One of the most important reasons why New York is still the best state for teachers is the New York State Teachers’ Retirement System (NYSTRS). At the November 2016 Annual Delegate Convention, NYSTRS Retirement Board President David P. Keefe said it best: “Tier 6, as bad as we think it is, the benefits are still better than the other 49 states.”

Our pension is guaranteed by the NYS Constitution Article V, §7.

State of New York Constitution Article V, §7

(Memberhip in retirement systems; benefits not to be diminished nor impaired.) §7. After July first, nineteen hundred forty, membership in any pension or retirement system of the state or of a civil division thereof shall be a contractual relationship, the benefits of which shall not be diminished or impaired.

(New. Adopted by Constitutional Convention of 1938 and approved by vote of the people November 8, 1938.)

Executive Director and Chief Investment Officer Thomas K. Lee’s business acumen and expertise—as well as those of his team—help NYSTRS remain among the best-funded public retirement systems in the nation, and it may be the best-funded teachers’ plan.

With $107.5 billion in assets at the end of its 2016 fiscal year, the Retirement System was 104.1% funded using a market value of assets and 94.2% using an actuarial value of assets. This information is among the many positive details found in NYSTRS’ recently released Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) for the Fiscal Years Ended June 30, 2016 and 2015 (NYSTRS Nov. 2016).

A recent study by the National Conference on Public Employee Retirement Systems (NCPERS), the NYSTRS, defined benefit plan is managed cost effectively, with investment fees and expenses averaging 24 cents per $100 managed, compared to 70-78 cents per $100 managed for the typical defined contribution plan, such as a 401(k) or mutual fund.

NYSTRS currently serves 426,173 active and retired members, including beneficiaries. Benefits paid to retirees in 2015 totaled approximately $6.7 billion. More than 80% of these benefits are paid to New York State residents, which significantly impact state and local economies. As benefit recipients spend their money in local communities, one person’s spending becomes another person’s income, creating a multiplier effect. According to the National Institute on Retirement Security (NIRS), expenditures stemming from New York’s state and local pensions support:

- More than 270,000 jobs that pay some $17 billion in wages and salaries;
- $7.4 billion in federal, state and local tax revenues; and,
- $44.3 billion in total economic output. (NYSTRS Nov., 2016)

Contents:
- LAP Works Together
- WCT Buddy Walk
- Around the District
- This Day in Union History
NIRS also estimates that in New York each dollar paid in pension benefits generates about $1.70 in total economic activity. As of June 30, 2016, the distribution of benefits paid to 3,072 retired members and beneficiaries of Dutchess County totaled more than $135.4 million, generating approximately $230.2 million of total economic activity in Dutchess County.

Can we fathom what the economy of our county would be without the aforementioned economic infusion from the retirees that live here?

Unfortunately, public employee pensions are facing a wide range of assaults on many fronts. These attacks are not based on facts. For the most part, these arguments are myths being used to undervalue the vital public service teachers and other public employees provide to our communities.

Public retirees should not be subjected to these affronts for collecting a pension they earned after decades of hard work and wanting to live with dignity in retirement.

A veritable threat to not only our pension, but also our constitutional rights, is the Constitutional Convention that comes up every 20 years where the voters are asked: “Shall there be a convention to revise the constitution and amend the same?”

These 12 simple words will appear on the top of the ballot on Nov. 7, 2017, and could have a catastrophic impact on every resident in the state. **We must vote no and reject the redrafting of the state's charter document.** (NYSUT 2016)

The constitution establishes the fundamental rights we enjoy as citizens of New York State and as public employees. A constitutional convention could easily assuage or eliminate these rights:

- Guaranteeing the right to a free public education (Article 11, §1)
- Prohibiting reductions in public pension benefits (Article 5, §7)
- Rights to workers’ compensation (Article 1, §18)
- Rights to be a member of a union and bargain collectively (Article 1, §17)
- Requiring the state to provide for social welfare needs (Article 27, §1)

If some of these rights are simply altered, we have the making of a right-to-work state that would take away many of the benefits that perhaps we take for granted. The false slogan known as “right to work” will push unions out of the state, drive down wages, diminish retirement benefits, levy high percentage for subpar health insurance and much more.

Presently there are 26 right-to-work states where right to work laws prohibit agreements between employers and labor unions. These laws do not aim to provide general guarantee of employment to people seeking work, but rather are a government regulation of the contractual agreements between employers and labor unions that prevents them from excluding non-union workers.

I suggest the reading of **How to Kill the Middle Class:** Strangling public-sector unions in Wisconsin has shrunk teachers’ pay and benefits. Who’s next? https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/12/unions-wisconsin/509798/

How ironic Wisconsin has become: it was the first state in 1959 to allow collective bargaining for government workers!

Another threat to our profession is the nomination of billionaire anti-public school activist Betsy DeVos as U.S. Secretary of Education. The DeVos foundation spent nearly $1.5 million to persuade the Michigan legislature to kill a bill to regulate charter schools. As a result of her efforts, 80% of the charter schools in Michigan operate for profit, without accountability. Her inexperience and support of private school vouchers will devastate public education and will result in loss of our members’ jobs.

I encourage the WCT membership to join the Network for Public Education in a national letter-writing campaign urging Senators to vote no to her confirmation. Please email the NPE statement below to your Senators and also share the information with your colleagues and on social media.

http://networkforpubliceducation.org/2016/11/tell-your-senator-to-vote-no-for-betsy-devos/

After two and a half years of dedicated service as the Commentator editor, Shanna Allen is stepping down to pursue other interests. On behalf of the WCT leadership, I would like to thank her and wish her the very best in her future endeavors.

I’m pleased to welcome back Meredith Inkeles as the returning editor of the Commentator. Her noteworthy experience and dedication will undoubtedly ensure the success of our newsletter.

At this time, on behalf of my family I would like to wish you and yours a very happy and blessed holiday season and a prosperous New Year!

In Solidarity,

Pasquale Delli Carpini

WCT President
Recently, I joined the LAP Committee, Local Action Project. After a successful WCT Food Drive for the Zion Food Pantry in Wappingers, I was asked to take the lead on the food drive for the following year. Little did I know... this automatically signed me up to be a Junior LAP Committee member. When the call came out towards the end of last year for new folks to join the original LAP members, I tentatively volunteered.

At that point, I didn’t even know what LAP meant. It was just another part of the educational alphabet we all get used to. I ran a food drive. It was a little work and required constant reminders, but it is helpful to others and rewarding to the WCT.

I was signing on to work with people I liked and admired, hoping to make connections with positive people, and bring new ideas to the group. My eyes were opened very quickly as to not only how much the WCT does for its members but what the WCT members do for the community as a whole.

Since I have joined in July, the LAP Committee has supplied all entering Kindergarteners with a new book, begun fund raising for the WCT scholarships by selling John Jay and RCK Rally Towels, and held a very successful food drive with the help of all of you at the general membership meeting.

We supplied breakfast for the membership at the meeting, as well as participated in two successful Community Days, one in Wappingers and one in East Fishkill. LAP has also accepted, sorted, labeled, boxed, and distributed over 21,000 new books, donated from the First Books Organization. These brand new books have been given to teachers, students, community members, and preschools around the county.

Upcoming events include The Buddy Walk: For Children with Down’s Syndrome, recognition of our area’s first responders, celebration of our new teachers and those who will reach 25 years of service, and of course the WCT Food Drive.

The LAP Committee does not do any of this alone. Members, retirees, students, and community members have made each of these events a success. Henry Ford stated, “Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.”

If you have a project that is special to you and need some help with organization, funding, or brainstorming, please reach out to me or any of the LAP members. The WCT would be happy to help you get your event off the ground.

• The Math Department is proud to announce the arrival of Dana Lahey's daughter Maria Grace. Maria was born this morning at 5:28 AM weighing in at 8 pounds and is 20 inches long. Mom and baby are doing well.

• Congratulations to Susanne Shand on the birth of her beautiful baby grand daughter! Emma Lily Shand was born on Friday evening and weighed 7lbs. 12oz. and is 19.5" long!

• It is our pleasure to announce Dianna and Mike Bianco gave birth to their second son on Thanksgiving, which also happened to be Dianna's birthday!!!!
WCT at the BUDDY WALK

By Diane DiChiara, Secondary-at-Large

On Sunday, October 2, the Wappingers Congress of Teachers participated in the Down Syndrome Buddy Walk at Dutchess Stadium.

The teachers, Kerrie Roger, Rena Finsmith, Kate DeGroat, Diane DiChiara and Pasquale Delli Carpini, part of the Local Action Project (LAP), were key supporters of Cara’s Crew and distributed free books from First Books to all those in attendance.

This LAP initiative was spearheaded by Tammy Gehlert, WJHS. Tammy also had LAP support for last year’s dance for the Down Syndrome Association.

If you have an event or passion that you would like assistance with please contact any LAP member.

Above: Roger, DiChiara, Finsmith, DeGroat, Delli Carpini

Left: Finsmith
**Brinckerhoff Elementary School**

My Think Pink with Brinck idea was started three years ago. There wasn't anything in particular that our school was doing to bring awareness to this disease.

We have had in the past and currently have faculty and many families of students that are affected by breast cancer. I decided to create a bulletin board of ribbons.

The ribbons have names of anyone who has been affected by breast cancer. I also created a day in our school (the date varies each year) that we have a PINK OUT and our entire school dresses in all pink.

It has been such an honor to create this bulletin board in our main lobby each year which is not only catchy and pretty but also carries such a strong message!

*By Gina Carrigan*

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**Evans Elementary School**

Evans Elementary's Fall-O-Ween fun night:

On Friday, October 28th, the Evans PTA organized Fall-O-Ween! Fall-O-Ween was an after school event held for our students and their families. Students and their families came out dressed in costumes to participate in many fun Halloween activities.

Activities included: pumpkin and cupcake decorating, story time, scavenger hunts, games and trick or treating. The event was held throughout the building and everyone left with smiles on their faces.

The event was a great success and showed how our community comes together to pull off a night that our students look forward to every year. Many special thanks to our fantastic Evans PTA, Mrs. Hernandez and the wonderful volunteers of teachers, staff, high school students and parents that help make these events so special.

We here at Evans hope everyone had a safe and enjoyable Halloween!

*By Kristen Glas*
Fishkill Elementary Goes from Pink to Red

Submitted by Kim Mahusky

Miles of Hope Day at Fishkill Elementary. Above: staff members in the Pink.

Below: the 5th and 6th graders showing their support in pink.
It has become a tradition at Fishkill Elementary School, to celebrate Red Ribbon Week during the last week of October.

We begin **Monday** morning outside on the blacktop with a Pep Rally for the whole school singing anti-drug songs and sharing anti-drug slogans. We all wear RED, of course.

**Tuesday** is "Hats On, Drugs Off", everyone wears hats.

**Wednesday** is "United We Stand in a Drug-Free Land", we wear red, white and blue.

**Thursday** is "Team Up Against Drugs", we wear clothes with a team logo.

**Friday** we finish up the week with a costume parade through the Village of Fishkill.

Costumes include VIP characters (kids dress as someone they respect), UFO characters (unbelievably funny outfits), Storybook characters, etc. Also, during the week, Buddy classes decorate bags with slogans and drug-free banners to carry in the parade.

It's a wonderful week of learning through fun activities.

Submitted by Jill Flanigan
John Jay and Mustaches for Kids Grows

By David Kedzielawa, Assistant Principal JJ

Thank you to this years Mustaches for Kids team, student body and faculty who helped support the fundraiser. Because of all of our efforts, Mustaches for Kids has raised more money than ever before.

With the recently found ING Match Program and help from local small businesses, the amount that will be donated to the Maria Ferrari Childrens Hospital is over $7600 dollars.

Help me congratulate the Mustaches for Kids team members and students that will be going to the WHUD radiothon to present this years check on behalf of John Jay. The team members that will be going to the radiothon are our most voted for team members and highest earning students.

I would also like to thank Allison Fedigan and Marisa Sarnelli for all of their help coordinating, counting and tallying this years event. Hours have been put in on top of their regular responsibilities and should be acknowledged for their above and beyond efforts. Thank you ladies for all that you do.

RCK Family Supports Sparrow’s Nest in Fight Against Cancer

RCK football held a Green Out in support of Sparrow’s Nest
By Rosellen Hardt

Wappingers Junior High School Events

Hosted by the SADD club and planned by club advisor Glen Calvin, this unique event provided dinner and a movie with friends for members of any WJH club!

More than 80 students attended on Friday, November 4 and had a great time! Pizza courtesy of the SADD club, delicious cupcakes baked by Civility Counts advisor Jesse Maietta and the Lombardo family, and a feature film were on the bill for the evening. Students from SADD, Civility Counts, First Lego League, Student Gov't, Jazz Band and Art Club attended the fun event with their friends and stayed after school until parents picked them up at 6:30 PM.

Jesse Maietta, advisor of Civility Counts, and Rosellen Hardt, co-advisor of the school’s Lego Robotics club were on hand to help Mr. Calvin and see that the event and dinner got off to a great start. Zack McDonald chaperoned the event. SADD club officers did a great job helping to plan and run the event as well.

October 27th WJH Team 7- Yellow Hosted a Blood Drive and CPR/AED training. Our students made the event a huge success!

WJH Team 7-yellow science students help researchers from Columbia University, Cornell University and the NY State DEC gather important data about the health of our Hudson River.

Above: Kelly Knight, Dana Bolduc, Melissa Wyant and Rosellen Hardt
Wappingers Junior High: I Choose Happy

By Claudia King

Last year a few teachers at WJHS were talking about how important our choices are everyday. We decided to start a movement here to CHOOSE HAPPY.

We created t-shirts with one simply yet powerful sentence...I CHOOSE HAPPY. These tshirts are a constant reminder that we all have a choose to be happy.

This movement has taken on Avery powerful role. So far, we have raised money to donate to Sparrow's Nest and Zylafone.

Students have been asking if they too could be a part of this movement. So, starting in the next few weeks, the students will be welcomed and encouraged to participate in the I CHOOSE HAPPY movement at WJHS.

It just feels good to know that every single day we all have a choice. I encourage you to take the time to think about your choice. Do you choose happy today?

because of the I CHOOSE HAPPY sales. We were able to work together as a school and raise $200.00 to donate to ZYLOFONE.

What an awesome place to work...where people are willing to help others!

RCK In-School Field Trip For Business Law

By Kathleen Conroy

Kathleen Conroy's Business Law and Sports Law students attended the In-School Field Trip to the LGI last Friday October 21,2016 to hear a presentation from Guest Speaker Aviv Segal, the Senior Assistant District Attorney for Dutchess County and former Roy C. Ketcham graduate.

Mr. Segal took questions from the students while explaining the career of a District Attorney and our court systems.
December 14th

Some 33,000 striking members of the Machinists end a 69-day walkout at Boeing after winning pay and benefit increases and protections against subcontracting some of their work overseas – 1995

December 15th

The U.S. Age Discrimination in Employment Act becomes law. It bars employment discrimination against anyone aged 40 or older – 1967

California's longest nurses' strike ended after workers at Doctors Medical Center in San Pablo and Pinole approved a new contract with Tenet Healthcare Corp., ending a 13-month walkout - 2003

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A PUBLICATION OF THE WAPPINGERS CONGRESS OF TEACHERS

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Commentator Editor: Shahna Allen  Webmaster: Nancy Beiner
Dear WCT Members/WCRT Members:

Effective January 01, 2017 the Welfare Trust Fund will no longer have a contract with Health Advocate.

The trustees have determined that the limited utilization outweighs the cost to the fund.

Thank you,
Welfare Trust Fund
Board of Trustees

THE WCT WELFARE TRUST FUND

Trustees:

Flip Gertler Chairperson
Theresa Stowel Treasurer
Erin Mulligan Secretary
Kim Mahusky Trustee
Pasquale Delli Carpini Trustee
Ronnie Dwyer WTF Administrator

LOCATION OF WCT OFFICE

280 NEW HACKENSACK RD
WAPPINGERS FALLS, NY 12590

- Located directly across from
  Dutchess County Airport
- On the right 2.5 miles from Rt 9
- On the left .25 miles from All
  Angels and 376 Intersection
- Next to Mid Hudson Podiatry

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS:

WCT OFFICE: 845-227-5065
DANIEL H. COOK 800-342-6651
MIRKIN & GORDON (LAWYERS) 914-997-1576
DAVIS VISION 800-999-5431
STACY BRAUN ASSOC (FINANCIAL) 888-949-1925

*If you would like to schedule an appointment, please call the union office at 227-5065.