



THE UNION SOUND

THE VOICE OF A SOUND UNION



February 2020

Rondout Valley Federation of Teachers and School-Related Professionals

Volume 44, Issue 6

Calendar of Upcoming Events

March

- 02: Budget Committee meeting 6:30pm at the DO
- 03: Committee of 100 all day in Albany
- 06: Blood Drive 8:00am-6:30pm at the HS
- 10: BOE meeting 7:00pm at the DO
- 11: RVF Executive Committee meeting 4:15pm at the RVF Office
- 13: Superintendent's Conference Day
- 19: Grades 6-12 Choral Pops Concert 7:00pm-9:00pm at the HS
- 20: Spring Fling 7:00pm-9:30pm at the HS
- 20: Deadline for submissions to *The Union Sound*
- 23: Budget Committee meeting 6:30pm at the DO
- 24: BOE meeting 7:00pm at the DO

Annual Legislative Luncheon

by Lucy Van Sickle

The NYSUT-sponsored Legislative Luncheon was held on February 1 at Wiltwyck Golf Club in Kingston. Each year, state and local legislators take time to gather and discuss current issues in education. Rob McDonough, Kim McEvoy, and Lucy Van Sickle represented the RVF at this awesome event. Each local union group had talking points that let legislators know exactly what is important to our unions. This year, the most talked about issue was the lack of Foundation Aid making its way to school districts. Foundation Aid changes from year to year and is based on a complex set of equations—all of which are subject to various political interpretations.

Rob had the fortune to sit with Assemblymember Kevin Cahill and chat with him directly. NYSUT



Kim McEvoy, Robert McDonough and Lucy Van Sickle representing the RVF at NYSUT's Legislative Luncheon at Wiltwyck Golf Club.

President Andy Pallotta and Secretary-Treasurer J. Philippe Abraham were also present and spoke to those in attendance. After a great meal, Kathy Taylor announced that she would not be seeking re-election as our District Director. She has given many hours to our local NYSUT office and was presented with flowers and balloons as a token of our appreciation for all the hard work she has done during her tenure.



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The Union Sound

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President's Message

by Robert McDonough

When Labor Day falls on September 5, 6, or 7, we have always had a problem. In late-start years, we can only squeeze six emergency closing days into the calendar, and as many of you who have been here a while know, it almost always leads to losing spring break. Our members can never plan for a vacation during spring break, and this results in increased stress for both staff and students since the spring has a long stretch of school without any holidays. Staff and students both deserve and need a spring break. This scenario happens about five times out of every eight years, and when it does happen, it greatly impacts our members. Under current contract language (Article 4.5A), we must also start work on the Friday before Labor Day when this occurs. We face this problem again this coming September 2020 as well as in 2021, 2022, 2026, and 2027.

During the last three rounds of Teachers Unit negotiations, the RVF proposed a solution to open up our calendar and allow for additional emergency closing days during these years where Labor Day is late in the month; however, the idea never got any traction.

Recently, the District has shown a renewed interest to bargain this with the RVF. Our proposal was endorsed unanimously by the RVF Executive Committee at our February 2020 meeting. The basic idea of our proposal is as follows:

- When Labor Day falls late (September 5, 6, or 7), Teachers Unit members will start the school year on September 1, provided that it is a weekday and provided it is not Labor Day or the Friday before Labor Day.
- Although we are starting on September 1 during these years and opening up the calendar, the actual number of days we work does not change and remains the same at 183.5 days.
- The Friday before Labor Day shall be a holiday, thus securing a four-day Labor Day weekend.
- At least half of the first day shall be for teachers to work alone in their rooms and prepare their workspace for the year.
- The other half of the first day will be to complete the mandatory NYS annual online trainings.
- Students will not start before Labor Day. Superintendent's Days will be front-loaded to the start of the year. (Four Superintendent's Days per year are allowed to count as student attendance days even though we have no students.)

- The Paraprofessional Unit works 1.5 days less than the Teachers Unit (182 days). Under this proposal, members from that unit would not come to work on September 1. They would report to work September 2 instead.
- The other half day for paraprofessionals will be the afternoon on Election Day (November 3, 2020), which is a Superintendent's Day. Due to the new law in NY, the District has agreed to give all RVF members three hours to go vote that morning. We will then report to work at 11am (11am-3pm). Paraprofessionals will have that afternoon off as well (half day), so they will not have to report to work at all that day.
- Members of the Secretarial Unit are twelve-month employees, so nothing would change for them under this proposal.

The RVF Executive Committee feels this benefits our members by the following:

1. Better preserving our spring break for vacation planning and thereby boosting morale.
2. Removing Superintendent's Days from the middle of the school year.
3. Allowing for a four-day Labor Day weekend for families.
4. Allowing for more emergency closing days. With the climate changing and the storms getting stronger, there is no telling how many days we will need in the future for power outages, flooding, etc. This winter was one of the warmest on record, and we have still used five emergency closing days already.
5. Allowing for the first day to be for Teachers Unit members to work alone in their rooms in order to prepare their space for the year and take the online trainings.
6. Allowing our Marbletown colleagues to unpack and set up their rooms. Our Marbletown colleagues are facing construction this summer and must pack up everything they own in June and unpack it all in September. This will be happening in other buildings in the near future. This would also give the Superintendent the flexibility to let members in certain buildings use the days before Labor Day to move back into their rooms.
7. Allowing our members to have the opportunity to accumulate several CTLE hours in the first few days of school once we become a CTLE-sponsored district.

I will be calling a meeting in the High School Auditorium for all Teachers Unit members to discuss and vote on this change very soon. Please be on the lookout for an email from me announcing the date and time of this meeting. If you have any questions, please see your Building/Unit Representative or an RVF Officer.

Guest Column

by Joe Delessio

PRIVATE SCHOOL CREDIT BILL PROPOSAL

[Bill S5075](#) that has been proposed by State Senator Joseph A. Griffo of the 47th District, if passed, would allow teachers who have worked in private schools chartered by the NYS Board of Regents to be granted up to five years of service credit. This is significant, as many of us have worked in private schools and fall into this category. We did not have union or wage protections even though we worked with students who were placed by New York public school districts. The current status of this bill is that it is in the Civil Service and Pensions Committee.

What's ironic is that if we worked at the local pool or park or public golf course or even on a bridge as a painter, we would be able to buy back that time. In virtually any other public institution other than private education—where we often taught students with high needs from *public* school

districts—we are afforded the opportunity to buy back years.

Granting us the ability to claim up to five years of service in private schools for our retirement would be a huge opportunity for many of us in this position. I encourage you to write to the committee members, our governor, our local legislators, and NYSUT in regard to this. I further encourage you to share [Bill S5075](#) to any and all social media platforms, especially in the committee member's districts.

The current committee includes the following:

- Andrew Gounardes District 22
- Rich Funke District 55
- Joseph Addabbo Jr. District 15
- George M. Borrello District 51
- Robert Jackson District 31
- Todd Kaminsky District 9
- Diane J. Savino District 23



*RVF President
Robert McDonough
and New York
Assemblymember
Kevin Cabill at
NYSUT's Legislative
Luncheon at Wiltnyck
Golf Club.*

History Corner

by Jennifer Slauson

THE GREATEST FREE SHOW ON EARTH

It takes a lot to get between New Orleans and Mardi Gras. Together, the Civil War (1861-65), World War I (1918-19), and World War II (1942-45) caused eleven Fat Tuesdays to be paradeless. But there was another time Mardi Gras was canceled. The year was 1979: Pink Floyd released *The Wall*, the USSR invaded Afghanistan, a velvet V-neck at Sears cost only \$24.99 (which was also the record price for a barrel of crude oil), and sixty-three Americans were taken hostage in Tehran. However, there was another hostage situation brewing.

In 1977, New Orleans saw the election of its first black mayor. Ernest "Dutch" Morial ran on a platform of police reform, and the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) was also looking to reorganize—they wanted union recognition. Police were underpaid and overworked. In his first term, Morial proposed the highest pay increase for policemen in modern times. His proposal made for good news coverage but failed to point out that due to an inherited budget crisis, the increases would be paid for by cuts to sick leave benefits, vacation days, and increased working hours of all civil service employees, including the police. Public service workers thought they were getting a raw deal from the city, making conditions ripe for a widespread strike by the fall of '78. Sanitation workers had already gone on strike in July, various city departments began whispers of the possibility that they might too, and the Firefighters' Union Local No. 632 kicked off a public discussion of a strike during Mardi Gras. Soon the Police Association of New Orleans (PANO) began to echo the ominous talk about job action during carnival season. A decade earlier PANO had split from the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) in part because the FOP was prohibited from striking by its constitution. The tension between the two groups reflected the 1970s trend in labor towards stronger, more active unions. The 1970s had been a tumultuous decade for organized labor, particularly so in Louisiana, with its strong anti-labor movement that culminated in the "Right-to-Work" legislation passed in 1976.

With pressure to negotiate mounting and only three weeks before Mardi Gras Day, Morial chose the FOP,

not PANO, as the only bargaining agent the city would recognize. PANO now felt like the mayor had betrayed them. On the night of February 8, about half of PANO's members met to formalize a strike—effective immediately. After just two days, Morial agreed to recognize PANO as the official representative for rank-and-file police officers and agreed not to take revenge on returning strikers. However, negotiations stalled as PANO's demands continued to up the ante, and on February 16, eleven days before Mardi Gras Day, the police went on strike for the second time. Mardi Gras, "The Greatest Free Show on Earth," would be held hostage. While striking police formed picket lines and held rambunctious rallies, the city responded with over 1,000 National Guard troops and Louisiana State Police assuming the NOPD's duties.

Mardi Gras crowds were tough to handle. The threat of lawlessness, real or imagined, scared many, including the Mayor, who decided to cancel the first weekend of parades. The public had mixed feelings; they understood the police union's need for better wages and conditions, but, at the same time, were frustrated that it was happening during Mardi Gras. Businesses were also affected and had much to say about the strike. Carnival season had developed into a lucrative source of income for hotels, restaurants, and other tourist-oriented service industries that brought in \$250 million in seasonal revenue. A week before Fat Tuesday, parade krewe captains from eighteen carnival organizations issued a joint statement with the mayor's office announcing that they would be canceling the remaining parades. Opposition to the union was clear, and Mardi Gras would not be used as a bargaining chip in 1979 or ever.

Some parades were moved to other parishes, and elite parties and balls went on behind closed doors. In the French Quarter, thousands of costumed revelers still came out onto the streets with their feather boas, beads, and booze, the National Guard ignoring the vice. Days later, having lost their leverage, the strike ended. The *New York Times* said it best when they asked, "Cancel Mardi Gras? You might as well try to cancel Christmas." One thing was clear: Mardi Gras was not run by any institution—not the city, not the elite krewes, and not the police force. At its heart were the people of New Orleans: neighbors, friends, and strangers alike. Some would say it was the best Carnival ever.

Laissez le bon temps rouler, everybody!