Wappingers Well Represented at 2008 RA Convention

(WCT & WFW Delegates pictured from left to right: Mike Lyons, Sue DiLullo, Jeff Savino, Pasquale Delli Carpini, Ellen Korz, Meredith Inkeles, Ray Koretsky, Diane DiChiara, Christine Romano, Martha Bilsback, Donna Basile)

RA 2008: Remember the Peace Corps?

In 1961, John F. Kennedy challenged the nation to change the world and created the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps is forty five years old and still empowering people to take charge of their own futures. The mission has been to promote world peace and friendship by

- helping the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women
- helping promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served
- helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans

Think the Peace Corps is just for those in their twenties? Not today’s Peace Corps, they are actively seeking people with a lifetime of experience. There is no age limit and medical and dental insurance is provided, as well as transportation costs, and a small living expense.

The average age of a volunteer is 28, with the oldest volunteer currently serving is age 79. An observation made by many volunteers over age 50 is that in the countries they serve, “elders are held in high esteem and their contributions are warmly embraced.” One volunteer, after a two year stint in the Ukraine, commented “In their culture, as opposed to ours, people with gray hair are seen to be wise and more respected.” Volunteers accrue vacation time and can travel home at their own expense to visit family and friends.

Retired or retiring? Looking to share your lifelong experience with others? Call the Peace Corps at 800-424-8580 or visit the Internet at www.peacecorps.gov.

For those in the classroom, visit the Peace Corps web site to download free standards-based lesson plans, implement service-learning projects, or connect the classroom with a Peace Corps volunteer serving overseas. At the site www.peacecorps.gov/wwvs an application can be downloaded to match your class with a volunteer serving in Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East, the Pacific Islands, or the Caribbean. How about inviting a Peace Corps volunteer into your classroom to share stories and expertise in culture, health, environment, business, and another language? You can also order several free publications by visiting the website.
From Ellen Korz, NYSUT Delegate

Each year that I have attended NYSUT Convention has been memorable, but this certainly held a special place for me. Being politically active during my college years at CCNY, I can remember how exhilarating the civil rights marches were. We paraded all over our campus, located in Harlem, and Columbia University. Hearing Reverend Lowery, who walked with Dr. Martin Luther King, at the convention, took me back to that time again. With his witty sense of humor, he inspired us to continue to strive for equity and “take our country back”. Though I never got close to any of the civil rights leaders in the sixties, this time I got to take a picture with the Reverend. It’s a moment I won’t forget.

At a previous convention we got to hear David Patterson, then our Lt. Governor. I was so impressed by him then that when he recently became Governor, I had no reservations about his doing the job. Again we got to hear him speak about and praise his public school education and how he believes he’s proof anyone can reach great heights going through the public education system. He is an amazing speaker and person.

Lastly, who of us will ever forget the choir from Central Islip who performed? They were so professional; you almost forgot they were students. The delegates were so impressed, when a bucket was passed for a donation for their trip abroad, $6000 was collected. They will be wonderful ambassadors for us.

The convention is always a fun time for us, but mostly it’s always a learning experience. What a feeling to be with about 3000 other educators rallying for the same ideals. Thank you all for electing me to go as your representative and be part of such excitement.

WCT & WCRT Win Journalism Awards

WCT editor of the COMMENTATOR and WCT webmaster, Meredith Inkeles, along with WCT President Pasquale Delli Carpini attended the New York Teacher Journalism reception while at the RA Convention.

Meredith won first place in the category of Best News Story, written about an Election District meeting she attended. Also, the WCT web page was honored as the “Best Web site” for Class IV unions (651-1000 members). This is the second consecutive year that the WCT web page has won this award.

Former COMMENTATOR editor and current PostScript editor, Bill Dourdis, also attended the reception. Bill was awarded the Award of Merit in the category of General Excellence. The PostScript also won first place in the categories of Best Feature Story and Best Editorial or Column for Class R-III (301-650 members).

(Pictured left to right: WCT President Pasquale Delli Carpini, NYSUT President Richard Iannuzzi, WCT editor Meredith Inkeles)
A few weeks ago I attended the NYSUT convention in New York City. Although it was not my first convention, it was one of the most enjoyable experiences. It’s not often that we are together in a room with thousands of people who respect and appreciate teachers and the teaching profession.

Being there is very energizing. We heard several excellent speakers including our new governor, David Patterson, Chuck Schumer, our Senior Senator, and Andrew Cuomo, our Attorney General. The message was clear from all of them: teachers have a tough job and we are often expected to perform miracles under the most stressful of conditions. One of the big themes throughout the convention was No Child Left Behind. Although no one suggested we get rid of the program completely, everyone agreed, including the politicians, that it has been woefully under funded and needs some tweaking.

We spoke to many, many other teachers around the state saying they have had to alter their curriculum to prepare for the tests. Most agreed that many of their fun and creative activities have been shelved in order to make sure students are ready for the high stakes tests. Lots of school districts voiced their concern over non-tested subjects being put on the back burner. Many also wanted to administer the tests later in the school year, and encourage the state to get results back in a timely manner. It doesn’t help any of us to get our students’ results in June. There’s no opportunity to adjust our teaching to help THOSE students.

One of the more entertaining moments was a visit from Tom Chapin, the folk singer. He and many of his artistic colleagues are upset at the shrinking music and art curriculums in the schools as a result of NCLB. Tom wrote a song entitled “Not on the Test”. He performed it for us to a standing ovation. You can hear this song on his website: [www.notonthetest.com](http://www.notonthetest.com). It’s well worth exploring and you will all appreciate his humor.

Another highlight was the Central Islip High School Choir. Our NYSUT President, Dick Ianuzzi, used to teach in Central Islip and a few of his former fourth grade students were in the choir. Not only were they amazing, every one of the seniors will attend college this fall. This summer they are going to Rome to perform at the Vatican. Seeing all those beautiful young adults and hearing those excellent voices just reinforces the need for arts in the schools. We all know we must have good, solid academics but it is those extra activities that make high school memorable for students.

It is always a fulfilling experience to see other teachers, learn about other districts, be informed about the “politics” of education and come away energized and ready to tackle the daily job of teaching children. At the end of the convention we have many new ideas and suggestions for the WCT and lots of good feelings about our profession. We are a part of a group of people who are dedicated, hard working and always looking for ways to improve our techniques and working conditions. We should all be very proud of the profession we have chosen.

(Folk singer, Tom Chapin singing his song “Not on the Test” to the NYSUT Delegates)

**Not On The Test**

by John Forster & Tom Chapin

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“Each box that you mark on each test that you take,

Remember your teachers, their jobs are at stake.

Your score is their score, but don’t get all stressed.

They’d never teach anything not on the test.”
April – the relentless cold is gone, the days are longer, and my calendar is marked with the words RA 2008. Dual feelings of anxiety and excitement converge as I envision writing two days of extensive lesson plans for a sub that may or may not show up and anticipation at the thought of gathering with 3,000 teachers and support personnel from across New York State. And so, before I knew it, I found myself “On the Move” to New York City and the 36th Annual Representative Assembly.

While “On the Move” was the official title for the NYSUT convention, this year, an all-encompassing philosophy of inclusion prevailed. As I review my event notes and literature, the reoccurrence of certain words and phrases - equity, advocacy, labor and social justice, more than a score, school reform, social learning, social integration, and left behind - stand out. These words gather together in a force that begs those employed in public education to remember we are part of a system that as our NYSUT president, Dick Iannuzzi, said calls for, “Our moral obligation to demand equal educational opportunities for all – I repeat – all our children.”

According to Iannuzzi, the state budget was a “victory for all” as the dollars will be distributed equitably. The money will find its way into the classroom where it is needed most. Furthermore, Attorney General Andrew Cuomo said that the budget will help reduce class size and provide extra help for students who need it. He felt that in some cases there are two different systems in public education: one for the rich districts and another for the poor districts. Social justice means education for all no matter what district a student attends. He left the delegates with words of the American dream and the dream of this state. Public school education is “the equalizer,” “It does not discriminate,” but allows everyone to be “the best…the hope.”

This message of our moral obligation was reinforced when the Albert Shanker award for Distinguished Service was presented to Reverend Joseph Lowery, well-known for his civil rights work; he was co-founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference along with Martin Luther King Jr. Lowery’s oratory prowess drew to attention the audience of almost 3,000, quite chatty, but now, so, very quiet people. Easily, many in the crowd were transported to another time and place and, even those whose adolescence and young adulthood falls between Disco Mania and Generation X, were able for a brief moment, to envision that they, too, walked in the 1960s civil rights vision. Lowery’s appeal enabled all to believe that “‘On the Move’ means higher and harder to goals of justice and equity.” He asked the crowd not to be complacent, but to renew the commitment to justice. As he discussed the upcoming presidential election, he encouraged all to put aside “restrictions of gender and race” and focus on our “interrelatedness” (RA Reporter). As Lowery’s speech came to a close and the audience approval began, it was easy to understand the meaning of “thunderous” applause.

Another advocate for equal educational opportunities, David Paterson is a graduate of Hempstead public schools. He made a repeat visit to the NYSUT convention, but this time he came dressed as governor. A teacher’s son, the governor expressed thanks to teachers “for all [they] have done for (Continued on page 5)
students” both on and “off the clock.” He thanked teachers “for [their] mission” because the “time” they took, allowed “a little kid like me to become governor.” He then recited the names of all his teachers, grade by grade. Paterson made several points that included the priority of education funding “because of the need to fulfill [student] potential.” Furthermore, he said “it’s up to the public schools to give [students] the skills and training to go out and change the world.” Paterson spoke out against NYC Chancellor Joel Klein’s attempt to change tenure law by tying standardized test results to tenure. Paterson believes that this thinking does not take into account “the background of students” (RA Reporter). As he ended his speech he told the audience that “Children cannot be standardized. Teachers cannot be homogenized.”

Leadership is extremely important in education and New York State Teacher of the Year recipient, Richard Ognibene, is a leader in both his union work and his profession. Ognibene is a physics and chemistry teacher in the Rochester school system, while his expertise with content matter is impressive; it is his leadership that makes him a top teacher. As his parents watched, Ognibene’s message was clear: teachers must speak up for disadvantaged students and new teachers to our profession. Ognibene echoed the message of the previous speakers as he called on his colleagues to fight for the children of poverty who attend high-needs school districts and whose teachers are often maligned. Furthermore, he felt that as a result of high stakes testing, new teachers in many districts are not being given the opportunity to develop their skills in the early teaching years. Therefore, teachers need to demand high quality mentoring for those just entering the field. Ognibene went on to say that, “A union is at its very best when it works for social justice.” I listened in admiration as Ognibene, an openly gay man, recounted the support he received from the union when he decided to come out to his school. In that vein, he asked his colleagues to protect gay students and teachers (RA Reporter). Ognibene’s strength is in his courage and determination as he reminded us “the essence of great leadership is speaking on behalf of others,” those who have no voice.

As Ognibene asked delegates not to sit silently, NYSUT vice-president, Maria Neira, urged us to rock the boat. She was inspiring as she called on us to use our professionalism and be part of the decision-making process that affects our workplace. We must be part of all aspects of education: professional development, mentoring programs, and peer review (RA Reporter). As it stands now, we are not included in development of current practices and yet we are held accountable when failure occurs. She called on us “to burst the bubble of meaningless over testing and advocate for true accountability.” If we are not part of the process then “the people who suffer, are the ones we serve.” Lastly, she asked us to encourage our colleagues to “be loud and clear for things we know are good practices.”

As we are “On the Move” complacency is unacceptable. We are reminded that as teachers in public education, all children are our children. Labels, such as “Regents,” “504,” “Honors,” “Special Ed,” “Free Breakfast,” “ESL,” or “AP” followed by the word student lead us to become teachers of exclusivity and teachers of subgroups. As a special education teacher, it is easy for me, too, to become entrapped in the “teacher of a subgroup” mind-set. However, equitable education is not just about my students; it is about the responsibility I have to all students and their right not to be left behind.
Delegates Support Fair Trade

The New York State Labor-Religion Coalition along with the following partners: Rural and Migrant Ministry, National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, New York State United Teachers, New York Education Association, NYS AFL-CIO, Bread and Roses Cultural Project, and Syracuse Cultural Workers, are working hard to fight against sweatshop conditions, to end child labor, and to bring humane working and living conditions to all.

The Coalition had a booth at the RA Convention and delegates were able to learn more about the cause as well as show their support by purchasing fair trade products such as chocolate or coffee. For example, the chocolate bars came from Peru where small-scale farmer co-operatives farm and harvest the cacao pods using environmentally sustainable methods.

Visit www.equalexchange.coop to purchase fair trade items and to learn more about the New York State Labor-Religion Coalition go to www.labor-religion.org.

*Facts taken from the Equal Exchange chocolate bar wrapper and from the New York State Labor-Religion Coalition web site.

Enter to win an Equal Exchange chocolate bar. Send your form in to the WCT office by May 20th to subscribe to the e-mail news updates from the WCT. Two winners will be selected at the May RA meeting. If you have already signed up for e-mail updates, you have already been entered to win.

Please return this portion of the page to the WCT Office to receive important updates from the union and to qualify to win an Equal Exchange chocolate bar.

Name: _____________________________________________________

Building: ___________________________________________________

Non-school e-mail: ___________________________________________