchildren. She continues to work, now as a realtor, and she also finds time to travel to fun places.

Setting goals is a reality for Karen. She wants to make retirement a learning experience by continuing to travel to exciting and unexplored places. Someday she hopes to teach others about the workings of the real estate world.

Clearly Karen will continue to learn and not let time pass her by, even in retirement! Thanks, Karen, for adding RC 12 to your “important” list!

Loretta Donlon: Always a Union Activist

by **Betsy Batchelor**, retired English teacher from the Greater Johnstown School District

Loretta Donlon began her union career when, as a third-year teacher, she arrived minutes late to an Onondaga County school district’s teachers’ meeting. Those few minutes gave her colleagues just enough time to choose her to be a building rep. Later she served the Syracuse Teachers’ Association as its executive vice-president, a job she held for 21 years. Now she represents retirees from Buffalo to Poughkeepsie on the NYSUT Board as the Director of ED 51. In assuming this position, she feels she became “the eyes and ears of retirees” and serves as a reminder to NYSUT that retirees are a full part of the union.

Donlon is the first person to hold her office. NYSUT began organizing retirees as far back as 1976, but it wasn’t until 2003 that retirees had voting representatives on NYSUT’s Executive Board.

Donlon describes her current work as much like teaching: working with people, talking with them, and explaining things of importance. She believes it is critically important for retirees to be educated about retiree issues and to stay active in the union. In a speech delivered at the October RC 12 general meeting, she noted that as retirees, we no longer are controlled by superintendents or principals. Our lives now are controlled by federal and state legislation which we can only affect by working together. It is

only through the combined power of NYSUT, NEA, AFT, and the AFL-CIO can we direct legislation, she said.

Donlon finds the geographic scale of her territory and the pace of change frustrating, noting that it took her whole career to see COLA enacted. But she continues to work to insure that everyone has dignity in retirement. If we give in to apathy or complacency, if as retirees we do nothing, “they will do unto us,” she said, noting that the public is turning against retired teachers, suffering from what she calls “pension envy.”

For her lifetime contributions to the union, Donlon was awarded the Sandra Feldman Award – Not For Ourselves Alone at the 2009 RA.

Volunteer Opportunities: Proctor's Theater

By **Linda Sammons**, retired Elementary teacher the Greater Johnstown School District

Would you like to see Broadway shows like *South Pacific*, *The Color Purple*, and *Wicked* for free?

My husband and I were asked a similar question soon after I retired. After our obvious answer of yes came our own question of “How?” Proctors Theater in Schenectady offers many opportunities to volunteer that are rewarded with access to see the shows for free. Currently, there are over 1,000 volunteers at Proctors working as ushers, bartenders, or staffing the Gift Centre and Candy Counter.

Although we signed up immediately, it was not until the GE and 440 Upstairs theaters opened that we were called to usher. After a training session that included a backstage tour and a fire drill (remember those?), we began ushering in the spring of 2007. We are given a chance three times a year to prioritize the shows that we would like to work—and see. The Broadway shows are mandated, but we pick the date and show time. Although we usually see about 20 shows each year, there are still shows that we wish we were assigned to work but we did not get. For those shows our names are put on substitute lists.

What are the downsides to volunteering at Proctors? Once a year, everyone must attend a preseason meeting to reorient us to the job. Ushers must report for duty up to 1½ hours before show time for a pre-show meeting. At this meeting we are given information about the show and sometimes we are asked to stuff the playbills with flyers, and every spring all ushers are required to work either a dance recital or graduation held at Proctors. All of these are small prices to pay for the quality and variety of entertainment that we enjoy during the year.



If you are interested in becoming a Proctors volunteer, go to Proctor’s website:

<http://www.proctors.org/support/volunteer>

to download an application or call Cindy La Roe, Coordinator of Volunteer Services at 382-3884.

Forming a Retiree Chapter Behind The Scenes of Johnstown Retired Teachers Association

by **Dianne Eddy**, *retired physical education teacher, Greater Johnstown School District*

In 2005, I attended a presentation by GERALYN O'Reilly, NYSUT Retiree Specialist, given to a few Cambridge Central School retired teachers who were interested in forming a retired teacher association. I adapted the information to energize several Johnstown retired teachers, starting with two newly-retired former union officers.

Initially, we three brainstormed all the possibilities that a retired organization could offer, such as social and learning activities, community service, political activism, and information. We could not form our own organization, however, without first being recognized by the in-service association.

Working with the guidance of documents provided by NYSUT, we got the Johnstown Teachers Association to officially recognize the formation of JRTA by amending its constitution. The retirees became non-dues paying and non-voting members of JTA. We specified that the reasons for establishing the retiree chapter were to maintain ties of professional unity, to promote the interests of the retirees, and to provide a forum to exchange information and express concerns.

We then expanded our base of interested members by meeting with various retirees informally. Finally, we held a coffee hour for the purpose of organizing and getting information out to our colleagues. At that meeting, interim officers were elected and a draft constitution was approved. The first official general membership meeting was held in the spring of 2007. Everything we needed to guide us through the process of developing our constitution and by-laws was provided by NYSUT. We relied heavily on both the booklets they provide and the advice of our RC12 NYSUT consultant, Bill Schultz.

The JRTA has continually grown. We publish a newsletter regularly to keep our membership informed. We hold special informative meetings, such as health insurance issues. We work with a nearby retiree chapter, the Gloversville Retired Teachers, in offering bus trips and workshops. We also have worked with our local, the JTA, providing a retirement workshop for potential retirees and participating in community service projects. To organize is simple:

- ✓ **Build a start up team**
- ✓ **Contact Bill Schultz at NYSUT for two brochures, "Recapturing At Large Members" and "Forming Retirement Chapters Handbook"**
- ✓ **Get the support of your local**
- ✓ **Form your chapter**

RC12 Supports the Efforts of Regional Food Bank of Northeastern NY

by **Linda Comstock**, *Director of Major Gifts & Special Projects for the Food Bank*

The Regional Food Bank of Northeastern NY collects large donations of food for distribution to over 1,000 member agencies, such as food pantries, soup kitchens, emergency shelters, child and senior care centers, in 23 counties of New York State. It distributes 20 million pounds of product annually. For every dollar donated, the Food Bank can distribute \$10-12 worth of food to its member agencies; 89.9% goes directly to programs and services.

The food bank operates a vegetable farm in the Town of Knox that provides thousands of pounds of locally grown nutritious produce to its member agencies.

The Backpack Program was initiated in 2007, providing backpacks of food to children in the

Schoharie Elementary School. Each Friday throughout the school year, children who receive reduced price or free breakfast and lunch throughout the school year are sent home with two days' worth of nutritious, child-friendly food for the weekend. The program was expanded for the school year 2008-2009.

The Summer Feeding Program provides children with nutritious meals and encourages physical and social development. In 2008, the Regional Food Bank became a Summer Feeding Program sponsor. The program served 12,433 meals. In 2009, the program will expand to provide meals to seven sites.

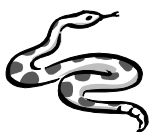
Kids Café is a soup kitchen for children. In addition to providing healthy meals in a safe atmosphere,

Kids Cafes provide athletic activities, homework assistance, and nutrition education to disadvantaged youth.

Volunteers play a vital role in the operation of the Food Bank.

Without volunteers, many food donations would sit idle on our shelves unable to be distributed, and fresh vegetables from the farm would never get picked, packed, and delivered to the Food Bank for distribution to member agencies. In 2008, the Food Bank had over 2,000 individual volunteers.

At RC 12's annual meeting on June 3rd 124 lbs of food was donated as well as \$465 in checks and cash. Our contribution will provide between \$4,650-\$5,580 worth of food to meet the needs in communities served by the Food Bank member agencies.



Taking a Trip on the Wild Side

by **Carolyn Darkangelo**, *retired science teacher, Mayfield School District*



My husband Dom and I like to travel to unusual places.

Four years ago we visited the Peruvian Amazon with Overseas Adventure Travel. We flew to Iquito from Lima and sailed up the river on a ferry and water taxis to a small tributary, the Rio Napo. The Amazon River - which holds 2/3 of the world's fresh water and whose depth fluctuates almost 50 feet seasonally - is huge, even at 2000 miles from its mouth.

This trip gave us a glimpse of the challenging lives of the people who live along the Amazon River. We stayed at riverside lodges where we slept under mosquito netting and ate by the light of kerosene lamps. In a river village, school children sang and danced for us, and we visited a local medical clinic, which was small but very important to the survival of the people of the region. A resident invited us into his home, showed us the 15-foot skin of an anaconda, and described killing the snake as it was wrapped around his son. We went piranha fishing and met with a local shaman, who shared his knowledge of spiritual healing and the curative properties of the rainforest plants. During a dance demonstration at our lodge, one of the performers wrapped a boa constrictor around my husband's neck. I was too shocked to get a picture!

The sights and sounds of the rainforest along the river are truly amazing. A canopy walkway gave us a wonderful view of the creatures in the rainforest. Throughout the trip, we had close encounters with a capybara (a large rodent), toucans, monkeys, caiman (small croc), sloths, and a wide variety of birds. One of the highlights of our journey was sighting Pink River dolphins.

An experienced local leader made this trip an exhilarating experience. I would recommend it to anyone who is willing to venture outside of his or her comfort zone.

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Health Insurance Moratorium

by **Carolyn Darkangelo**, *retired science teacher, Mayfield School District*
 This law prohibits school district employers from unilaterally diminishing the health insurance benefits of retirees. The measure prevents school districts looking to cut costs from doing so on the back of retirees. The health insurance moratorium requires that any diminution of health insurance benefits negotiated must be applied to both in-service and retiree members equally.

In order for us to receive the benefits of this legislation, we must work to insure that it is extended annually, something that would not happen without the efforts of NYSUT. You can help these efforts by contributing to the VOTE /COPE (Voice Of Teachers in Education, the Committee On Political Education) funds. Please contact the NY State Retirement System to have your contribution deducted from your pension payment if you have not already done so. It's easy, painless, and critically important. And keep in touch with your local. The changes in insurance your local negotiates with the district affect you.

NYSUT has taken a number of school districts to court for violating this legislation and won! So it is a very important safeguard for your health insurance benefit. For further information contact Bill Schultz, RC 12 NYSUT Retiree Consultant at 399-4957, AyYUH@AOL.com.

Save these Dates

March 21-22 - Committee of 100
 March 25- General Meeting at Crystal Restaurant in Amsterdam
 June 2- General Meeting at the Waters Edge Light House Scotia

**Retiree Council 12 Contribution Form
 July 1, 2009 - June 30 2010**

Name _____ County _____
 Address _____ City _____ Year Retired _____
 State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____ Email _____
 Original Union Local _____ You may share my email with AFT _____
 My Assemblyman _____ My NY State Senator _____ My US Representative _____

I would be willing to work for my fellow retirees in the area of:

_____ Legislation _____ Social Committee _____ Newsletter

\$15.00 yearly contribution requested send to John Mazur, 176 West Bush Rd. Gloversville, NY 12078
 518-773-7180 Make check payable to NYSUT Retiree Council 12

