

Dear Colleagues,

Several weeks ago, a group of your WTA representatives attended the annual NYSUT Representative Assembly, which was held in New York City this year. Through the various break-out sessions and general assembly meetings, we learned much about the status of the political warfare being waged against unions, public employees in general, and teachers in particular, across the state of New York and the nation as a whole. It is telling that although on the last day of the RA, teachers marched from the convention to Times Square and participated in a labor rally with several thousand in attendance, that this event was not deemed newsworthy by any significant media outlet. It is fortunate that our parent unions are well organized and have thrown themselves full-force into this struggle, because with so much at stake, we cannot afford to lose. Please stay up to date by reading the NYSUT and AFT publications that you receive, and make use of the nysut.org website to help your voice be heard, lest New York become the next Wisconsin.

This year's reduction in state aid impacted school districts everywhere in our state, and sadly, staff reductions in varying forms have been enacted in the majority of districts. However, there has been a great deal of variation in the way that individual districts have chosen to deal with the problem. While superintendents in some districts have courageously chosen to stand side-by-side with teachers and defend both their contracts and teachers' compensation, that strategy has proven woefully scarce in our own region. And while many districts have requested various forms of concessions and instituted staff reductions, the reductions have normally been executed by focusing on the needs of the students, thereby making the best effort to avoid impacting the quality of education. The strategy employed in Webster, whereby bargaining units were separated, then a proportion of money demanded from each unit in return for saving jobs within each particular unit, precluded flexibility and provided a rationalization for keeping the administration intact while laying off teachers and teaching assistants.

As we are all aware, the radical and inflexible nature of this stance, involving the demand for permanent concessions in return for a temporary slowing of staff reductions, led to an extended period of time wherein no negotiations between the union and the administration took place. This impasse was finally ended when the WTA leadership extended an olive branch, and agreed to separate our concerns about scheduling at all 3 school levels from the discussion of concessions that would involve contractual protections, but would not extend beyond one year. Since management continues to refuse to flex the same way for us regarding the high school schedule, this represented a major compromise on our part. We hoped that our gesture would be returned, that in discussing monetary concessions the administration would demonstrate some flexibility in their demands, and would agree to work collaboratively with us, creatively applying cost savings to preserve jobs in the places that provide the maximum benefit for our students. While we have met several times, and have a third meeting scheduled for April 29, thus far we have been deeply disappointed by the administration's refusal to deviate from its original position regarding proportional spending cuts.

Positive Community Relations in Two Easy Steps What Every WTA Member Should Know

Many of our members at the recent General Membership Meeting [March 14] asked how we can counter the negative perception of teachers and teachers' unions in our community. A few months ago, Jeanne Coonan, Sue Hooper, Wendy Sardella and I had the opportunity to attend a session called **"Public Employees Suck!"** at the NYSUT Negotiations Conference [January 22]. In the next few issues of *The Voice*, we hope to communicate some of the salient points from the workshop, including how we here in Webster can continue to shape and improve our public image.

Our union leaders know and acknowledge the power of positive interactions with our community. However, it came as a surprise to us at the conference that there is a difference between community *relations* and community *service*, and this slight difference in phrasing transfers to a big difference in public perception. In short, our union members have a long history of community *service*: donating their time and funds to many worthy causes. However, we have fallen short with community *relations*: publicizing the union's connection to these good works.

Recent polls have shown that New Yorkers support public education and consider teachers to be the 3rd most ethical and trustworthy profession (behind military personnel and pharmacologists). However, there is a curious disconnect when it comes to how they feel about unions. While teachers are viewed as "good," unions are viewed as "bad," and in the public eye, are seen as two separate entities. This thinking permeates even our own membership, with some members distancing themselves from the WTA in order to avoid associating themselves with any media-induced controversy. This divide is unacceptable in a time of unprecedented attacks on our profession and our right to collectively bargain.

The goal, then, is to reframe our views in order to link the positive qualities of what we do as teachers to our representative body: the union. To the community, and to ourselves, the two must be one in the same. Consider the "extras" that already take place at your school: ice cream socials, Family Fun Night, Freshman Orientation. Whose manpower makes these voluntary events function? Yes, administrators play a role, but what would those activities be without the teachers in attendance? Yet these teachers—the members of our union—never get the credit for the time they put in. "The District," or "the school" does. What follows are two suggestions from the conference as to how we can get started reshaping our positive public image.



A unionized public employee, a taxpayer, and a CEO are sitting at a table...

A unionized public employee, a taxpayer, and a CEO are sitting at a table. In the middle of the table is a plate with a dozen cookies on it. The CEO reaches across and takes 11 cookies, then looks at the taxpayer and says "Watch out for that union guy—he wants a piece of your cookie!"

Number One: *Your modesty—get over it!* The field trip you organized; the guest speaker you brought in; the activity you collaborated with your colleagues on during CT time; an activity that is uniquely yours that your students enjoy: these are not “ordinary” things—they are cause for celebration! Teachers are famous for doing things not for the recognition, but because they need to get done. Many of us feel that these extras that we do are “just little things,” or “nothing special.” However, we need to start letting the outside world know that we do them—and on a regular basis.

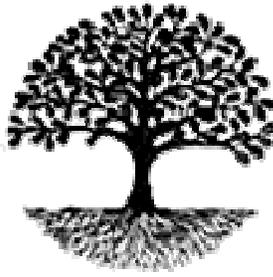
Sue Hooper is our WTA liaison to the Board of Education, and she has been in contact with your Senior Building Rep to elicit some examples of those good things you do all the time. Be ready by asking yourself the following question: “*What have I done this year that has been well-received by students/parents/administration/the community?*” Did you write it down yet?? One response from each of us to that question would give Sue an arsenal to last a whole year’s worth of Board Meetings! For those who watch the Board Meetings on TV, this is our union’s time to shine and promote the positive things we as professionals do.

Number Two: *Lend your expertise and an hour of your time.* As we near New York State tests at all grade levels, student, parent and teacher stress levels rise. Consider gathering a few fellow teachers from your school to host an hour-long “State Testing ‘Answer’ Night” for concerned parents. Provide some samples of past exams that parents can see. Address how many assessments there are for their particular grade level. Explain what you have been doing in class to prepare, and offer suggestions as to how parents can help to support their child. ***The event should be hosted by the Webster Teachers Association: A Union of Caring and Dedicated Professionals.*** It is important to include the word “union” in your flyer so that the public will begin to associate the “union” with positive press. Reserve a space in your school or even a conference room at the Webster Public Library for the event if your school will not be open.

If you are a secondary teacher, you probably still have time to organize an event like this with your building. Try to get a representative from each affected department to attend the evening. If you are an elementary teacher, your State tests may be imminent and there is no time to have a session of this type this year. Think about making a few strategic phone calls instead. Do you have a new student from out-of-state? Their parents might especially appreciate a phone call to explain what these assessments will include. Do you have specific students who you may feel would be especially anxious about these tests? Give their parents a call—and again, ***make sure you make the connection to them that the professionals in Webster’s teacher’s union want to help their child succeed.*** You may feel awkward saying that, but that’s how we start to make those connections between positive actions and the word “union.”

So, we all have some work to do. The above suggestions are well within our professional capabilities and don’t take much time. But they’ll go a long way in establishing and/or continuing positive relationships with the community. When it counts, and the community votes on a budget, those positive connections—no matter how small—can make all the difference. Please e-mail any one of us with any questions you may have, and stay tuned for more in the next issue. Thanks for all you do as the caring and dedicated professionals that you are!

Written by Carrie Waldarek, with Jeanne Coonan,
Sue Hooper and Wendy Sardella



The **Oak Tree Committee** is pleased to announce that **Beth Keesom** and **Cherylynn Wilson** have been named the 2011 Oak Tree Recipients.

With 30 years of teaching experience, Elizabeth Keesom is an outstanding educator who exemplifies best practices in curricular areas and lesson planning ideas. Humor and active listening skills make those around her feel that they are truly being heard. Beth seeks out professional learning opportunities, brings energy to interactions with those around her, and actively embraces the collaborative approach to teaching. Her students feel that she treats them as family.

Cherylynn Wilson has been a Social Studies teacher in the Webster School District for 12 years. As an educator, Social Studies is only one facet she brings to her interactions with students. Whether it is working on the school play, the newspaper, bringing in a special speaker, or introducing exciting classroom activities that bring history to life, Cherylynn does it in a quiet down-to-earth manner.

The Awards will be presented at the May 10th Board of Education Meeting. The Oak Tree Recognition Program is designed to recognize teacher excellence in Webster Central Schools at both the elementary and secondary levels and is Co-Sponsored by The Webster Teacher Association (WTA) and the Webster Central Parent-Teacher Association (PTSA).

Wendy Sardella
Oak Tree Committee Chairperson



It's **WTA Scholarship** time! I need 3-4 people to volunteer to assist me in the selection of the scholarship. We will meet on **Thursday, May 12th** after school *if needed* to make the final selection.

Please reply by **Friday, April 29th**. Please consider serving your union.

Thanks!
Laura D'Angelo

Laura_D'Angelo@websterschools.org



**UNITED WE LEAD
ARE
ONE**

A rally to support WORKERS' RIGHTS

**IF IT CAN HAPPEN IN WISCONSIN,
IT CAN HAPPEN HERE!**

NOON-1 pm Saturday, April 9 - Times Square



Jim McEntee and Kelly Zielke walking to Times Square after the 2011 NYSUT Representative Assembly;
Alyssa & Christine Dunne in Times Square
(WTA delegates also participating in this rally but not pictured here: Steve Turiano, Jeanne Coonan, Sandy Clement, Bev Voos & Kate Lasky

Over 15,000 public employees rallied to support workers' rights – NO major media outlet provided notable coverage of the event.



The Rex Embrey

Annual SEPTA Golf Invitational

Format: Four Person Scramble

Date: Saturday, May 21, 2011 @ 1:00p.m.

Location: Shadow Pines Golf Club in Penfield

Package Includes:

18 Holes of Golf

Power Golf Cart

Lunch

Dinner

Prizes

50/50 Raffles



4 Divisions: Players/Duffers/Mixed/Women

Cost: \$100.00 Per Person (Check made payable to SEPTA)

For more information:

Contact Dina Malboeuf at Webster Thomas H.S.

Email: dina_malboeuf@websterschools.org or cell (355-0283)

Sponsored by:

Webster Special Education Teachers and the Special Education Parent Teacher Association (SEPTA)



****All registrations and payments due by May 1, 2011***

New financial education services offer something for everyone

If you're looking for information on financial services available to you as a NYSUT member, NYSUT Member Benefits may have something just for you. Considerable efforts have been put forth in creating new printed material as well as new presentations. Both in-service and retiree members can benefit.

403(b) Field Guide. This booklet covers all aspects of 403(b) plans and includes information pertinent to members not yet contributing to a 403(b) plan, those who are contributing, those nearing retirement, and those already enjoying retirement.

To get the free guide, you can view and print a copy from the Member Benefits website, www.memberbenefits.nysut.org, hit the "Contact" option on the site to send an e-mail request, or call **800-626-8101** for a copy to be sent to you.

403(b) Provider-Specific Workshop. Member Benefits contracted with the provider of its endorsed Financial Counseling Program, Stacey Braun Associates, Inc., to conduct these workshops upon request from local leaders. The workshop covers detailed information on five 403(b) providers chosen by the local leader from a list of 10 popular 403(b) providers. Workshops review the features of each plan, comparing fees and benefits. These workshops are designed for in-service members.

Workshops have a registration fee of \$20 per participant and a minimum requirement of 30 participants. A local could schedule this workshop as a webinar for a fee of \$250.

Workshops will not address specific questions pertaining to an individual's 403(b) plan. Members with questions regarding personal 403(b) accounts or other financial planning issues will be directed to speak with their 403(b) adviser or their financial planner. For those who don't have an adviser or planner, information on the endorsed Financial Counseling Program will also be available.

Financial Planning Puzzle Workshop. Today's economy has clarified the need for a financial plan; unfortunately, for many, beginning a financial plan remains a daunting task.

This two-hour workshop, designed for in-service members, outlines the process, covering cash management, risk management, savings, retirement and estate planning.

The Challenging Times of Financial Management – The Retirement Years. Financial planning doesn't stop at retirement. This one-hour presentation discusses the various investment options you may face during retirement along with helpful information regarding your 403(b) plan, Social Security benefits, income taxes and more.



For information about these programs or about contractual endorsement arrangements with providers of endorsed programs, please contact NYSUT Member Benefits.

Agency fee payers to NYSUT are eligible to participate in NYSUT Member Benefits-endorsed programs.



Your building needs YOU!

According to the WTA Constitution, in each WCSD building, members shall elect for a **term of two (2) years one (1) Building Representative and one (1) alternate to the Representative Council for each twenty (20) members** of major fraction thereof. One shall be designated Senior Building Representative and the terms shall be staggered. The Representatives shall take their seats (offices) at the June meeting of the Representative Council.

Elections:

- Nominations will take place in each building during the month of April.
- Members of the Association shall vote by secret ballot in their building in the month of May each year.
- The candidate(s) receiving the greatest number of votes shall be elected.
- Newly elected Building Representatives shall begin their terms of service at the June Representative Council Meeting (June 13, 2011).
- Ballots shall be held by the Building Representatives for one year after the elections as prescribed by the Landrum-Griffin Act.

Building Representative Duties include:

- Keep the Association's leadership informed as to problems and/or accomplishments at the school level.
- Assist the Teaching Unit members with problems or concerns affection their professional life in a confidential manner.
- Represent the membership at Association meetings.
- Answer questions and/or discuss issues with members.
- Communicate information to the members through meetings, personal contact, memos and telephone networks.
- Discuss with members how problems can best be handled – as complaints or grievances.
- Communicate the details of all concerns to the President of the Association in a timely fashion.

Editorial:

If you've been of the mindset that "The Union's" only purpose is to "protect bad teachers" and/or negotiate our successor contracts, this is YOUR opportunity to experience first-hand what your colleagues who have volunteered their time to advance our profession have been doing. It is also an excellent entry-level position for you to make your mark and add your voice to form the direction you believe would be most worthy of the WTA in this day-and-age of public employee unions.

New challenges include:

- Unwarranted attacks to all public employee unions
- Limited and/or restricted funding sources for public education
- Development of new Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) regulations (four ratings for teachers plus a student growth as a factor for teacher evaluations; the procedures used to implement the new regulations will ***need to be collectively bargained at the local level.***



Do you know you have money waiting for you? Understanding our IRC Section 105(h) Plan

[p.57, Section IV of Article 8010 of the Contract between the Superintendent of WCSD and WTA]

Since January 2001, the Webster CSD has made contributions for each teacher in a 105(h) Plan. It began as a \$600 and \$900 contribution for individual and married unit members, respectively. On January 1, 2006, these amounts increased to \$675 and \$975 respectively. This contribution is made annually on January 1st.

Employees can **pay for a wide range of out-of-pocket medical expenses with tax-free dollars.**

Eligible expenses can include:

- co-payments
- deductibles
- prescription drugs
- dental care



- vision care, eyeglasses, contact lenses
- chiropractic care
- psychological counseling
- certain over-the-counter medical items

You may pay for your eligible medical expenses with your Beniversal MasterCard or be reimbursed by submitting a claim form.

Unlike funds you contribute to your Flexible Spending Account (FSA) Plan that you lose if they are not spent on medical or dependent care expenses within the calendar year, 105(h) Plan funds roll-over to the following year. Even if you don't participate in the District's medical coverage plan, (and you elect the buy-out payment), you do receive this 105(h) Plan contribution annually. Therefore, if you've been employed in Webster since January 1, 2006 and haven't yet touched your account – you now have \$6,375 waiting for you to pay for out-of-pocket medical expenses!

For more information, go to: <http://www.benefitresource.com/>

- Company Code = WebsterCSD
- Member ID = your social security number
- Password = your zip code (the first time you log on – then you can change it)

Webster Teachers' Association (Established 1972)

Representing 789 teachers in 11 schools
(7 elementary, 2 middle and 2 high schools)
in the Webster Central School District

Affiliated with NYSUT, AFT/NEA, and the AFL-CIO

WTA office

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<http://www.wta1972.com/>

