WCRT’s Spring Luncheon informed its 68 attendees about the importance of voting and negotiating at Arbor Ridge Caterers on May 15.

Sue Roger, WCRT President, explained WCRT’s contribution to the Ralph and Janet Capasso Scholarship Awards. Recipients receive $1,500. Awards go to children of active teachers in the WCSD.

Leslie Leventhal, WCRT 2nd VP, announced slots still open for FDR Library trip. Leslie is also in contact with Joyce Gold in NYC for a possible 9/11 museum trip by bus. Bill Green, East Fishkill Recreation Commissioner, pointed out that he also tried to organize a bus trip, but the lines at the museum were too long and waiting time made it difficult for senior citizens to stand for that long. They will research this further.

Cliff Foley, Political Action Committee Chairperson, reported the VOTE-COPE mailing went out. Over $14,000 raised last year with 50% donating. Contributions from WCRT members become more and more important.

He warned about ALEC, allowing reduction of pension payments in states. NYS isn’t safe anymore.

With five days left before the school budget and board of education elections votes on May 20, the “Fabulous Four” refused to be interviewed by the WCT and WCRT. They want to privatize some things, but would not be specific.

The WCT/WCRT endorsed Peg Kellen; retiree John Lumia; Tracy Pelton, PTA President at Fishkill Plains Elementary School; Dr. Rizvi; and Ved Shravah, current BOE President, who garners most controversial comments and opinions, but votes for teachers. Cliff noted that Ved supports the contract and can bring a few votes with him.

Pasquale Delli Carpini, WCT President, stressed that NYSUT was not the same after a “hostile takeover.” The entire executive board is all gone. He suggested the new board was controlled by UFT President Mike McGrew since a 65/35 split went to NYC, but now it’s the opposite. Of $285 million allotted, only $41,000 went to NYS and the rest to NYC. Now that UFT has a nine-year contract, they want to pull back more from the retirees. He warned to keep an eye on that importance to the rest of the state and the retirees.

Regarding opposition candidates, Pasquale met with the nine local unions in the district and asked each union who they’d vote for. He emphasized knowing the contract language because if a bid comes in to the district from a private firm against the WFW, the WCSD must take a look at that. If the outside firm gets the bid, they’ll destroy the District, which is what they want. Opposition candidates suggested that monitors had a brainless job and that they could do it.

Pasquale thanked the WCRT for its support at the February 10 rally as a turning point in negotiations. He accused the WCSD negotiating team of reporting wrong information to the BOE. “I had to convince them of the real numbers. They said the contract would cost $12 million vs. our $4.8 or $4.7 million.”

He thanked Marty Scheinman, WCT lawyer, who convinced the WCT to walk

see LUNCHEON on page 4
Dear WCRT member,

The most important thing to happen to the WCSD this year is the new contract! Congratulations to Pasquale and the negotiating team for a job well done!

Thanks to Pasquale, the two new health plans were able to retain the same level of coverage we were used to. They are called "cost sharing plans" which means we share more of the cost as in co-pays and co-insurance. We all knew this was coming as we saw health plans in the private sector escalate. I attended one of the explanation meetings, and it was very well done. Pasquale's idea of a reimbursement plan of up to $300 a year for retirees in the Welfare Trust will help defray the costs.

We had a fun luncheon at Arbor Ridge on May 15th with 63 in attendance. Most of the business meeting was Pasquale explaining the health plans.

We are looking forward to our trip on June 18th to the FDR library.

Have a great summer!

Susan Roger

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**From The President**

**SUSAN ROGER**

**WCRT**

**President**

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**Newsletter distribution process, renewals, dues info**

Some WCRT members who want to receive the *Commentator* and *PostScript* by email have not received them. Contact www.wcteachers.org or Ronnie Dwyer at the WCT office wct@frontiernet.net if the problem continues.

Retirees give the WCRT their email address. The WCT maintains the email list for publication. Prohibitive U.S. Mail costs may soon force us to cancel postal mailings, so please consider going green to save money.

The *Commentator* and *PostScript* may be viewed at www.wcteachers.org.

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**WCT & WCRT publication dates for academic year 2013-2014:**

- **Commentator and PostScript**
  - Dates: Oct. 15* Mar. 15* Nov. 15* Apr. 15* Dec. 14* May 15* Jan. 15* June 14* Feb. 15*
  - and one sometime in August*.

Several retirees have almost had their NYSUT benefits cancelled because they neglected to pay their WCT dues. Calls to the office and checks sent in a panic have mitigated the problem. Make checks payable to WCT and mail to WCT.

Renewal notices have been sent out. Dues for 2013-2014 are:
  - $20.00 Yearly;
  - $200.00 Individual Lifetime;
  - $325.00 Couples Lifetime.

Pay lifetime and alleviate the yearly task of renewing.

**WCT & WCRT Mission Statement:**

To bring WCSD retirees together for mutual assistance and socialization, and to promote the best interests of retired educators.

---

**PostScript**

**WCRT Officers and Board of Directors**

**July 1, 2013-June 30, 2015**

President........... Susan Roger 226-8285
1st. Vice-Pres. Roger Higgins 297-8757
2nd. V.P......... Leslie Leventhal 297-4430
Rec Secy......... Flo Mondanaro 454-0352
Corr Secy........ Barbara Stuck 896-9572
Treasurer.......... Tom DeRito 440-3476
Past Pres.......... Alice Baker 452-5793
WCRT Rep. to WCT Representative Council 13 Liaison....Cliff Foley

**Directors**

- Ruth Ehlers 831-6390
- Alice Heusinger 226-8769
- Jane Stockslager 297-3766
- Jack Devine 297-5032
- Margaret Nikola 221-3824

**Committee Chairpersons**

Political Action: ..................Cliff Foley
Constitution/Bylaws: ..Jane Stockslager
Historian: ..................Kathie Munsie
Gifts and Contributions:....Mary Coiteux

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**NYSUT Retiree Council 13**

**WCRT Rep.**

- Assembly…. Ellen Korz 297-9713
- Journalist Competition Winner..Pasquale DelliCarpini; (AoD=Award of Distinction; 1st= 1st Place)
- Margaret Nikola   221-3824
- Jack Devine           297-5032
- Ruth Ehlers           831-6390
- Bill Dourdis 473-1796
- Assembly…. Ellen Korz 297-9713
- WCRT Rep. to WCT Representative Council 13 Liaison....Cliff Foley

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**WCRT Mission Statement:**

To bring WCSD retirees together for mutual assistance and socialization, and to promote the best interests of retired educators.

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**Wappingers Congress of Retired Teachers Newsletter**

*Editor: Bill Dourdis wdourdis@verizon.net (845) 473-1796*


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**SAVE THESE DATES (future details coming soon)**

- June 17  Executive Board mtg. 10:00am-12:00pm
- July 17  Deadline for August, 2014 *PostScript*
- Sept. 16  Fall Luncheon, Christos, 11:30am, $23/p (see flyer, p.  )
- Oct. 9  RC#13 Regional Conference, Wiltwyck CC, Kingston
AS THE SMOKE SETTLES

CLIFF FOLEY
Political Action Chairperson

The May budget and board election is over and we’re ready for the smoke to settle in Wappingers. Of course that would be too simple.

We had a first in the district this year when two seated board members resigned shortly before the election. One had a year and the other two years left on their terms. This meant we needed to elect five members to the board. When the petitions were all filed, there were eleven citizens being placed on the ballot.

Often times people running for board seats are unqualified for the position. They know nothing about educational issues in general and the functioning of the Wappingers Central School District (WCSD) specifically.

In the past, there have been people looking to get a board seat to advance their own agenda or because they had a specific grievance. These are not the folks you really want running the WCSD.

The Wappingers Congress of Teachers (WCT), along with the other bargaining groups, has always interviewed the candidates, including the incumbents, to see what their current positions are on education and the issues vital to the school system. The WCT works with all the other bargaining units to decide who receives an endorsement. The choices are made and the campaign begins.

Of the eleven vying for seats, seven came in for interviews. The remaining four refused to meet with the union representatives so it was difficult to know what their positions were. They claimed in the media that one of their main issues was Common Core. Without knowing clearly what all their positions were, how could any voter make an informed decision?

When the ballots were tallied, incumbent John Lumia received the most votes and another three-year term. Peggy Kelland and Tracy Pelton also won seats for three years. The two-year term went to Dr. Seema Rizvi with Board President Ved Shravah winning a one-year term. These were all union-endorsed individuals. The budget and transportation bond also passed. It should be noted that the WCSD budget stayed below the state imposed 2% tax cap.

Not everyone was happy with the positive outcome of the election. One of the other candidates, Anne LaValle, said in the May 23, 2014, Poughkeepsie Journal, “It would seem that we were not running against any candidates, but against the union itself.” Had she accepted the invitation to be interviewed, maybe she would have been one of the WCT-backed individuals.

Despite the accusations that the unions had too much power, it took the WCT two years to finally settle the expired contract. There is never any guarantee that backing a candidate is going to mean the board will run efficiently.

The ideal, after the vote, would be for everyone to focus on education. There is work to be done on Common Core, the new teacher evaluation system, redistricting and the utilization of the buildings and, most of all, being sure our children get the best education possible.

We remind you that your donations to VOTE-COPE are currently being collected. Be part of making a difference in education.

Notify these groups of an address change or death of a member:

-WCRT, 2537 Route 52, Suite 15
HOPewell Jct, N.Y. 12533
(845) 227-5065
wc@frontier.net

-WCT, same as above

-NYSUT, 800-342-9810
800 Troy-Schenectady Rd.
Latham, NY 12110-2455
www.nysut.org

-NYSTRS, www.nystrs.org
800-348-7298 x 6250
10 Corporate Woods Drive
Albany, NY 12211-2395

-WCSD, Human Resources
167 Myers Corners Rd. Suite 200
Wapp. Falls, NY 12590
845-298-5000 x 115

-NYSUT Retiree Council 13 website:
http://ny.aft.org/rc13/

Directions to WCT office:
-The WCT office is in the Heritage Square complex at 2537 Route 52 in Hopewell Junction.
-Heritage Square is a short distance east of the intersection of Routes 376 and 52 and west of the Taconic State Parkway.
-Enter the parking lot and make the second right turn into parking.
-Enter main entrance of building.
-The sign over the main entrance is “Prudential”.
-Take stairs or elevator to 2nd floor.
-Go right, all the way to the end.
-“Wappingers Congress of Teachers” sign posted on Suite 15 door.

-WCSD Board of Ed. e-mail address:
WCSD.Board@WappingersSchools.org

NOTE:
If you are aware of a member’s illness, or the need to send a condolence card, please contact Ruth Ehlers at 831-6390.

Send your comments to
cgfoley@optonline.net
out with a Memorandum of Agreement despite the one-step cut and no raise. He used comparisons to other districts, contracts, and law firms representing them.

Health insurance will be kept the same by getting the same plan with a little increase on the consortium plan. Wappingers has had the Alternative PPO for 15 years with the same co-pays. We are at a crossroads of what we can afford and what we want while keeping portability, depth, level of care, and a little more. Co-pays will go from $15 to $30. Actives will make more money, and retirees don’t give up any benefits.

Pasquale met with the WCRT executive board on May 22 to explain the proposed health insurance plan available to them during the open enrollment period.

Sue Blodgett read a postcard from her daughter Katie, now a Guidance Counselor at Valley Central, written when she was in fourth grade. The assignment was, “What you don’t want to do for a living.” “I don’t want to be a teacher because they work so hard.”

Financial Report available

As a service to any interested WCRT member, our union’s financial report is always available upon request.

Address your questions or concerns to tderito@optonline.net and we’ll make arrangements to satisfy your numerical curiosity.

Enjoy some of what NYC has to offer.
Sign up to receive the monthly Plum Benefits Guide.
Send an e-mail to jtkorz@optonline.net to be added to our list.

Ellen Korz
E-mail subscribers sign up slowly

WCRT officers want to cut that cost to half the current number. Officers think 20%-25% is a reasonable goal to strive for since this initiative started in October 2013. Members wishing to go green can e-mail your name, address, city, state, zip, phone number, and e-mail address to wdourdis@verizon.net or the WCRT office at (845) 227-5065.

Sign up for WCRT’s bi-monthly e-mail PostScript newsletter, produced in color—you’ll do yourself and WCRT a big favor. It saves us money and time—two critical factors for non-profit organizations.

Members may opt to receive the newsletter in color by e-mail or black and white by “snail mail.” Fonts and pictures can be enlarged on your computer as a PDF. WCRT newsletters have become magazine quality!

Newsletters arrive sooner by e-mail than postal mail. More importantly, the WCRT can have immediate contact with the membership via e-mail at no cost.

Your reply is appreciated and saves the WCRT money in mailings. It saves on printing, folding, paper, envelopes, mailing labels, and stamps. The volunteer crew would also thank you for cutting down on their time spent in preparation for the distribution process.

Look at our new website: www.wcteachers.org. Support the website and the WCRT by attending luncheons and tours, maintaining your membership, contributing to VOTE-COPE, and communicating with officers.

Editor’s note: Over 40 words were highlighted in four different colors. E-mail readers saw it. Hard copy readers had to be told. They only saw black and white. Subscribe by e-mail to enjoy the benefits listed above. (Not to mention 39 full-color pictures and the graphic in this issue!)

Hey, sports fans

Hi Bill,

Back in New York. Hope all is well with you and your family.

No pickleball at this point. They are fixing our courts. I will let you know when they are ready.

Hope to see you soon.

Tom Knickerbocker
In Memoriam

HOLY TRINITY PAROCHIAL SCHOOL IN Poughkeepsie, from 1971-1976, and then became a Library Media Specialist for the Wappingers Central School District until her retirement in 1996. Jodie’s many advocacy and volunteer activities included NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness), the Frances Loeb Art Gallery at Vassar College, Literacy Volunteers, the Commission on the Quality of Care for the Mentally Disabled, and Rehabilitation Support Services.

On April 7, 1957 Judie married Isaac D. Rubin in Brooklyn. Dr. Rubin survives in New Paltz.

In addition to her husband, Judie is survived by her sister Frieda Feldman and did a lot of sewing which she enjoyed doing for her family.

She was survived by her husband – John E. and children Christopher Ericson and his wife Bonnie and Karin Ericson and Companion Erik Harkins. Grandchildren Zachary, Tyler and Eliza Ericson.

Funeral services were held 11:00am Friday May 2, 2014 at the Jay Gould Memorial Reformed Church, Roxbury, N.Y. Rev. Richard A. Dykstra, officiated. Calling hours were held at the Miller Funeral Home, Roxbury on Thursday May 1, 2014 from 6:00 to 8:00pm.

Donations in memory of Nancy may be made to the Roxbury Fire Dept. Ambulance Fund.

Nancy Jean Ericson


Nancy was born May 4, 1942 at Port Chester, New York, the daughter of Patrick and Katherine Horbolic Nethercott. She married John E, Ericson on April 15, 1968 at Port Chester.

Nancy taught Social Studies and History in the Wappingers Falls School District at the VanWyck Middle School and the John Jay High School retiring in 1997. Nancy and John were parttime area residents from 1980 until both retired and moved to the Town of Roxbury in 1999.

She was a very talented quilter and a member of Sunbonnet Quilters Club and Catskill Mt. Quilters. Nancy was honored being selected to the Catskill Hall of Fame Quilters. She taught classes in making caps for premature babies. She made many quilts for family and friends to enjoy.

Nancy was also an excellent baker and had a passion for education and lifelong learning. She was a very active volunteer in the community. She was a member of Phi Beta Kappa. Judie went on to receive her Master’s Degree in Library Science at State University of NY at Albany.

She began her career as a librarian at Mt. Quilters. Nancy was also an excellent baker and made many quilts for family and friends to enjoy.

In addition to her husband, Judie is survived by her sister Frieda Feldman and did a lot of sewing which she enjoyed doing for her family.

She was survived by her husband – John E. and children Christopher Ericson and his wife Bonnie and Karin Ericson and Companion Erik Harkins. Grandchildren Zachary, Tyler and Eliza Ericson.

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Donations in memory of Nancy may be made to the Roxbury Fire Dept. Ambulance Fund.

John C. Messina

MARLBORO,NY-John Charles Messina, Sr., age 71, of Marlboro, NY passed away peacefully on May 6, 2014, in Devon, Pennsylvania surrounded by his loving family. He was the husband of Melanie Mower, his wife of 45 years.

Son of the late Charles and Rose Messina, John was born in Astoria, NY. He spent childhood summers and holidays creating cherished memories with his aunts, uncles, and cousins at the Vasilie Farm in Marlboro, NY Marlboro became home to him and his family in 1953. He graduated from Marlboro High School in 1960 and received a degree in education from SUNY Oswego and a master’s degree in guidance from SUNY Albany.

He taught mechanical & architectural drawing for 35 years, 32 at John Jay High School in Wappingers Falls, NY. [John retired in 1998.]

His passion for education extended beyond the classroom. John served as class advisor for many years but his favorite role was yearbook advisor. He guided numerous students toward successful academic and professional careers, often resulting in long-lasting friendships. John hardly went anywhere without bumping into a former student whom he affected.

John was an active member of the Marlboro community his entire adult life. As a parishioner of St. Mary’s Church, he could often be found at the annual bazaar and various church dinners pitching in to make events successful. He was a founding member of the Town of Marlboro Ambulance Corp, a member of the Lions Club, and served as a town Councilman.

Family was most important to him. After retirement, John and his wife spent most weekends traveling between Boston and Baltimore visiting their three children and seven grandchildren. John affectionately known as Grampy, made his grandchildren’s lives and activities his #1 hobby.

John is survived by his loving wife, Melanie Mower Messina, son John and wife Jennifer Messina of Downingtown, PA, his daughter Johanna and husband Paul Messina of Marshfield, MA, daughter Jessica and her husband Michael Hiebler of Lutherville, MD and brother Carmen and wife Gail Messina of Marlboro, NY. He is also survived by his seven grandchildren:

Matthew Messina (14), Jonah Messina (12), Joshua Power (10), Peyton Messina (10), Elizabeth Power (7), Jack Hiebler (7), and Samantha Hiebler (4) and numerous family and friends.

Visitation was Sunday, May 11, 2014 from 4pm-8pm at The DiDonato Funeral Home, 1290 Route 9W, Marlboro, NY. A funeral mass took place on Monday, May 12, 2014 at 10:30am at St. Mary’s Roman Catholic Church, 1209 Route 9W, Marlboro, NY.

Interment followed at Cedar Hill Cemetery, Middle Hope, NY In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to FARE (Food Allergy Research & Education) at www.foodallergy.org Funeral arrangements were entrusted to The DiDonato Funeral Service, Inc., (845)236-4300, www.didonatofuneralservice.com

Judith G. Rubin

NEW PALTZ - Judith G. Rubin, a longtime resident of Wappingers Falls, died Saturday, May 3, 2014 in New Paltz.

Born September 5, 1937 in Brooklyn, she was the daughter of the late Max and Goldie Krasner Goldseger.

She was the daughter of the late Max and Goldie Krasner Goldseger. She was the daughter of the late Max and Goldie Krasner Goldseger.

Judith received her Bachelor’s Degree in English from Brooklyn College, and was a member of Phi Beta Kappa. She went on to receive her Master’s Degree in Library Science at State University of NY at Albany.

She began her career as a librarian at
The WCT and WCRT awarded three $1500 scholarships to children of active teachers at a reception in the John Jay High School library on May 28.

Laura Dixon is the daughter of Diane Dixon, a 2nd Grade teacher at Gayhead Elementary. Laura ranks 10th out of 550 at JJHS. Her in-school activities include National, Math, and Spanish Honor Societies, and Varsity Cheerleading. She volunteers at Special Olympics because of her empathetic nature, and Breast Cancer and Ovarian Cancer Societies because of her compassion and understanding. Laura will attend Northeastern University, Boston, MA to become an orthodontist.

Laura feels the committee chose her as a recipient because of, “my dedication to both academics and community service.”

Dignitaries included Ralph Capasso, former WCT President; Dr. Dwight Bonk, JJHS Principal; and Susan Roger, WCRT President.

Maria Delli Carpini served as Master of Ceremonies. She explained the scholarship awards named after Ralph, “a benefactor and union activist.” Ralph served 17 years as WCT President and started the WCT.

“Ralph’s a gentleman and a scholar who made a difference in the lives of thousands of teachers, kids, and parents. We thank him and remember him for the current benefits and working conditions. He was Teacher of the Year and Outstanding Educator. Providing students with a quality education has always been his top priority.”

During Mr. Capasso’s remarks to the recipients, he emphasized, “Your wonderful qualities are noteworthy…Congratulations for all your accomplishments…Always remember your fine and effective teachers.” He also thanked the parents for such wonderful students.

Brittany Keenan, ranked 30 out of 180 students at Millbrook High School, will attend University of Delaware to focus on Pre-Veterinary and minor in Wildlife so she can work with tigers. Her GPA is 92.3. Her father, Sean Keenan, teaches 6th Grade ELA/Math at Van Wyck Junior High.

After-school activities include National Honor Society, Athletes Helping Athletes, Environmental Club, Varsity Volleyball and Varsity Basketball. Out-of-school organizations she frequents are travel basketball, and her internship at the Center for Veterinary Care.

Brittany senses the committee chose her, “for my strong passion to work with animals and my desire to protect and help them in any way I can.”

Shawn Stoliker was Brittany’s most influential teacher because, “he always pushed me to accomplish my dreams and be who I am.”

Selection committee, from left, Maria Delli Carpini, Eileen Clancy, and Anchala Sobrin whose children won last year.

Devon Stuart is the daughter of Caryn Stuart, who teaches Special Education at John Jay. Devon is Class President of 386 Minisink Valley High School students and boasts a 92 GPA.

She will attend Ithaca College to major in Physical Therapy and minor in Gerontology. Devon balances studies with many volunteer activities and clubs. In school, it’s National Honor Society, Youth in Government, National Technical Honors Society, Student Council, and Student Government. When not in school, she volunteers at Fed by Grace Food Pantry and as a Physical Therapy volunteer.

“Mrs. Weilacher was my trigonometry teacher who showed me the value of diligence and dedicated teachers.”

The committee was impressed by her scholarship, being a Class Vice President then Class President during her junior and senior years. She also participated in Key Club and National Honor Society. Also she volunteers at New Visions Medical Program at BOCES and displays ambition, high expectations, and passion about learning.

“I believe the committee chose me because of my dedication to my studies and leadership abilities. Whatever the reason, I am so grateful for this opportunity.”
LATHAM, NY—New York State United Teachers hosted its annual Communications Competition Awards Luncheon and Conference on Saturday, May 10 at NYSUT headquarters.

Bill Dourdis, WCRT PostScript editor, attended the event and received three Awards of Distinction and two first-place plaques out of seven categories entered.

All entries were judged in the state for in-service and retiree publications. The expanded competition covered entries produced between September 1, 2012 and December 31, 2013.

During his eight-year tenure as Editor of the WCT Commentator, Dourdis won six NYSUT awards and five AFT awards for General Excellence, Best News Story, Best Editorial or Column, and Best Feature.

As WCRT PostScript Editor, Dourdis has won 28 awards in nine years. (20 firsts and 8 seconds.)

An outside panel of professional journalists judged the competition according to their professional standards. Judges read 196 total retiree entries and gave 36 awards in 10 categories.

Mary Fran Gleason, NYSUT United Editor-in-Chief, thanked her crew and staff and especially the local editors for all the passion they put into their communications efforts because their work is important to NYSUT’s effort to keep members informed and to celebrate their successes.

### 2014 Category Place Title/Headline Winner

| Best Article About a Social Justice Issue | First | Connolly handles Yellowstone, cancer | Brian Connolly |
| Best Photo | *AOD | Connolly writes, donates books to schools | Brian Connolly |
| Best Column/Blog by a Leader | First | Concern over health insurance | Cliff Foley |
| Best Creative Writing | *AOD | The girls in Miss Corey’s class | Jack Devine |
| Catchiest Headline/Title | *AOD | Saranne Rap—A transparent view of issues | Saranne Ratner |

*AOD = Award of Distinction

**Messner encourages editors**

Martin Messner, newly elected NYSUT Secretary-Treasurer and AFT 2012 Every Day Hero, offered his comments to award-winning editors. Excerpts follow:

“This goes out to all editors and officers. It’s good to attend.

NYSUT is on the ropes or in trouble. Union density is shrinking. We need to turn it around by good acts of kindness and our work in local communities—not in isolation. Your ability to communicate that story—our story—to members and whole communities is fantastic.

My own communications website/webpage has tons of information on it. I tried to maintain it weekly, then monthly, then had to delegate it to a member because of the sheer volume of stories told, updates, etc. It’s staggering. I couldn’t keep up. Your work as disseminators and communicators is much appreciated.

Anything we, the officers, can do for you from headquarters, we’re available 24/7. Contact us with good ideas, ways for us to communicate better, and ways to assist in your communications.”

"Nothing can dim the light which shines from within.”

- Maya Angelou 1928 – 2014
News since last issue

Source: Poughkeepsie Journal
Poor Elijah’s almanac: Reclaiming the table

Source: This article appeared in the Eagle Times on May 13, 2014. The Eagle Times is a daily newspaper based in Claremont, NH, serving the twin states of New Hampshire and Vermont. Bob Ruopp, WCRT Class of 1998 who lives in Sunapee, NH submitted this article at the WCRT Spring Luncheon on May 15.

It’s spring and time for teachers to tally how many days of actual class remain for actual teaching.
The formula is simple. Count the number of weekdays. Then subtract all the anti-tobacco and anti-bullying assemblies, spring concerts, rehearsals, field days, class trips, grant-funded traveling performers, and the countless other organizations that just need an hour before June.

Next, subtract the eons lost to standardized testing. This includes “pilot testing,” which is when assessment companies use your children as guinea pigs to road test the new assessments they’ll be selling your school next year at what ought to be embarrassingly high prices, but that don’t seem to embarrass either the assessment contractors or the officials who pay for tests that historically generate reams of expensive, useless numbers.

You may have noticed your school and state keep switching to a new expensive standardized test every few years. That’s not because the old expensive tests were so good.

We can’t let the 2013-2014 school year draw to a close without celebrating that all American students are now academically “proficient.” This miracle was wrought by No Child Left Behind, which in 2001 “ensured” that within 12 years “all students” in every ability, ethnic, and income group would “meet or exceed” their state’s academic standards.

No, you didn’t miss the miracle. It predictably didn’t happen. Of course, now that NCLB is out of fashion, every policymaker and expert who sang its praises in 2001 is singing a different tune and innocently searching the horizon for the silly people who thought NCLB was a good idea in the first place.

Most education gurus now acknowledge that anyone with a brain should have realized that “universal proficiency” is an “unrealistic” goal. Since having some sort of brain isn’t a high threshold, I don’t feel immodest recalling that in 2001 I likened NCLB’s guarantee that all my students would succeed to Leah’s demand in Genesis that her husband Jacob make her pregnant. Jacob, who was already doing his part, replied simply, “Am I in the place of God?”

The day your Congressman is willing to guarantee the financial, marital, genetic, and behavioral success of all his district’s constituents, I’ll make a similar promise for all my students.

Don’t imagine that education’s leaders possess some sudden sanity. Yes, most no longer chorus NCLB’s promise of academic proficiency for all students in every ability, ethnic, and income group. Instead, they now trumpet the Common Core’s promise that all students in every ability, ethnic, and income group will graduate “college and career ready.”

The Common Core, which claims to be a “grass roots” initiative even though most Americans don’t know what it is and had nothing whatever to do with designing or adopting it in their states and schools, is already crumbling and losing support before it’s even fully implemented. Now would be the time to reject it, before another generation of students gets to serve as lab rats in yet another ill-conceived education experiment.

Unfortunately, the captains of education don’t hold regular people and teachers in high regard. One typical expert, writing in the journal Education Leadership, explains how teachers must “earn their seat” at the education reform “table.” This leader’s biography describes him as “a former high school social studies teacher,” which he was for two entire years back in 1990. He then attended graduate school and became an expert. Since then he’s been writing education reform books, sitting on education expert panels, and serving part time as an education professor.

And I need to earn my place at the table?

Teachers aren’t the only targets of disdain. According to a Gallup/Education Week survey, “most of the nation’s superintendents” disapprove of the job school boards are doing. Only 2 percent “strongly agree” that schools “are effectively governed” by citizen boards. The superintendents complain that “no one is really reviewing boards.” Someone should explain to these education leaders that since almost all school boards are elected by parents and other voters, school board membership is already reviewed on a regular basis by the people whose schools they actually are.

At the top of the heap sits Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. Mr. Duncan, a former sociology major, gained his education expertise watching his mother tutor inner city children, running a private education foundation, and playing Australian professional basketball. Based on this experience, he superintended Chicago’s schools, following which he became the nation’s chief education officer.

The secretary recently labeled his critics “armchair pundits.” Speaking from his Washington armchair, he condemns those critics for “living inside the Washington bubble” and for being “so supremely confident in their perspective that they have simply stopped listening to people with a different viewpoint.” He also denounces those who oppose him for “ignoring plain evidence and deliberately disturbing” other people’s positions.

This is the education leader who recently blasted teachers and administrators as a “school-to-prison pipeline” for suspending disruptive students. This is the non-distorter who blamed opposition to the Common Core on “white, suburban moms” who “all of a sudden” discover “their child isn’t as brilliant as they thought they were and their school isn’t quite as good as they thought they were.”

These leaders are the people sitting at the table.

It’s time to remind them whose table it is.

Peter Berger teaches English at Weathersfield School. Poor Elijah would be pleased to answer letters addressed to him in care of the editor. [Poor Elijah is an Education feature published every other week.]
Tuesday, Sept. 16, 2014    11:30 a.m.

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