

ROBS Newsletters



NUMBER 31

RETIREES OF BRENTWOOD SCHOOLS

JULY 1999

YOU NEVER KNOW!

Just as the moratorium on reducing retiree health benefits was extended for another year by the New York State Legislature and the governor, NYSUT announced that a coalition of all AFL-CIO public employees unions are supporting the same COLA bill. A COLA bill has been introduced in each of the legislative branches: A-8516 and S-5703.

The bill amends the education law, the retirement and social security law and the administrative code of the city of N.Y. to provide retirees of all public retirement systems with a permanent, automatic and reliable pension COLA. It will be calculated annually based on the increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI).*

It applies to all retired public employees (disability and service) who are 55 or more, as well as to recipients of an accidental death benefit. The increase will be 50% of the annual increase in the CPI and will be applied to the first \$25,000 of the retired members maximum annual allowance including Court Supplementation. All current Supplemental benefits will continue to be paid.

The COLA will be funded through the Normal Employer Contribution Rate as part of the annual actuarial valuation of retirement system assets and liabilities. It will be paid monthly, beginning with a payment for the month of July 2000.

The bill provides a one-time, permanent supplemental adjustment for older retirees equal to 50% of the CPI from the member's date of retirement through 1997 in order to mitigate current inequities resulting

from past adjustments.

After 20 years, the percentage of CPI will increase by 5% each year to 100% at 30 or more years.

The information presented here was received from NYSUT Retiree Office Director, Pat Longo, on June 6th. He had mentioned the fact that the coalition had agreed on the provisions when he spoke at the RC 21 luncheon at the Watermill on May 11th. The bills were filed after that date.

Though retirees have been lobbying NYSUT to push for a COLA bill for years, this is the first time there has been broad unified support for one bill.

* The CPI is a measure of inflation. It does not capture changes in prices across the entire country. Rather, it measures average changes in prices paid by consumers for a fixed "basket" of approximately 95,000 goods and services at 21,000 locations in 85 urban areas. The Bureau of Labor Statistics releases the CPI each month, and also releases CPI's for four national regions: Northwest, Midwest, South and West. CPI's for local areas examined by the BLS are published every other month.

ROBS LUNCHEON

Our get ready for summer luncheon was held again at the Bonwit in Commack on June 2nd. Sixty two ROBS members and guests enjoyed the upstairs room for good food and good company.

Appreciation gifts for their work over the years for teachers and retirees as members of the Brentwood School Board were presented to Anthony Felicio and Ruth Rosenthal.

Thanks to the committee of Ruth, Harriet and Lilian...again a job beautifully done!



THE TIME HAS COME THE WALRUS SAID...!



Yes, at long last the time has come for us to talk COLA. Every year we have talked about the need for a Cost of Living Increase to our pensions but every year we've been told the time is not right, supplementation stands a better chance, it's too costly, and on and on. But this year the push is really on. **NYSUT's COLA bill, Assembly 8516 and Senate 5703**, has been introduced in both houses. (See 1st page article). It is designed to be a "permanent, automatic and reliable pension" for all public employee retirees, with calculations based on the Consumer Price Index. Through the AFL-CIO, all public employee unions are putting their efforts behind this NYSUT bill. COLA could become a reality. Now it's up to you to contact your legislators and do your own lobbying. Your legislators must be made aware of the importance of COLA to you and your family, and you're the only one who can do that.

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You can fax a message directly through NYSUT's website: www.nysut.org

Call, write or visit - but make sure you do something to ensure your own future.

In Unity, Dot Zuckerman

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For Your Information: Since 1997 you have been allowed to have withholding tax taken from Social Security payments. Contact IRS and ask for Form W-4V.

BUY "Fund the Cure" stamps to fund breast cancer research. They cost \$.40 instead of \$.33, but the extra goes to research to wipe out a disease that turns the lives of families upside down. They've also just released a stamp to help fund research on prostate cancer. Buy a book for \$8.00 today and help.



STATE OF THE UNION: 1999

Sixty folks crowded into the Islip Public Library on May 5th to hear BTA president, Joe Hogan, give his annual observations on what is happening in the place we used to work. The contract is in effect until 2001 with no adverse changes. Four Brentwood teachers who returned to teaching after leaving to raise children were returned to Tier I as a result of the recent court case. We'll probably hear more in this vein for those in II, III and IV. There are more than 20 positions to be filled for next year, and the new standards will certainly mean that there will be more need for remediation. This year's June Regents will be 3 to 6 hours for everyone! How this will impact on drop-out rates remains to be seen. There is a 40% mobility rate in Brentwood, and in 2 years, at the rate the student population is growing, it will again be the largest district in the state outside of NYC.

More classrooms will be needed. At Oak Park ESL is housed in a closet. With smaller classes, extra space is needed. In the Kindergarten there is an exciting program beginning next year. There will be three classes of 12 Spanish speaking and 12 English speaking children taught by two teachers for each class through the third grade. The goal of this federally funded program is that these children will become bilingual, and help knit the community together. The program will also involve 100 English speaking parents and 100 Spanish speaking parents as volunteers.

In the 9th grade center 12 self contained Special Ed students will be taught under an Inclusion system involving a Special Ed teacher and the regular academic subject teachers. This may mean the end of Special Ed as we have known it in Brentwood. As academic subjects are pushed with the raising of standards, art and music programs may suffer. Hogan added, "It's scary to see what's coming."

Charter Schools are dividing the union. Special groups can set up their own schools, funded by N.Y. State directly. That money will come from the local school districts. In Rochester, 30% of students will be in Charter Schools started by the union. Hogan feels the Charter Schools will siphon off 10% of the top students in poorer districts, of which Brentwood is one. (Recent NEWSDAY story about the Roosevelt Charter included Brentwood students as enrollees). Teachers in these schools will not be covered by the union and the curriculum will not be monitored by the state, though the students will have to pass Regents exams. The top 10% will pass the Regents with no effort.

Teachers in Charter's will not be covered by the Retirement system. It is vital that new teachers (probably in teaching programs) need indoctrination by senior teachers. It all seems to be part of the Governor's game: Change New York!

Hogan urged retirees to let the legislature know how we feel. "You're more active than teachers currently in service," he said. He also urged us to "make sure Guiliani doesn't get elected to the U.S. Senate so we won't have to worry about how to get him out" as we did with D'Amato.

After the Littleton, CO shootings, there was some work done on violence in the high school, but little in the elementary schools. None of it was enough. One month of awareness and then nothing. What is needed is alternative education, and more guidance counselors in the elementary schools because the influx of children from the city to the Brentwood schools brings with it gang attitudes.

Today, 40% of young women in college go into teaching. Twenty years ago it was 95%. Only 35% of men go into teaching now compared to 90% on the GI Bill. There are more opportunities elsewhere. This matters in districts like Brentwood where the major problem is that there are fewer minority teachers available. In a changing Long Island, this issue must be addressed seriously as the fundamental problem it is.





PROJECT HOPE UPDATE

The Community Liaison Committee wants to thank all who supported and/or participated in the volunteer/mentoring program this year. Chairperson, Frank Spencer, reported that "we had a very good year. Some folks were not able to participate on a regular basis, but did some pinch hitting when they could."

The committee thanks them and the following "full timers: Tom & Barbara O'Connor at South West, Shirley Walker-Lloyd at Pine Park, Ruth McCalla at North East, Vern Spencer at Hemlock Pines, Frank Spencer at South West, and Beverly Fisher at Suburban Children, Inc..

The Community Liaison Committee, consisting of: Frank Spencer, Ruth McCalla, Harriet Pepine, Vern Spencer and Chris Veech announce that the program will start again in October for the '99-'00 school year, and urge early sign ups.

Project Hope also wishes to thank retiree Marion Gray from Montpelier, Vermont for the very sizable, gracious donation to the work of this committee.



UNION MUSINGS

by Jack Zuckerman

It seems strange that July 4th hasn't appeared on my calendar yet and I am already thinking about Labor Day. What triggered this line of thought was Memorial Day. Now before you think I have lost all my marbles, bear with me a minute.

Who are we memorializing on Memorial Day? Why are we memorializing them? Ask the people you know. I'll bet two out of three won't know!

That brings me to Labor Day. Why do we have a holiday called Labor Day? Everyone knows the answer: to honor Labor. But tell me this. Who is this group called Labor?"

"Why any fool knows the answer. Labor is us, the people who work in the United States."

Well, true enough. But how should we honor ourselves as Labor or, if you like, as workers? Just how do you, your friends, your family, honor yourselves on Labor Day?

On Labor Day, I see people running to stores to take advantage of the End of Summer sales; "all prices slashed." Does this make us feel good to be American workers? I'll bet it doesn't so much for the salesperson who is there to take your money on Labor Day. My TV shows pictures of long lines of cars

on the super highways crawling bumper to bumper towards somewhere out of the picture. Someone is screaming at someone else; radiators are overheating. I am sure the last thing they are thinking of is the American worker.

The whole idea originally was to give us a day off so we could be with our families and enjoy the togetherness that is so hard so come by when families work. It was one of the props of family life that we seem to have lost. It was so important that the U.S. government made Labor Day a federal holiday. The holiday didn't come easily. Men and women fought hard to give working people a day they could call their own.

Maybe we ought to change the name of the holiday to make it more appropriate. How about Money Day! Now that's something everyone will be able to relate to.

Y2K IS HERE!

We're leaving for "The Magic of Italy" on September 7, 2000! To insure that date with Go Ahead Vacations, reservations must be placed immediately! \$150 will hold your place. Call Dot Zuckerman at 516-567-3866.

NEWS NOTES

Dean DePoy reports that he's having so much fun working part time for Disney Cruise Lines as a Resort Cruise Representative. His place of work is in the Polynesian Village Resort just outside the Magic Kingdom! "Being at Disney World, I never have to grow up. Some would say I never did." (His new e-mail is: Deanrdepoy@aol.com) "Enjoy reading On The Road Again column. Rich Edwards has a future as the next Charles Kuralt/Harry Smith on CBS!" (Ed.s note: several retirees have told me the same thing!)

Anthony LaScala (9th grade center) and wife, Carol, have a condo in west Palm Beach, Fla. for rent from November to April with the time negotiable. Call 589-8299.

The book with the "longest title in the world" was recently published by our own **Herb Laub**. Congratulations. His recent author's brunch had a number of ROBS members in attendance.

David Brown (HS music) is still coaching the L.I. Fencing Team with the Empire State Games. The games are July 21-24 and he will be competing on the 24th in the Master's. He and his wife are traveling to California in June, and in August they will travel to London and Scotland to celebrate their 40th anniversary. His classical music record collection now numbers 4000 items. Now that presents storage problems!

Other travelers are **Florence Briggs** and husband Larry (10 Northwest Center). For 6 weeks and 19 touchdown flights they visited Bali, Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand. (See page 7).

We have quite a few retirees whose art careers have blossomed since they retired. The latest show for **Grace Fishenfeld** was a collage and painting show at the Great Neck Art Center in June. **Rick Mundy's** show at the Gallery on Main in Sayville, runs through July 11th. He works in water colors and has expanded his subjects from L.I. to Alaska, where he spends a good deal of time painting. The SUFFOLK COUNTY NEWS in a recent art review calls his style "robustly delicate, and totally realistic.... He has received awards from the Manhattan Arts International and the N.Y. Press Association two years running.... His Fire Island Lighthouse painting was used on the cover of the L.I. Tourist Bureau's brochure and his paintings have made the covers of national magazines." (Sayville Summerfest 8/7; Ocean Beach [Fire Is] 8/14-15; Montauk Village Green 8/21-22; Pt. Jeff Maritime Festival 9/18-19 with wife Anne who sews; Gallery North, Setauket 9/18-19).

Get well wishes are sent to **Larry Sommers**. He had surgery on an outpatient basis. He says he's keeping busy and doing fine, but "the incision hurts like hell."

Get well wishes also to **Marilyn Flamberg** (East Jr. High) who had a knee replacement.

We were saddened to hear of the death of **Millie Singleton** on May 11th. **Millie** died after a long battle with cancer. She retired from Ross H.S. Guidance and will be missed by friends, family and acquaintances as well.

Former English Chair **Gilda Mantin's** husband, Al, died suddenly in Arizona on May 27th. The funeral on L.I. drew retired and active English teachers from Ross H.S. **Gilda** is still recovering from an auto accident that occurred while Al was in the hospital. **Gilda** is held close to the heart of those of us who worked with her.

CONGRATULATIONS

The Arts





ON THE ROAD AGAIN

by Rich Edwards, '98 retiree touring U.S. by RV/Motorcycle

They are still in love, Bud and his wife Mel. Their greatest joy is motorcycling through the back country of Arizona on their red Goldwing. It was an honor when they offered to take me along on a ride through the Chihuahua National Monument, one of the state's spectacular spots. It's famous for the way erosion has created pillars of stone, many with boulders as big as small houses perched on top of rocks one fifth their size. Miracles of improbable balance set in deep canyons and on the shoulders of rising mountains.

The ride covered 200 miles that day, impressive for Bud and Mel who completed the distance with joy and energy. Impressive because they are both 75.

The art of motorcycle pin striping is practiced by many in Arizona. I went to Butchr's after Grumpy's Motorcycling Service recommended his work. I had been waiting to get to Arizona to have one of these artists change the plain green surface of my bike into a masterpiece.

Butchr talked while his steady hand drew teal colored lines and scroll work on my bike. His face pinched up as his eyes followed along, six inches from his moving hand. He cursed the drivers in the Phoenix area. I had seen five accidents since arriving in the area and he agreed that Phoenix drivers were crazy. He showed me the gun that he keeps in his truck, his way of dealing with the most difficult drivers.

Butchr stopped his pin striping briefly to show off his restored 1956 Chevy station wagon. Beautiful. And his custom Harley-Davidson. Magnificent. A man with lots of toys. On the wall of his garage he displayed his collection of antique condom and sanitary napkin dispensers.

He finished and warned me to avoid washing the bike for at least a week, then sent me off on a ride through hills covered with tall saguaro cactus plants so that the wind would dry the paint.

Before I started on my exploration of this big country, I did a whole lot of research on the subject of living in a recreational vehicle. I read a dozen books and a hundred magazine articles about this lifestyle. I spoke with one experienced couple working as hosts in a Suffolk County campground. Overall though, I was pretty ignorant about "life on wheels."

Since I started on September 1, 1998, I've had over 8 months to learn. I'm going to share with you some of the lessons I've learned.... (Little by little).

Today's question: Just who does this RV traveling?

Everyone. I have met people from most states. Folks from the midwest and the northwest are more prevalent, though. New Yorkers are rare, especially when you get to the campgrounds in the southwest and west. Most are older than me, which is a bit disconcerting since I spent the last 30 years working with teenagers. But lots of younger people are starting to travel in RV's because early retirement is becoming more common.

In most communities people with similar bank accounts live together in the same neighborhood. This is not true with RVers. A gas station attendant and his wife with a 20 year old camper may be parked next to a retired C.E.O. and his wife in a half-million dollar rig. I can't think of too many other places where these two couples would come together to converse for hours. A campfire can become a wonderful social equalizer.

I've met other teachers as well as bankers, air traffic controllers, pilots, retired military folk, stock brokers, doctors, lawyers, you name it. Most are married couples, some are unmarried couples, few are singles like me. And that's a good subject for my next bit on RVers.



RETURN FROM DOWN UNDER

by Florence Briggs



After six weeks and 19 touchdown flights, Larry and I returned safely to Fairfield Harbour, NC from our travel to Bali, Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand.

Bali, a paradise in the midst of Muslim Indonesia, is famous for its Hindu culture whose rituals pervade every aspect of daily life. Theater, dance and music are closely interwound in traditional Indonesian life. At the ornately carved temple of Ubud, a spiritual focal point of Balinese ceremonial rites, we learned that every dance has a degree of sacramental importance.

In contrast, the sleek sophistication of the Sydney Opera House, with its sail like roof structure, marks Australia's largest city with distinction. In many senses, Australia is still the last frontier as it appears on the globe to be down under. From the city's magical grandeur through the simplicity and tranquillity of the Australian outback with its prairie and thermal springs, to the picturesque New Zealand pastoral farms, stories and events of this journey continue to remind us of a very special adventure.

Ayres Rock swells up from the central Australian plain and is a special place that the aboriginals hold sacred, and Alice Springs with its hidden calmness provides a peaceful resting place.

The thrill of experiencing firsthand the dexterity of a curious kangaroo, the thick gray fur of the cuddly Koala or the hard rump of a young bull camel will remain with us for years to come.

Flashbacks of New Zealand pass by vividly as weeks of driving on the opposite side of the road introduced us to the scenic countryside and afforded us personal contact with the sheep in the lush meadows.

Unpolluted air, spectacular sights, wilderness, and abundant sunshine, all contribute to the high standard of living on the island perpetuated by the export of wool.

We're ready to pack our knapsacks and begin the venture all over again.

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To take advantage of prices well below hotel rack rates, mention "AFT Member Benefits # 20952" when calling the toll free numbers of the following chains: Days Inn, 800/268-2195; Howard Johnson, 800/769-0939; Knights Inn, 800/843-5644; Ramada Inn, 800/462-8035; and Travelodge, 800/545-5545.

EXERPTS FROM A THEODORE ROZAK ESSAY

author of "Cult of Information"

As more and more of us get hooked up to the computer and begin to rely on

it for almost everything, along comes "Shakespeare Never Lost a Manuscript to a Computer Crash." Here are some gems from the essay!

"Children do not need that much information to learn how to think or taste the joys of creativity.... What they need is impassioned ideas to think with. Where are those found? In other knowledge loving minds.... A good teacher with enough copies of "Huckleberry Finn" to go around can do more to make young minds blossom than the same teacher forced to revamp all she knows to fit the limited capacities of a roomful of expensive computers."

"All the greatest thoughts were thought before computers." We don't need machines to think, just minds & deeply pondered experience!

Beware winding up thinking the same rather than the different!

