




## ROBS NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 43

RETIRES OF BRENTWOOD SCHOOLS

FEBRUARY 2002

 THE NYSUT 9-11 DISASTER RELIEF FUND which aids NYSUT members and other union members who suffered losses in the 9/11 terrorist attacks has raised nearly \$400,000. Approximately \$290,000 has already been disbursed: to the families of 34 Public Employees Federation members who died, 120 UFT members who lost someone, and many others.

\$32,000 was earmarked by donors for school supplies, materials & equipment for schools and staff in the vicinity of the WTC.

NYSUT is also offering pro bono assistance to the families, as well as the assistance of NYSUT Social Services.

**WHICH 50'S VOCAL GROUP HALL OF FAMER IS A ROBS RETIREE?**  
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### accounting shift/prescription discount

A little known change in the standard for government accounting procedures could have a big impact on retiree health coverage, due to changes being developed by the Government Accounting Standards Board (effective 2006). Under the new standard, state & local governments and school districts would be required to project retiree health care costs for 30 years, increasing financial liabilities on their balance sheet. Current practice is to pay such costs year to year. The first GASB draft will be issued this June.

A similar standard drafted in 1990 for corporations, has accelerated cutbacks in retiree health benefits for private sector employees. AFT has been counseled to try to counter the standard with technical rather than political arguments, encouraging employers to make structural changes aimed at meeting accounting needs rather than reducing benefits. Unlike pensions, most retiree health benefits are currently guaranteed only during the union contract. Watch developments on this.

Pharmaceutical giant Pfizer is offering low-income senior citizens some of its most widely used prescriptions for \$15 a month beginning March 2002. It is expected to reach as many as 7 million eligible elderly Americans for drugs such as: Viagra (impotence), Lipitor (cholesterol), Norvasc (high blood pressure, angina), and Zoloft (depression).

To qualify, seniors must be enrolled in Medicare, have an annual gross income below \$18,000 or \$24,000 for couples, and no other prescription coverage. There is no enrollment fee and no limit on the number of drugs a patient can receive.

Proof of income (tax return) is required. CVS and Wal-Mart Stores have agreed to participate in the program. Company officials expect the discount to remain in place until Congress passes a prescription drug benefit.

Adapted from -AFT Retiree E-newsletter

### IT WAS A GREAT WRAP!

The holidays are always a special time for ROBS' Project HOPE, our Community Liaison Committee's outreach program to the homeless among our students and their families. This year, due to the tremendous need generated by the events of 9/11, and the increased response of members and friends, HOPE was able to deliver Thanksgiving to three families, and Christmas joy to four. Contributions of two computers were made by anonymous friends of the program.

One of the fun things the committee did, after Vern and Frank Spencer, Sheila and Letty Sustrin, and Lois Morella shopped for the wish list gifts, was get together to wrap them. Irene Spano, Chris Veech, Harriet Pepine, Ruth McCalla and Phyllis Goodwin, joined the shopping five on December 21st, to make sure "it was a wrap" so Vern and Frank could do the deliveries the next morning. Thanks to all, and to those who augmented the funds raised by ROBS membership so that the "extras" would be covered. That is truly the Holiday spirit!

The 4 homeless families were elated at the caring and attention they received from ROBS. The children were ecstatic that they hadn't been forgotten in this holiday season.

HOPE's tutoring continues at the Brentwood schools and Suburban Children, Inc., but there is a difference this year. For five years now, Suffolk County has kept the homeless out of the welfare hotels. But due to the current mushrooming of the homeless, Frank now finds himself tutoring a boy who is housed with his mother and 2 siblings in a hotel in Copague. Join us in tutoring these children. It is a worthwhile and important thing to do! (See letters/coupon... p. 5)



## PHYLL'S FORUM



Happy New Year Everyone,

In a recent article in the *EPI (Economic Policy Institute) Issue Brief*, "Undermining Social Security With Private Accounts," by Christian E. Weller, the EPI analysis finds the commission's final report reveals that all workers would see a declining standard of living if the proposals are enacted. The commission's proposals leave unanswered the issue of serious national fiscal consequences, such as transition costs associated with changing the current system to the privatized system. It also does not take into consideration the shortfall of 2038 to 2075 that will require additional taxes. The complete *EPI Brief* analysis may be found at <http://www.epinet.org>

In December, the SS Commission announced a plan to repair the System with benefit cuts for future retirees that vary in severity, and which replace part of SS with individual private investment accounts. The three options are as follows:

### Option I

Each worker can voluntarily contribute 2% of payroll to an individual account. But the worker would have to give up "the amount of benefits those payroll taxes (with interest) would have brought from Social Security." Each dollar contributed to an account will be replaced by a fixed-dollar reduction in benefits.

### Option II

Each worker can choose to contribute 4% of payroll to an individual account up to a wage-indexed maximum of \$1,000. As in Option I, benefits are cut in line with the worker's contribution. Additionally, benefits would be cut across-the-board, regardless of individual account contribution, by indexing them to the rate of inflation rather than the (generally higher) rate of average wage growth. For some, part of this benefit's cut is compensated for by raising benefits for low lifetime earners and surviving spouses.

### Option III

Workers could decide to contribute 1% out of their own pockets to in individual account, and their contribution would be matched by 2.55% from payroll taxes that otherwise would have gone to SS. Benefits would be reduced the same as Options I and II. Additionally, Option III would raise the retirement age, effectively reducing benefits for everybody. Benefits would also be reduced for high lifetime earners, but raised for low lifetime earners and surviving spouses.

Phyllis Goodwin, President - (631-673-2971)

## LORETTA PARK SCHOOL RECRUITING RETIREES

Loretta Park Elementary School is trying to recruit retired Brentwood teachers to volunteer their time to work with first and second grade students who are in need of academic support. They would like the teachers to come and help the students with basic skills in language arts during school hours. .

Any prospective volunteers should contact Tricia Renkowski at 631-434-2246 for further information.



**YOUR INTEREST WOULD BE GREATLY APPRECIATED**

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**Remember your special valentine February 14th**, with the union member flower service. AFT members receive a 15% discount on every order (minimum \$29.99). Have flowers or a gift basket delivered in time for Valentine's Day. Call toll free at 1-888-667-7779 or visit AFT PLUS Web site at (<http://www.aft.org/aftplus/newflowers.html>).

**HAPPY VALENTINES DAY**





## BRENTWOOD: A Unique Place by Chris Veech



When English teacher Judi Hearst Weissman's students became aware of the fact that 3 Brentwood students had lost their parents and baby sister in the November 12th crash of American Airlines flight 587 in Queens, they created a Kids Who Care Committee to help the family.

The children are Dania Corporan at the Freshman Center, Zuleika Corporan at South Middle School and Danilo Corporan, a student at Oak Park. The children have been adopted by their aunt, Angela Martinez, whose daughter Elizabeth is a student at the high school.

On January 4th, Kids Who Care celebrated a Day of Caring in honor of the Corporan and Martinez families. I was honored to be invited as a longtime friend of dedicated Judi Weissman, and welcomed as a representative of Brentwood retirees. The "Day of Honor" was held after the holidays because the family had to fly to the Dominican Republic to bury their parents and baby sister.

The library was crowded with district and school board dignitaries and the students who had worked hard to raise some \$1,500 for the family, as well as shopping for gifts from their wish lists to lift their spirits on this day.

Trying hard to keep his composure as he fought back tears, principal Tom O'Brien called Brentwood a "unique place, with students from 46 different countries, and sensitive, caring and supportive staff and students." Gail Swensen, vice principal called the day an "outpouring of love from us to you." (the Corporan and Martinez families). She hoped that this love would breed love for them as they forged a new family together. Board president, Tony Felicio echoed the family's loss as one not only for them, but for the entire Brentwood family.

Ms. Martinez, visibly moved by the outpouring of sentiments, help and gifts, gave a loving tribute and thanks to the staff and students of Brentwood when she said, "this is not about the gifts, but the love you have shown us" since the tragedy that killed her brother and orphaned his children. And she thanked South Middle School guidance counselor Laurie Constantino for being patient with all her phone calls, and always being there for her as she sought to meld her nieces and nephew into her family.

In the sorrow that surrounded the joy of the giving and caring, there were tears and lumps in the throat. But there was also the feeling of hope and joy and moving on because of the outpouring of support.

Students performed special music with acappella singers, and a violin group and solo, as well as verbal tributes to the honored families. The whole day was a gift in itself. People giving of themselves to lighten the burden of this bereaved family.

As Judi Weissman said, "A sad tragedy, but I'm so very proud of my students and this fine lesson in giving and community service." Judi suggested this follow up story "to show we still do great things for our kids in Brentwood."

And I realized finally what I really miss about not teaching anymore. The kids. And discovering each day, sometimes each period, the pearls that exist inside students as they explore the world, gain knowledge and enter into relationships with fellow students and teachers. I miss being proud of "my kids."

But I was proud of Judi and "Judi's kids" that day. And Brentwood schools and staff as well. What Tony Felicio refers to as "the Brentwood family really does exist."

### FLORIDA FEBRUARY LUNCHEON ALERT

On **Wednesday, February 20 from 12 noon to 3 P.M.**, ROBS South contingent, - including any birds that fly that way at that time, - are invited to the annual luncheon to meet and greet old friends and make new ones.

This year it will be held at **Padrino's restaurant in Mission Bay Plaza** on the northwest corner of 441 and Glades Road (2 doors from Office Max).

The menu will be a buffet lunch, soda, coffee, dessert (flan or tres leches cake). Total cost is **\$11.25 per person** which includes tax and gratuities.

**Checks must be received no later than February 15th.** Send your check made out to Marilyn DePlaza (our southern fireball organizer) & send to her at 10609 Mendocino Lane, Boca Raton, Florida 33428. Her phone is: 561-488-1267 and you may email her (marilyndeplaza@aol.com).

This year ROBS president, Phyllis Goodwin, will be joining the ROBS sun lovers for the first time to fill them in on northern happenings, legislative alerts, and future directions for our growing chapter.

**Plan to attend. It is always a good gathering. Thanks again to Marilyn DePlaza for all her behind the scenes work in organizing this annual event.**



**NOTE: Take action for worker's rights. Click on [www.unionvoice.org/ct/N71V1.M1q11a/behindthelabel](http://www.unionvoice.org/ct/N71V1.M1q11a/behindthelabel) & make your voice heard to stop sweat shops!**



# NEWS NOTES

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY** – A very special birthday was celebrated on February 6, 2002, by **Anna Mattausch**. Anna turned 90! She retired from the Ross Guidance office in 1972. The ROBS Holiday luncheon was part of the early partying for this big day. And **Donna-Marie Ragonese** was surprised Big Time by a party thrown for her 60th in December by long time pal, **Phyllis Goodwin**. Many more happy days, fellow retirees!



ROBS members spotted in Cape May, New Jersey on the RC 21 Holiday Victorian trip in December: **Lilian Kelly, Ruth & Mac McCalla, Lois Morella, Delores Osborne, Mary Poppo** (who looks like Judy Dench), **Joyce Rosenberg, Chris Veech, and Dot & Jack Zuckerman**. Despite the rain, it was a great trip!

Hale and hearty retirees, **Harry Hayden** and **Bob Wilcox** were spotted shopping in Target by Brentwood teacher **Judi Weissman** who reported that their happiness in retirement makes it look ever so appealing to her. Judi also said that "the ROBS Newsletter is wonderful! I so enjoy reading it! ...Nice you mentioned the Corporan family." Then she suggested the follow up story on page 3 of this issue...which this editor loved doing! Also great seeing Board President Tony Felicio looking so well at the Corporan/Martinez party.



And **Ellie Steffens** reports that she just sold 2 paintings from the holiday show at the Woodstock Artist's Association. She and daughter and grandson are planning to travel to Japan to visit the family during Easter vacation. She liked the article regarding Muslims in the last ROBS Newsletter, and reports she's still a peacenik, and very much in the minority. She has also been nominated for a national humanitarian award by her ALS support group. She assists the family and patient through the process of "Lou Gehrig's disease."



Special Ed teacher, **Lynn Evans Mand**, ('90 Hemlock Park ; Mr. Graf was principal) had a highlight this year with a reunion of her singing group, The Chordettes. The group was honored by being inducted into the Vocal Group Hall of Fame in Sharon, PA. Other '50's inductees included the Four Aces, the Four Freshman, the McGuire Sisters, and the Lennon Sisters. The Chordettes' families and children hadn't seen each other for 35 years. They are all happy and well!

Directory Update: **Lynn Prass** has a new address: 208 Elton Court W.' St. James, NY 11780; Phone is 631-265-9750.

Had a lovely note from retired Ross aide, **Grace Fata**, (243 Barnswallow Ct., Manorville, NY 11949) thanking us for the December newsletter. She visits Boca Raton, and has bumped into **Grace Fishenfeld**, and this year hopes to catch her art show in March. She remembers **Addie Lee** fondly when she was in Ross, and sends her get well wishes. **Addie** had knee surgery in December, recovered nicely and had the other knee done on January 28th. **Grace Fata** is recovering from surgery and chemo from ovarian cancer, which she is thankful they discovered early enough. She says, "I'm not ready to throw in the towel yet!" We're with you on that philosophy. Here's lookin' at you kid!



Another Ross aide, **Millie O'Neill**, a ROBS newsletter contributor, spent some 6 weeks in a nursing home due to her emphysema, while husband Don had angioplasty surgery after a heart attack. She is back home now, still chipper, and her husband is recuperating.

**Selma Berkowitz**, ('85 Loretta Park) was injured in a car accident in December. Hope recovery is going well, **Selma**.

**Mary Lou Fitzgerald**, who suffered a stroke 10 years ago and retired in 1991 from Southeast, is wheel chair bound. Her address: 5150 Sharon Rd.' Charlotte, NC, 28210. Phone: 704053201289. Email: (MFitzge105@aol.com).

Feel better wishes to **Anita Silverman**, (Sonderling Guidance Sec'y.) who had a quadruple by-pass; **Marge Kirchner**, ('99 elem. Guidance counselor) who had foot surgery (wishing you truffles and lingen tarts); **Carmen Hill**, who continues to battle cancer; **Dolores Hanellin** (Northeast '77); and **Jack Zuckerman**.



### Condolences to:

**Mary Ruffino** on the death of her sister in December.

The family of **Gloria Ascuitto** (Ross Guidance 2000) who also passed away in December after 5 weeks in the hospital. She suffered from complications of emphysema.

And to the family of **Mary Bender** ('85 sec'y. Southwest), who died of cancer in January 2002.



# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR: HOPE



Dear Ms. Veech:

I'd like to take this time to thank [ ROBS] for your generous donation to our children. Your support is so appreciated, especially this year when most Americans were donated out, so to speak. ROBS is a wonderful organization that has supported us year after year, and I am proud to be associated with it. ..Wish you a happy, healthy and safe 2002.

Diane Gustaw, Ed Liaison, Suburban Children

Dear Mr. Spencer:

I, Dalic Ortiz, and my three children, Justin, Joshua, and Jada, thank you from our hearts for giving us such a beautiful Christmas. ... to have someone to care for those less fortunate. Thanks for all the beautiful gifts. We loved everything. Happy New Year and many more.

Love sincerely, The Ortiz family

Dear Sirs/Madams:

...Your organization adopted my family for the Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday. I just wanted to send a little note of thanks and so much blessings to your organization. When I and my family entered this program (Suburban) on August 5, 2001, I was depressed and thought to be the only one in this situation. I had just gave birth to my twins in June. I lived in a house in Wyandanch where the landlord took my money every month knowing he wasn't the owner of the house. The house was in foreclosure for two years and in the process of being sold by the bank. The bank eventually turned off my electricity and water on June 18th. I had no where to turn. When I was just about to give up, Social Services entered me into this program.

When Thanksgiving came around, I was thinking to myself, what was I going to feed my kids. ...The next day, Mr. Frank Spencer knocked on my door with boxes of food. I wanted to cry so much but I didn't want

my kids to see that I had this big burden on me that was just taken away. I thanked him so much ... from my heart not only my mouth.

Then Mr. & Mrs. Spencer came over on December 22 to deliver Christmas gifts. Mind you, my kids had just said, "Mommy, we know you can't get much, but we still love you." I just hugged them but held back my tears. Again, my kids see Mr. Spencer pull up in the driveway. My son, Jonathan says, "Mommy we have Christmas. Mr. Spencer is here. Look. Look."

To see the expression on their faces on Christmas day made my day, my hour, my year. Why? Because there are people like you that make Thanksgiving and Christmas special for those less fortunate. If I could thank each one of you personally I would. I'm so thankful and grateful for what you have done for my family and me. I was making excuses but you came through and I am happy. To see my children with smiles on their faces puts a smile on mine.

I get up every morning and thank God for a roof over my head. For giving me and my children breath to breathe another day, and now to thank ROBS for being so thoughtful and understanding.

Thank you again for your caring and giving and please, please have a safe holiday. I don't have any other family but my kids but I feel better to know I have a new family. That's ROBS and Suburban Housing. Happy Holidays and best wishes for the New Year.

Sincerely, Monique D. Moore

Ms. Moore also wrote a letter to Letty and Sheila Sustrin and Lois Morella who shopped for the gifts. And she thanks the person who donated the computer for her family. And her children wrote also.

Dear ROBS ... Without all of you we wouldn't had a Christmas. So... I thank you all very much.  
From, Myra Taylor

**PROJECT HOPE STILL NEEDS TUTORS FOR BRENTWOOD'S HOMELESS CHILDREN TO HELP AS THEY FACE HARDSHIP. PLEASE, PLEASE JOIN US, EVEN FOR SHORT TERM HELP.**

**ROBS TO OFFER HOPE**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

I am available to volunteer:

\_\_\_\_ Brentwood Classroom \_\_\_\_ Suburban Educational Center \_\_\_\_ Both

\_\_\_\_ 2 hours a week \_\_\_\_ 2 hours a month \_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Mon. \_\_\_\_ Tues. \_\_\_\_ Wed. \_\_\_\_ Thurs. \_\_\_\_ Fri.

My talents & interests are:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Return to: Frank Spencer, ROBS Community Liaison Committee  
3 Nottingham Dr., Wheatley Heights, N.Y. 11798-1593. Phone: 631-253-0355



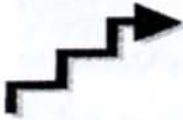
## MARK YOUR CALENDARS & JOIN US

**Friday, Friday, March 1 - General Meeting: Art / Craft Show of ROBS members  
"LET'S GO FOR ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL SHOW"  
of ROBS' hobbies, collections and craft/art works.**

(Past exhibits have included: stamps, quilts, knitting, angel collection, Scotty collection, water-color-oil paintings,...)

**WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO PARTICIPATE!**

Let Ruth McCalla (631-234-8013) know what you wish to share with ROBS members.



**Friday, April 5 – General Meeting: C-2 Get Serious**

**Friday, May 3 – General Meeting: History Revue of years - Member Interviews**

**Friday, June 14 – Luncheon**

*All General Meetings are held at the Bay Shore Library, Montauk Hwy., 10 A.M.*

## A RETIREE'S REACTION TO ROBS' VIDEO!

*The following was written by Floridian Marilyn DePlaza, (North Jr. Hi '89) retiree as a result of purchasing the History Project's video, "Through the Years: The Challenge of Change"*

This is my thank you to John Sherin. Everyone who remembers and loved the Brentwood years should buy this video.

Oh how I enjoyed every minute. There are not enough words in my head (and heart) to thank you for your efforts. Maybe I am just a sentimental ninny, but the interviews just brought back so many delicious remembrances of times gone by. Brentwood defined my life; and so many of the people that I knew over the 25 years that I spent there meant so much more to me than they probably even knew.

Marion Gray – for example – she probably doesn't even remember me... but I subbed for 6 years in almost every school, so I knew everyone and have an excellent memory. I also was a very good observer of so many happenings. I would see her on Fridays at the many different places that we would all gather on pay days and she was the belle of the ball. Everyone wanted to talk to her, be near her, laugh with her. I would watch and wish I knew her better. That whole crowd from Laurel Park was so lively – John Meade, Lois Rodriguez – you wanted to be on their faculty if you were in elementary school.

Do you mind if I ramble on? I didn't get to know Dot (Zuckerman) till I was ready to retire and went to her seminar. Another mind that I wished that I had been closer to. Who knew? I was in my teacher/mother bubble and had no time for the BTA – such a big regret. I am so, so grateful for the hard work they put in for my health benefits.

Of course, seeing Cal (Fornwald) and Joe (Palazzolo) brought tears to my eyes. Cal and I lunched together in the Ross building for a few years and we compared "bicultural" marriages. We had so many laughs.

And Joe – so unique, so individual – what a guy!! When I was in the foreign language department we would sit and laugh. He came to my retirement party and wrote how much he loved my stories about my kids and my mother and aunt – (they were a comical pair of sisters who lived together for 80 years. My dad only got to spend 30 years with the two of them – it like having two wives).

Tony Messina was so right when he called Brentwood a small New York – it really was. How I cherish the years I spent there.

And now, thanks to you John, I have a little bit of it to look at and warm my heart, make me laugh, and make me cry.



This video includes retiree interviews with clips from a NY state Education Department film from the 1960's shot in Brentwood that includes "West Wing's" Martin Sheen.

Besides those mentioned by Marilyn, the tape includes: Tom O'Connor, Phyllis Goodwin, Karen Storjohann, Eleanor Bazata, Ruth Bernhardt, Amy Leftenant, Dot Zuckermnan, Flo Corkery, Betty DeLong, Laurie Ann Ashdown.

For those who would like to purchase it, the cost is \$10. Checks to ROBS History Project. Contact John Sherin, 356 Dawson Lane, Jericho, NY 11753. Phone: 516-931-2971. Email: (jmsherin@aol.com).

**R C 21 Tuesday, March 19 meeting features Gunderman & Gunderman on Aflac insurance information. The goose is fun, the benefits interesting. 10 AM Bay Shore Library.**



## Some important insurance coverages explained

The Member Benefits department of New York State United Teachers offers a variety of insurance plans, each designed to meet a particular need. Brief descriptions of NYSUT's voluntary disability, long-term care and catastrophe major medical plans are provided here. For more information, call NYSUT Member Benefits at 1-800-626-8101, e-mail [benefits@nysutmail.org](mailto:benefits@nysutmail.org), or visit the Web at [www.memberbenefits.nysut.org](http://www.memberbenefits.nysut.org).

**Disability insurance** helps replace a portion of your lost income by providing tax-free monthly benefits if an illness or injury prevents you from working. In addition to the plan for NYSUT members and agency fee payers, a separate plan is available for associate members, retiree members, and spouses or domestic partners of NYSUT members. Applicants to either plan must be under the age of 64.

You can tailor the plan by choosing long or short term coverage; your monthly benefit amount up to \$5,000, not to exceed 60 percent of gross monthly earnings; and your waiting period, which is the amount of time you must be totally disabled before benefits will be paid. The longer the waiting period, the lower your premium payments will be.

**Long-term care insurance** helps pay the cost of custodial care and other long-term care expenses. People may think that they're too young to think about this, but the need for long-term care can happen at any age and at any time, due to an unexpected accident or illness.

Basic health insurance and Medicare often don't cover long-term care expenses. Unfortunately, many people don't find this out until they're actually faced with a long-term care situation. As a result, they end up paying for long-term care out of their own pockets and risk spending their life savings.

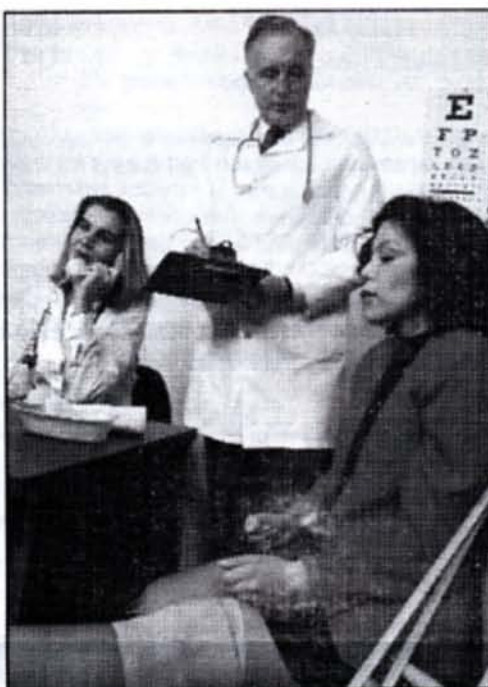
NYSUT members, agency fee payers, and their spouses or domestic partners are eligible to apply, as are their parents (and in-laws),

grandparents (and in-laws). The NYSUT plan lets you choose a comprehensive or nursing home plan, daily benefit amount, total lifetime benefit and home care/assisted living reimbursement amount. You may choose additional options to further tailor your coverage.

**Catastrophe major medical insurance** supplements your basic health insurance, including Medicare. Once the deductible is satisfied, the plan will pay up to 100 percent of eligible expenses

not recovered by other insurance coverage for up to five years or up to \$2 million, whichever comes first. Your out-of-pocket expenses as well as expenses paid by basic health insurance count toward the \$25,000 deductible.

The plan also offers some nursing home, home health care and private duty nursing benefits. Members can apply, regardless of age. Coverage can be added for spouse, parents (and in-laws) and dependent children.





## IMPORTANT CLARIFICATION REGARDING ROBS MEMBERSHIP

**Membership for those 75 years or older is free based on membership in ROBS for three years in good standing prior to applying for this benefit. (This policy was adopted 1999)**

### NYSUT NOTES

from Dorothy Zuckerman, NYSUT Retiree Services Consultant  
(631-273-8822)

We're into the second year of the new millennium, anxious to put the past year's memories behind us and eagerly anticipating the new year ahead. Here are some items of information for you to be aware of at this time:

✓ Mark your calendar for **Friday April 12<sup>th</sup>** - We are planning an all day **Nassau-Suffolk conference on Consumer Fraud** for all retirees sponsored by NYSUT and the State Attorney General's office. More details will be following soon.

✓ **2002 changes in Social Security and Medicare:** Social Security COLA is increased by 2.6% (about \$22/month) and Medicare Part B payments are now increased to \$54/month. There is no deductible for certain Part B services such as diagnostic laboratory tests, screening pap smears or mammographies, pelvic exams, clinical breast exams, fecal-occult blood tests, prostate PSA tests, and flu and pneumonia shots.

✓ **Empire health insurance premium rates have changed.** These are the rates paid by the districts; your payment is whatever percentage of this rate you pay:  
Non-Medicare - Individual: \$344.66; Family: \$723.97  
Medicare - Individual: \$253.82; Family with 1 Medicare: \$633.13;  
Family with 2 Medicares: \$542.29

Districts also pay a monthly administrative fee of \$1.231 per enrollee plus a flat charge of \$22.833.

New for 2002: Maximum for hearing aids is increased to \$1200 every four years for adults.

✓ **Legislation Update:**

\* **Enhanced Star Benefit** - all those eligible (65+ with income under \$60,000) must reapply before March 1<sup>st</sup>; IRA distributions can be exempted from income

\* **Tax Relief** - Low income seniors 65+ who have school age children living with them may maintain their real property tax exemption at the discretion of the school district.

\* **Earnings After Retirement** - Those working in NYS public employment may now earn up to \$20,000; there is no earnings limit for private employment.

\* **Minimum Guaranteed Pension Allowance:** Pre-1970 retirees will now be guaranteed \$500 per year of service up to a maximum of \$17,500 for 35 years.

\* **Disability Benefit for Members 62+** - Would have increased pension benefits at age 62 if the service benefit would have been greater than the disability benefit. VETOED

\* **Tier Reinstatement** for members who were hired by NYC as regular substitutes but weren't allowed to join the NYSTRS: VETOED

✓ Look for a new NYSUT member benefit called "**Assist America**" that is designed to provide a full range of emergency assistance services for travelers.