Today, October 27, things aren’t much better. Joe and I volunteered at a local church where Red Cross Disaster Relief in conjunction with an Illinois Disaster Relief Team set up a “walk away hot meal” center. Joe directed traffic, and I joined the serving team - cafeteria duty! We served hot meals to thousands of people today, some of whom hadn’t eaten in two days.

Joe was teacher and student again. It took ten minutes for him to convince a young man with a two-year-old that he did not need to be a member of the church to get a meal. Joe also learned quickly how to communicate to non-English speaking families where to go and what was being served. Teachers always find a way to communicate information.

We have been out of communication with friends and family in New York for several days. Joe’s cell phone came alive briefly, and we found a message from our daughter asking if a two-foot Poughkeepsie snow storm was looking good right now.

I think we weathered our initiation to Florida quite well. We planned ahead. We’re used to that. We shared. Teachers always share supplies and ideas. The police are enforcing a 7 PM - 5 AM curfew. That’s okay, we’re used to schedules. We problem solved and helped others. We conserved our resources. We remembered years of tight budgets and limited materials. We were flexible. If one thing didn’t work, we tried something else. It was second nature to us. We made notes of our mistakes and will be better prepared next time. So many people did not take the warnings seriously and were paralyzed in the aftermath.

Hurricane season is officially over. We will repair. The city will rebuild. The power will come back on - eventually. I’ll think of my daughter shoveling snow in Connecticut in a few months. Being teachers prepared us for anything life throws our way, even a Category 3 hurricane.

Editor’s Note:

This letter was first sent to Anne Pedicone (OG) on October 27, 2005, and then passed onto the COMMENTATOR. The letter was written by candlelight!

I cannot thank Anne DeRosa enough for sharing this amazing story with the membership. We all hope she and Joe are doing well and the power is back on!
From the President’s Pad

Happy Holidays!

Dear Colleagues,

As the holidays approach, and we are in a frenzy to decorate and do last minute shopping to buy loved ones the perfect gift, let us take a moment to reflect and be thankful for the important things that truly matter in our lives and that we sometimes take for granted.

As your union president for the past year and a half, I must reflect and give thanks to all of the wonderful people who contribute in making my job a very rewarding experience.

A devoted employee who plays an integral role in our union is Linda Leito. Our administrative assistant has been working with us for twenty-one years. Her experience, good judgment, dedication, and professionalism provide the members an invaluable resource only a phone call away. I found out that she has a great sense of humor, especially in tough situations like when she had to handle over two hundred phone calls from concerned members because the District failed to “direct-deposit” on time.

I would like to extend my appreciation to our dedicated W.C.T. Executive Board members: Michael Lyons (V.P. Negotiations), Raymond Koretsky (V.P. Grievances), Michael Kennedy (V.P. External Communications), Meredith Inkeles (V.P. Internal Communications), Martha Bilisback (V.P. Educational Issues), Donna Basile (Treasurer), Christine Romano (Secretary), Bonnie Kieffer (Secondary at Large), Caroline V. Hernandez (Secondary at Large), James Molloy (Secondary at Large), John Nevel (Elementary at Large), Michelle Ross (Elementary at Large), and Theresa Stowell (Elementary at Large). Their guidance, wisdom, and support are ingredients that are necessary for the smooth running and success of a large union.

My heartfelt thanks and gratitude go to the dedicated WCT Building Representatives who on a daily basis protect and safeguard the interests and the rights of our members. Your continued hard work and involvement in resolving union issues are commendable and very much appreciated.

I would also like to thank the membership of the WCT for your support and solidarity which will be extremely necessary when we enter into negotiations in 2006.

One of the WCT goals at the beginning of my tenure was to encourage members to take a more proactive role in the organization. It is gratifying to see a great deal of participation and involvement especially from our “younger” members. I was proud of the support and great show of solidarity that we gave Debra A. Cassidy and the Wappingers Federation of Workers at their November 14th rally.

As 2005 draws to a close, we are faced with difficult challenges and decisions. We are prepared to commence negotiations with the District. We have put together a well-balanced negotiating team; the members are Michael Lyons, Michelle Ross, Martha Bilisback, Leslie Seigle, and I, with the able guidance and expertise of Steve Berman, NYSUT'S Labor Relation Specialist. It is the hope of the negotiating team to come together with the District and resolve our issues at the negotiating table. Members of the WCT will always be informed of the progress, or lack thereof.

On a lighter note, we are moving to our new office at 2537 Route 52 – Suite 15, Hopewell Junction, NY 12533. Please do not hesitate to drop by and visit us.

On behalf of myself and my family, I would like to wish you and yours the best for a very happy and healthy holiday and prosperous New Year!

In solidarity,

Pasquale Delli Carpini
Pasquale Delli Carpini
An Open Letter to the Membership

Dear Colleagues,

It is not often that I send out a letter asking for support. I have always been able to accomplish my goals in life by putting my heart and soul into whatever task I set out to accomplish. This time, however, I need your help. I am running a marathon with the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society’s Team in Training program in support of research for this disease. Cancer is scary, and let’s face it, you probably know at least one person who has been diagnosed. Believe it or not, along with running 26.2 miles in May, my fundraising goal for the society is $3,000. I know what you are thinking, “Wow, that’s a lot of money!” But trust me, every dollar counts (Yes, even one dollar!!). I figure that it is my turn to try to make a difference. With your help, I know that I can achieve this goal.

You may be asking yourself, “Why should I contribute? I hardly know this woman.” Well, I’ll tell you:

1. You can make a difference
2. Leukemia is the leading disease killer of children in the US
3. 100,000 children between the ages of 2 and 15 will be diagnosed with Leukemia this year
4. Leukemia strikes 10 times as many adults as children.

The next big question is, “How much should I contribute?” As I mentioned before, every dollar counts and your generosity will not go unnoticed.

- $26.20: That’s $1 for every mile I run!
- $52.40: Double it!
- $100: Did I mention I was running a marathon?
- $200: A girl can dream, can’t she?
- Even ten bucks will bring encouragement!

If you wish to contribute, please send checks (payable to the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society’s Team in Training) to Kinry Road Elementary School.

With Love and Many Thanks,
Crista Roa
Kinry Road Art Teacher

NYSUT’s Defensive Driving Instructor Retires

Armine Heinz, NYSUT’s Defensive Driving instructor, was presented a gift certificate by Alice Baker, WCT Membership Services, in recognition of his many years of service to the WCT and WCRT. The Defensive Driving class held in November was Armine’s last class prior to his official retirement.
Special Education Class Size Limits in Middle and Secondary Schools

Briefing Bulletin - December 2005
http://www.nysut.org/research/bulletins/20051202specialedclasssize.html

Number 05-14 November 2005
Replaces ##05-03, 03-15, #02-07, #01-11

New York State Law relating to special class sizes for students with disabilities (Section 4402.2(d) of Education Law) was amended by Part L of Chapter 57 of the Laws of 2005 as described below. Chapter 57 extended the provisions of Sections 4402.2(d) and 4402(6) until July 1, 2006.

Special Class Size Variance by Notification

The provisions of Education Law section 4402.2(d)(1) and (2) were extended until June 30, 2006. This law authorizes all schools, except the school district of the City of New York, to exceed, for the remainder of the school year, the special education class size standards established in regulation for special education classes for middle and secondary school students by no more than 20 percent, rounded up to the next whole number, upon written notice to the Commissioner and parental notification. The variance provision applies to BOCES, State-operated and State-supported schools, approved private schools and state departments or agencies operating education programs. School districts proposing to exceed the standards must begin each school year in September in compliance with the special class size regulatory requirements. The requirements for this variance by notification can be found in section 200.6 (g)(6)(i) and (ii) of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education.

Over-enrollment Special Class Size Allowance

Section 4402.6 of the Education Law was also extended until July 1, 2006 authorizing a city school district with a population of 125,000 or more inhabitants, except the City School District of New York, to establish maximum class sizes not to exceed one and two-tenths times (20 percent) the applicable maximum class size in regulation for middle and secondary schools due to the rate of attendance in such classes. This over enrollment special class size allowance is applicable only to the large city school districts of Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Yonkers. The requirements relating to this over-enrollment special class size variance can be found in Section 200.6 (g)(6)(iii) of the Regulations.

Greetings from the Welfare Trust Fund

The Trustees of the Welfare Trust Fund wish all of you a very happy Holiday Season.

We would like to take this time to remind everyone of the proper procedures for filing claims. Everyone enrolled in the Welfare Trust Fund should have a booklet that describes all the benefits in detail. Any updates should be kept in the pocket at the back of this booklet.

The Trustees would like you to review the following synopsis of two of the benefits: 1.) Dental insurance - if you refer to page 35 in the booklet, you will see a list of participating dentists. This is a list of names, addresses, phone numbers and type of practice of the dentists who are currently participating with the Welfare Trust Fund’s Dental Plan. These dentists have agreed to provide covered dental procedures and accept the Fund’s dental fee schedule as PAYMENT IN FULL FOR COVERED SERVICES AND AT NO OUT-OF-POCKET EXPENSE TO FUND MEMBERS. Eligible dependents will pay the dentist the designated DEPENDENT CO-PAY ONLY FOR COVERED SERVICES. A dentist’s participation is subject to change – therefore, when you call for your appointment, be sure to verify that the dentist is currently participating with the Wappingers Congress of Teachers Welfare Trust Fund. You do not have to use a participating dentist. If you go to a non-participating dentist, he/she will be paid according to the fee schedule and you will have to pay the

(Continued on page 5)
THE WCT OFFICE IS MOVING!

Our new address will be:
2537 Route 52
Suite 15
Hopewell Jct., NY 12533

Our phone numbers will be the same.

We will be settled in the new office by January 3rd.

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NYSTRS Delegate Reports
By: Kristin Kennedy
Fishkill Elementary

I just got back from the New York State Teachers Retirement System (NYSTRS) 85th Annual Delegates Meeting which took place from November 13-14, 2005. I’m glad to report that NYSTRS is in good shape! This was the first time I attended the meeting. While the primary purpose of the meeting was to elect a NYSUT-endorsed candidate to the NYSTRS Board, the message was loud and clear that NYSTRS is strong and well. NYSTRS has approximately 260,000 active members and 125,000 retired members.

(Continued on page 6)

Greetings from the Welfare Trust Fund
continued from page 4

difference. Our third party administrator is currently working on updating the list of participating dentists and as soon as this is available, it will be distributed to all Fund members.

2.) Optical Benefits is listed on page 49 of the booklet. Davis Vision, Inc., a leading national administrator of routine vision care program, oversees the plan. Every 12 months you and your eligible dependents are entitled to a routine eye examination, including dilation as professionally indicated, and a complete pair of eyeglasses or contact lenses (in lieu of eyeglasses). Again, there are network doctors who have been reviewed and credentialed by Davis Optical to ensure that stringent standards for quality service are maintained. You can call 1-800-999-5431 to get a list of these doctors, or go on-line, www.davisvision.com. Your social security number is your membership number. Type in your zip code and you will see a list of doctors in your area. When calling to make an appointment, you must identify yourself as a WCT Welfare Trust Fund member, and that the claim is to be submitted to Davis through the Welfare Trust Fund. This is very important!

We cannot stress the importance of reading the benefit booklet and following the procedures. The trustees are always looking to improve benefits based on detailed analyses and recommendations from the Fund’s consultants. Again, Happy Holidays and we wish you all a very Happy, Healthy New Year!

Christine Romano, Chairperson
Sean Keenan, Treasurer
Erin Mulligan, Secretary
Betty Seifert, Trustee
Pasquale Delli Carpini, Trustee

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the WCT COMMENTATOR
Wappingers Congress of Teachers
867 Route 376
Wappingers Falls, NY 12590
(845) 227-5065, 5066
FAX (845) 227-1977
e-mail: wct@frontiernet.net
web site: nysut.org/wappingers/

Editor & VP Internal Communications:
Meredith Inkeles
Proofreader:
Betsy Solomon
Distribution:
Peg Nikola & Ginny Marcus, WCRT

COMMENTATOR deadline for the next issue is the Monday after the paycheck. Send all information for the January 13th issue to WCTINK@HOTMAIL.COM, or to the WCT Office by Monday, January 2nd.
Joe McLaughlin was elected to the NYSTRS Board.

NYSTRS is a defined benefit pension, which means that the pension is guaranteed by the New York Constitution. Article 5, Section 7 of the 1937 constitution states that our retirement benefits can never be diminished. While this may be comforting, we must be vigilant for those individuals who may promote a bill or law that would call for a constitutional convention that could repeal this guarantee. The teacher members of the NYSTRS displayed solidarity in the statements that they could not support a constitutional convention that could jeopardize our pension.

The most important message I can bring back to you is that, “You are never too young to think about your retirement.” For example, apply for prior service credit, which means after 2 years of membership, members of all tiers may claim and receive credit for prior New York State public service or teaching service. Only tier 1 and 2 members may, under certain conditions, claim out-of-state service. Apply for prior service credit as soon as you can, since it will insure that records proving your prior service are available. The longer you wait, the greater the risk that these records could be lost. Don’t wait until you’re in your 50’s to claim credit for service you might have done in your 20’s.

NYSTRS is there to help you. They are individuals who are most knowledgeable. Listed below are the e-mail and telephone numbers of the NYSTRS offices.

NYSTRS 518-447-2900
www.nystrs.org

Benefits for Active Members: 1-800-348-7298
Other Services: 1-800-356-3128

General information for Active Members: Ext. 6250
Earnings after retirement: Ext. 6150

Retirement Information
Pre-retirement: Ext. 6180
Service Retirement: Ext. 6000
Legislation: Ext. 6200
Disability Retirement: Ext. 6010
Vesting: Ext. 6250
Retirement Estimates: Ext. 6020
Forms to change Name & Address: Ext. 6210

Service Crediting
Direct Deposit: Ext. 6230
Prior Service (Tiers2&3): Ext. 6030
Lost Checks: Ext. 6160
Prior Service (Tiers1 & 4): Ext. 6260
Retiree Benefits Info Line: Ext. 2980
Transfer-In & Reinstatement: Ext. 6040
To report a Retiree’s Death: Ext. 6140
Transfer-Out: Ext. 6050
Military Service: Ext. 6060
Retroactive Membership (chap.437): Ext. 6070

Member Service Credit: Ext. 6075

Other
Loans: Ext. 6080
Automated Loan Information: Ext. 2881
Membership Withdrawals: Ext. 6090
Personal & Video Consultations: Ext. 6100
In-Service Death Benefits Information: Ext. 6110
Income Tax Information: Ext. 6120
Beneficiary Information: Ext. 6130

Contact Your Teacher Member on the TRS Board of Directors:

SHEILA SALINGER
800-342-9810 or 518-213-6000

JOE McLAUGHLIN
914-835-3830

MICHAEL CORN
315-735-8421

If retired members have questions, call our colleague...

DAVID KEEFE
516-741-1241
2005-2006 Pay Dates:

December 30th
January 13th
January 27th
February 10th
February 24th
March 10th
March 24th
April 7th
April 21st
May 5th
May 19th
June 2nd
June 16th
June 23rd

WCSD Factoid:

• During the month of December, WCT members get three (3) paychecks! There will not be a Dec. 30th issue of the WCT Commentator.

Congratulations to Mid-Hudson Teacher Center Grant Winners

The following members of the WCT were recognized at the MHTC Grants Awards Dinner held on Wednesday, December 7, 2005 at The Poughkeepsie Grand.

Hannah Abrahamson
Jennifer Colucci
Mandy Dwight
Kelly Fanelli
Rachel Lafreniere
Stephanie McCaffrey
Meghan Petras
Tim Rifenburg

Jennifer Roy
Joanne Single
Allison Smith
Danielle Sundberg
Dawn Turpin-Orgetas
Mary Witkowski
Ginny Woych

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(Continued on page 8)
Thinking of Buying or Selling a Home?
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FOR RENT/SALE: Wildwood Manor, 1 bedroom, 1 bath updated unit with new kitchen cabinets and new windows, self cleaning oven, dishwasher and air conditioner, pool, tennis courts, playground, low commons charges. Call June - 227-7157.

FREE: Sharp copy machine as is - come and get it. May need work. Call the WCT office, 227-5065.

FOR SALE: 3 antique Singer Featherweight sewing machines - one black, two white. Call Marsha at 223-7238.

Remember it is prescription reimbursement time! You have up until 3 months after 2005 ends to get in your paperwork. Go to the WCT web site to download your form - http://nysut.org/wappingers/welfare/prescript.pdf

See you in 2006!