



THE UNION SOUND

THE VOICE OF A SOUND UNION



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Rondout Valley Federation of Teachers and School-Related Professionals

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RVF Members Rival Odysseus

by Collen Vitti

Welcome, Baby Henry!

And congratulations to our Rondout teachers Emily and Andrew Ugolino, as well as Henry's big brother, little Andrew.

As an English teacher who enjoys analyzing contemporary literature through the lens of the hero's journey, Andrew embarked on his own heroic journey on Wednesday, November 29, at 5:33pm.

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The Union Sound

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President's Message

by Robert McDonough

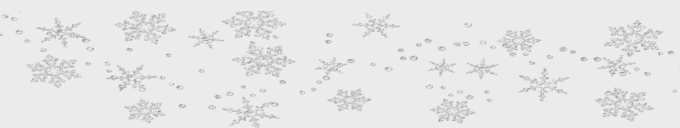
When I sat down to write an article for this issue of *The Union Sound*, I couldn't think of a topic at first. I thought about writing about my trip to Buffalo with Dr. Morgan where we co-presented a workshop on Interest Based Bargaining at the NYSSBA conference. I thought about talking about the Fix Tier 6 campaign. But then something happened to me last Friday that I think you can all relate to. So I wanted to tell you a little story about my day last Friday.

As many of you probably also feel... I am mentally exhausted. These four full weeks before Winter Break feel like an eternity. So last Friday as I sat at my desk to grade some AP Government quizzes, I was feeling mentally drained but I had to get the grades done for the five-week progress reports. I made myself a cup of tea, created an answer key, put my reading glasses on, and started to grade. Six or seven quizzes in, I was delighted at how well this one student was doing. They only got three wrong out of forty-five questions. I looked to the top of the paper to see who the student was and noticed a blank space where their name should be. I was slightly perturbed as I wrote a note in red pen at the top of the paper. It said, "Who are you? Try this next year in college and see what the professor says." Then, as I finished writing, it hit me. And I just sat there staring and sipping my tea. The realization came down on me like a ton of bricks. *I just graded my own answer key*, I thought to myself. *And I also roasted myself at the top for not putting my name, or even the word 'key' on the answer sheet.* Boy, do I need a break.

I don't know if any of you have ever graded your own

answer key before and wrote "see me" on the top of it. But I do know that many, if not most, of you probably feel as exhausted as I do. And that is because you give it your all every single day. This profession is both rewarding and exhausting. I am currently watching the show *Suits* which is about corporate lawyers in New York City. There is an episode where the main character tries his hand at teaching and can't cut it. I found it funny that someone who is used to working fourteen-hour days couldn't handle a single seven-hour day in the classroom. We do it day after day for 183 days a year.

The point of my story is that as a union, we have to rely on each other and be there for one another. After I graded my own answer key, I went down to see our librarian and our 3rd vice president, Tara Thibault-Edmonds. I told her this story and we laughed together. This is when I realized that I had the topic for my article. She made me feel better and helped me put it all in perspective. So, if you are feeling overwhelmed and mentally shot, lean on your friends and colleagues. If we are all there for each other, it helps us realize we are not alone. It helps to know that our colleagues are all feeling the same. By supporting each other, we will get through each year. Another calendar year has passed and I know the holidays are not always a happy time for everyone. For many, it brings back the memories of the loved ones they have lost. So please have a restful and relaxing winter break and a happy New Year. And when we get back in 2024, don't be afraid to support your colleagues or ask for support when you need it.



RVF Members, Continued from Page 1

Andrew ventured home after an ordinary day of teaching English to eighth-grade students. Little did he know he was entering a supernatural world as Emily prepared to bring forth new life. He encountered fabulous forces at play as brave Grandma Carol summoned an ambulance. But, lo and behold, minutes later, a child was born unto his favorite heroine and lovely wife...into Andrew's arms...in their home...before the ambulance arrived.

And, yes! All is well! Both parents are certain to return from this mysterious adventure with great powers. May their family and our Rondout community benefit from the boons bestowed as a result of this heroic journey.

And, yes! We all know Emily is the true hero of this story. She showed tremendous strength and courage during the final ordeal. Emily, you're amazing!

History Corner

by Jennifer Slauson

SANTA'S WORKSHOP EMBRACES AUTOMATION AMIDST ELF UNIONIZATION STRUGGLES

In an unexpected turn of events at the North Pole, Santa Claus has announced the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into his iconic workshop, following unsuccessful attempts by his elves to unionize. This move, Santa states, is aimed at “maintaining efficiency and ensuring that the Christmas spirit reaches children worldwide with unprecedented speed.”

The elves, who have for centuries been the heart and soul of Santa's workshop, initiated discussions about unionization during the sizzling summer of striking workers around the US. Inspired by UAW and SAG workers, the industrious elves attempted to join the International Union of Allied Novelty and Production Workers (IUANPW), who has traditionally organized workers at toy factories and is affiliated with the AFL-CIO. However, despite their genuine efforts, logistical challenges and the remote location of the North Pole posed significant obstacles in setting up a local union chapter.

While the proposed union failed to materialize, the setback paved the way for Santa's implementation of AI technologies – dubbed JINGL (Jolly Intelligence Network for Gift Logistics) – to assume some of the elves' traditional responsibilities. This move only added more sugar to the elves' swirl. North Pole correspondents reported furious elves seen picketing with signs that read “Santa, Don't Toy with Our Rights!” and “Jolly Old St. Nick, Not Silicon St. Click!” Others were heard chanting “Hey Santa, We Craft, We Laugh, No More Algorithmic Staff!” Inside the workshop, progress on this winter's gift making nearly slowed to a stop while united elves sang “Hey, hey, ho, ho, robo-toys have got to go!”

In a press release, Santa's Press Secretary, Holly Merrybottom, commented that “the elves will remain an integral part of the workshop, they will shift into supervisory roles, overseeing and collaborating with the newly introduced AI systems, and will continue to coordinate all reindeer training.” When pressed about

the new technology, Merrybottom responded that the AI-powered machines were “equipped with cutting-edge robotics and machine learning capabilities.” She explained how “many routine tasks like sawing, painting, gluing, and wrapping can be 100% done by AI – and we have seen a 47% increase in completion rates, allowing the elves to focus on more creative aspects of gift-giving.”

Amidst the transition, concerns have emerged among the elves regarding the potential for AI mistakes in interpreting children's wish lists. The fear of inaccuracies and misunderstandings in the digital realm has raised questions about the reliability of the new system. In a report filed with the Commission for Yuletide Operational Oversight and Jolly Incident Evaluation, details of misinterpretations number in the thousands. Sources within the Commission report they have seen strange things coming off the assembly lines; Slinky's with non-traditional shapes - including loops, some with a combination of smooth and textured surfaces, play kitchens that have a shape-shifting ability, transforming into different creatures at random and spilling the contents of pots and pans, and Tickle-Me-Elmos whose fur causes a burning sensation on fingers when it is tickled.

Santa acknowledged these concerns, emphasizing the meticulous testing and quality control measures in place to ensure the safety and accuracy of the JINGL system. He reassured the public, saying, “We understand the apprehensions, and we share the commitment to maintaining the authenticity of Christmas. Rest assured, we are taking every precaution to prevent mistakes and uphold the magic of the season.”

As the workshop becomes a hybrid of traditional craftsmanship and modern automation, the global community awaits the outcome with peppermint-scented bated breath. Will the magic of Christmas persist amidst these spicy gingerbread innovations, or will the charm of Santa's workshop be forever altered by the sweet march of technological progress? As for the elves, the complexities of establishing a formalized candy-striped union in the enchanting yet isolated workshop have proved insurmountable for this year, but it tops their wish list for next season. The elves, unionized or not, remain dedicated to their craft, continuing to play an essential role in the sprinkle-filled world of candy canes and gift-making, infusing each present with the magical spirit of the holiday season.



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Financial Update

by David Bonington, CFP®
Stacey Braun Associates, Inc.

MAKE A 2024 FINANCIAL RESOLUTION TODAY!

Hello! I am delighted to have been invited to submit this article—my first for *The Union Sound*.

For starters, I think you will agree that it's a great time of year! Chilly—maybe flurries in the forecast. Short days, but with lights and seasonal music everywhere. Candles in windows. Get-togethers. Gift giving. A month for joy, celebration, and renewal—and an opportunity for me to wish everyone a safe and happy holiday season!

If you are not aware, Stacey Braun Associates offers a covered financial counseling benefit, and the program is open to all Rondout Valley Federation members and eligible employees. It offers up to six annual hours of free consultation time with a Certified Financial Planner™. Meetings are confidential, and because no financial products are sold there is never any sales pressure. A session can cover items like debt management, insurance, saving for a home or college, tax-smart investing, retirement, and estate planning, and is always devoted to topics of greatest importance to you.

January is a month to make resolutions – and it will be here soon. Many of the resolutions I am hearing relate to

health and personal wellness: *I will lose weight. I will get more sleep and more exercise. I will eat more heart-healthy food.*

One very healthy financial resolution would be to make 2024 a year in which you take initial or continuing advantage of this benefit, whether you or a family member are looking for information, ideas, recommendations, or simply need a sounding board or second opinion. There are sometimes general answers to financial planning questions, but the very best and sharpest advice is always developed in the context of a client's own personal and unique circumstances. Meetings bring important facts and details into focus, and can also help a planner help you make progress toward (I can't resist) *resolution* of any stressful financial matters.

My immediate advice is not financial: embrace the spirit of the season! Relax. Enjoy. Celebrate. But don't forget to resolve to meet with a Stacey Braun planner in 2024, or (better yet) get a head start on the new year by scheduling a meeting today. My colleagues and I hope to see many of you in the year ahead!

Free, confidential Telephone or Zoom sessions with a Stacey Braun planner can be arranged by calling 1-888-949-1925.

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Being ready for the holidays can mean a lot of different things:

- Gifts for your loved ones
- Appliances for your home
- Confirming travel plans
- Entertainment for the kids
- Food delivery in case of inclement weather
- Savings set aside for unexpected expenses

NYSUT Member Benefits offers dozens of endorsed programs and services that could help make you as prepared as possible for whatever the holiday season may throw at you.

No matter what your plans may be this holiday season, NYSUT Member Benefits is a great place to start. With a number of shopping, travel and discount programs, you are certain to find something of interest that could benefit you or your loved ones.

Speaking of savings, the **Member Benefits Discounts & Deals** program utilizes the nation's largest private discount network to offer all NYSUT members (both in-service and retiree) exclusive access to savings of up to 50% at 850,000 locations – including more than 21,200 New York State deals. If you have not already done so, head over to mbdeals.enjoymydeals.com to create your account with your NYSUT ID number, preferred email address, and password.

You'll then be eligible to save on restaurant dine-in or take-out, flowers and gift baskets, Bose products, clothing and shoes, oil changes and vehicle maintenance, sporting events, hotels and flights, car rentals, theme parks, movie tickets, and much more. Members are encouraged to download the MB Discounts & Deals mobile app for the best user experience with this program.

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