



THE UNION SOUND

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Rondout Valley Federation of Teachers and School-Related Professionals

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The Union Sound

Editor-in-Chief:
Robyn McDonough

Assistant Editors:
Jennifer Slauson,
Tara Thibault-Edmonds,
Colleen Vitti

President:
Robert McDonough

Contributors:
Darlene Cummins,
Loren Dugan, Melissa Feinberg,
High School Life Skills Team,
Annmarie Huffman,
Michele Juric, Debbie Eck,
Laurie Knapp, Angela Longway,
Dave Mahoskey,
Robert McDonough,
Colleen McGarril, Cyndi Murphy,
The Sassy Crew, Doug Serson,
Mindy Shaw, Rita Stoddard,
Beth Sulpice, Nisha Valle

President's Message

by Rob McDonough

Last summer, after the last year and a half we all lived and worked through, I thought to myself that the hard part was over. I couldn't have been more wrong. I think most of you would agree with me that this year's challenges were even harder to overcome than the previous year's challenges. We all came into this year with high hopes of normality. But we all soon realized that, for our students, the previous two years were a lifetime. As adults, the years fly by--yet even for us these last two years challenged us in ways we never prepared for. But for kids, these two years were a quarter or more of their lives. Although on paper it looked like we were returning to normalcy, this year was anything but that. Students struggled to behave properly and lacked the social skills to succeed in this in-person setting we all craved and mistakenly thought would solve everything. That wasn't the case, and as students displayed new levels of immaturity and neediness, our teachers struggled to cope with this as well.

So I understand how exhausted and spent you all feel. But this is no time for apathy, folks. This is no time to let your exhaustion prevent you from making a difference. This year was a double-edged sword for me. While I rode the highs of getting two contracts done in two weeks time, I also experienced the lows that exhaustion and apathy can create. We struggled to get people to run for a position in the union this year and still have some unfilled positions. We struggled to tackle our commitment to our community by barely getting a dozen RVF members out to the highway cleanup twice a year. The RVF is 350 members strong. I realize everybody can't do it all. But perhaps if each of us can pledge to do one RVF event next year, that will go a long way. A union is stronger than just the sum of its parts, and each one of us can find the time to do our part and commit to just one thing per year. Maybe it's the highway cleanup or running for a position. Or maybe it is helping a colleague or becoming a mentor to a young teacher starting out. Perhaps it is reaching out to me as some of you did to convince me to do something about maternity leave. No matter how big or small, I know that each of you has at least one thing to give.



There is also the perception that the union works for its members. But the members also have to give back some of that as well because we are only as strong as our members. We are stronger united than alone. As we head into summer, please use the time to rejuvenate and refresh because we cannot let exhaustion and apathy deteriorate our unity and power. Together we got through these last three years, and together we will continue forward.

Thank you to all who contributed articles to this issue for our retirees. I have worked with many of this year's retirees, and each of them has influenced me in some way. Thank you for all you do for our students, community, and each other. Have a great summer and enjoy the retiree issue of *The Union Sound*.

This year's 8 RVF Retirees have given a combined total of 211 years of service to the Rondout Valley CSD!

Marbletown Retiree

LAURIE KNAPP

According to *Merriam-Webster*, a teacher is defined as the following:

teacher noun teach·er | \ 'tē-chər \

Definition of **teacher**

1: one that teaches *especially* : one whose occupation is to instruct.

Teachers play an important role in supporting children's learning, as well as the learning they provide to their peers. Laurie Knapp has done this and more for the past 36 years. What does "more" look like? Caretaker, mentor, behavior specialist, curriculum instruction advisor, positive reinforcement supplier, magic word provider, "mushes," and, most importantly, an unconditional love giver! This is the definition of Laurie Knapp.

Generations of families have had the good fortune to experience Mrs. Knapp and all she has to offer them. Her love and kindness will continue to be passed on while she now takes the time to enjoy this next stage of her life. Her energy, excitement, and passion for helping her students and colleagues over the years will never be forgotten! Her legacy will continue to live on in this school district and beyond. Marbletown Elementary School will not be the same without you! We will miss you, Mrs. Knapp!

~ Michele Juric



Laurie has taught in the district for over 35 years. She loves and advocates for children through ensuring that every child in her care receives an equal education--and her devotion is unparalleled.

As a lifelong learner herself, she continued to learn all she could to keep up with the ever-changing and on-going demands of the field of education. For a number of years, she has served as a liaison to the district and has held various leadership roles in the union. Her warm and friendly nature make her a hands-down winner for Ms. Congeniality. Parents, teachers, administration, and students all want to have Mrs. Knapp either as a colleague, friend, or teacher due to all the wonderful and fine qualities she possesses, and she willingly shares a piece of herself with everyone.

You just cannot help but feel good when Laurie is nearby. Her smile lights up the room. Many have begun lunch breaks entering the staff room feeling low or having a bad day and ended up walking out with a smile and a spring in their step because of Laurie. Her contagious laughter could be heard from a distance and would draw you in. She would tell a joke or a story that would just make you feel better about yourself or the world in general.

Her presence will surely be missed in the halls, rooms, and hearts of Rondout . . . especially here at MES.

We wish you nothing but the best, Laurie, and all the joy your heart can hold as you venture into the next phase of your life!

~ Melissa Feinberg

Kerhonkson Retiree

ZULMA MARTINEZ

When I visited my classroom for the first time, I was greeted with several piles of books organized by subject. It was a mystery! The next day, I found more books organized. Then, I met Zulma! She was the mystery helper! She made me feel comfortable and welcome almost immediately. That is Zulma--friendly, caring, giving, and dedicated. She sends the staff an uplifting email every Monday. I am not sure how it will be next year without our Zulma there! At least she is not too far! Zulma, thank you for what you do for all of us at Kerhonkson Elementary School. My wish for you is that you keep smiling like you have made me smile all these years. Congratulations and best wishes on your retirement!

Love,

~ Darlene Cummins

Zulma has been the backbone of KES for the last 35 years. I don't know how that's possible, since she's only 21! Her job title might be Teaching Assistant, but Zulma is much more. She makes everyone feel welcomed and included. Zulma is also a teacher, nurse, counselor, interpreter, custodian, scheduler, devoted wife, mother, grandmother, and friend. She is one of a kind! Zulma takes pride in our school and community, and encourages the students to do the same. Throughout the pandemic, Zulma sent weekly emails to encourage and inspire all of us. She's still sending those weekly emails! That's the thing about Zulma... she's always thinking of others! We will miss seeing her walking in the halls of our school everyday, but we know where to find her. If anyone deserves a happy, healthy retirement, it's Zulma! Love you, my friend!

~ Debbie Eck

Zulma is the heart and soul of Kerhonkson Elementary School. Zulma always has a kind word to say to all. My daughter was with her many years ago in kindergarten, and my mind was put at ease knowing that such a kind and caring person was with her during her first year at school. The many children that she has cared for that have passed through these halls adore her as much as her colleagues do. I will personally miss seeing her smiling face in the hallway. Happy retirement, my friend. You are the best. Don't blink!



~ Loren Dugan

Zulma Martinez has been the life force of KES for as long as she has been here. Beloved by all who know her, she is



always the first to offer help or comfort. She sends out weekly inspirational emails to bolster the staff morale. She organizes anything that comes along to make sure the KES magic is fully on display. "Mira" can be heard daily as she speaks to someone in her signature Spanish/English chatter. She always tells the kids that she is still in elementary school as she measures against them to show how much taller they are than she is. Each day is another opportunity for students and staff to be the recipient of her attention and comfort. Never one to accept kudos or acknowledgment of any of the multitude of good things she does, she will defer and step into the background. We all wish Zulma a fabulous retirement, and fingers crossed we will see her often as a sub. We love you, Zulma!

~ Rita Stoddard

Zulma Martinez definition: loving, kind, caring, giving, fun, great friend, and teacher. Zulma will be greatly missed by all at KES.



~ Annmarie Huffman

High School Retirees

BETSY RAMA

Betsy worked at Rondout High School with the Life Skills classes for more than eight years. We were blessed to have such a kind and generous person working with us and our students. She brought out the best in everyone who spent time with her. She brought out the best in me! She has an abundance of patience, strong faith, and a ton of energy. I was very fortunate that she was my classroom assistant, and I treasure the time we spent together. She assisted with love, created fun games and activities, and was always ready to step in and run the class if I needed to take a phone call or be out of the classroom. Her gentle disposition and appreciation for life added so much joy to our program. Together we successfully taught through COVID! We had a lot of laughs and we learned more about the world and ourselves through our lessons with the students. It was a joy to start out a Zoom session with my wonderful co-host on another screen. We shared many positive and uplifting moments with our classes. We laughed a lot and were so impressed with our students' love for learning.

I miss seeing her in the classroom each morning. I miss her warm smile, kind eyes, and gentle disposition. The students ask about her often, and we are looking forward to a visit soon! Thank you to Betsy for her years of giving, not only to the Rondout Central School District, but also to her family, friends, and community.

I asked our students: "What comes to mind when you think of Mrs. Rama?" The following are their responses.

"She's a good person." JP

"She always made us laugh when we were down." SM

"Loving her." FC

"Phone call." IL

"She's the best teacher." JS

"Kind." ND

"I miss Mrs. Rama. She was cool and funny." RF

"Calendar." RD

"Weather was fun." ET

"Mrs. Rama is sweet, kind and all of the above!" AR

"She was the best teacher's assistant and she was my favorite comm hab worker and she would help me calm down and be fair with me all the time." FM

"I cared about Mrs. Rama." KW

"Good." LR

"She's smart and outstanding!" OJ

"She is the best teacher we ever had!" MV

~ Angela Longway



Heavens to Betsy!

Betsy Rama . . . we're not quite sure how or when Betsy began her career at Rondout, but how blessed we were to have the opportunity to work with Betsy here at the high school.

Betsy is surely the most composed, cool, calm, collected, and classy teaching assistant ever gracing the classrooms here at Rondout. Her love for children was evident in her unbelievable patience in trying times while continuing to smile. Betsy knew how to always bring hectic times into proper perspective. She was always the first one to say, "I'll do it" or "I got this." No assignment was too big or too challenging. A deep breath and Betsy was off to any task that needed to be done . . . with a smile!

She consoled, walked, and listened to many students and staff with her heart and soul. Betsy knew how to always say the right thing to make that person feel so good about themselves. A true gift!

Betsy is a wonderful, loving, selfless, and caring woman. Her students, coworkers, and family have been in the presence of a true "angel." How blessed we all are to know and adore Betsy!

Thank you and we wish you many wonderful years to come!

Much love,

~ High School Life Skills Team

EILEEN KAISIK

As teachers, we appreciate the importance of good neighbors. When we need a box of tissues or a stand-in for a bathroom emergency, we turn to our hallmates, and for a number of wonderful years, Eileen Kaisik was my neighbor. When a difficult class rocked my calm, Eileen was a reassuring presence. And even when personal matters disrupted my sense of well-being, Eileen transcended the limits of a colleague and instead rose to the level of a true friend. It's not yet been a full year since Eileen has retired and taken up her very active post-teaching life, and yet I feel her absence every day.

Eileen embraced her role as a teacher with unshakeable professionalism. All tasks were given full attention, each student was cared for with compassion, and every colleague was treated with respect. I often found myself comparing my own behavior to that of Eileen's, knowing that she served as an excellent model of integrity.

For those who did not know Eileen well, Eileen was an inspiration to many of us for additional reasons. Eileen is an accomplished hiker, runner, skier, and photographer, activities that I know will keep her healthy, creative, and stimulated in her life after teaching. While some individuals retire and fade gently, Eileen will meet her new freedom with tremendous zeal.

While Eileen's neighborly duties were many, I most relied on Eileen to answer my most vexing grammatical questions: "Does the pronoun agree with the antecedent?" "Is this a restrictive or nonrestrictive clause?" With that in mind, I close out this tribute to my good friend and fine, retired hallmate Eileen Kaisik, hoping that she doesn't find any grammatical errors! Best of luck in all that (lie, lies, lay) ahead, Eileen. (One last grammar question for you, Eileen!)

~ Doug Serson

WENDY ROONEY

It is with mixed emotions that we write this for our colleague, dear friend, confidante, and "sister," Wendy Rooney. We are extremely happy and excited for Wendy as she closes

this chapter of her life to move on to the next, but we are also saddened knowing that we will not see Wendy's smiling face on a daily basis in our hallways. Wendy started her career at the Rondout Valley CSD on December 1, 2002, as a substitute. On September 24, 2003, she was hired full time as a teaching assistant assigned to the high school. Wendy has been an asset to not only the special education program but also to the entire school community. Outside of her being kind, nurturing, thoughtful, and patient (though we could go on and on) with everyone she meets, she has a soft spot in her heart for our students, especially those who struggled the most. Wendy had a unique ability to be able to de-escalate many intense situations with her calming demeanor and her great sense of humor. We know you will live your retirement life to the fullest and enjoy every extra moment of time with your husband Peter, your children, and your grandchildren. Wendy, we love you, and you will be very missed!

~ *The Sassy Crew*

Having the pleasure of Wendy as my teaching assistant for a few years was amazing. Her calmness in the face of sometimes craziness helped me immensely. Wendy made connections with difficult students and helped them become better citizens of our school.

~ *Beth Sulpice*

Through all these years that
we've worked together

Your presence, like sunshine,
in darkening weather . . .

Has made the years tolerable,
it's true

You've befriended us all,
which is quite hard to do . . .

Now it's time to move on,
We'll miss you so

Off to sunshine and beaches you'll go
With grandkids in tow . . .

~ *Cyndi & Nisha*

The Union Sound would like to thank Colleen Vitti for her

years of service on the editing team. We wish her luck with her
future endeavors.

ANTHONY TOCCO

Tony Tocco and I first met back in 2004. It was my third full year with the district, and I was supposed to be getting tenure. My principal at the time, Ray Palmer, called me at home to inform me that the Board of Education had decided to give me a Juul agreement, which means that I would have to prove myself over the course of a 4th year, in order to get tenure. This was back in the day where tenure was usually granted after three years.

At this time, Tony was still involved in the union as our vice president. He came over to the middle school to represent me in a meeting with the superintendent, Dr. Pirkle, in which she was going to officially tell me that I was getting a 4th year. This was the first time I had ever met Tony. It was intimidating at first to see a man with his size and animated personality come over to represent me--especially when I only heard stories about "the time Tony Tocco put that student upside down in the garbage can right as the principal, Peter Beckwith, walked in." Tony's reputation preceded him, and I was nervous as he walked up to me like he was going to rip both of my arms out of their sockets. Tony only had one single piece of advice. "Say nothing," he told me. I said, "Okay," and we went into the superintendent's office. As the superintendent outlined some criticisms, I countered each assertion, only to look over at Tony who by this time had his glasses off and head in his hands. After the meeting, he said to me, "I don't know if you're going to make it here, kid. You have to learn to keep your mouth shut. This is the whole reason they aren't giving you tenure in the first place."

Well, I kept my mouth shut (for the next year anyway) and got tenure a year later. Fast forward seven more years, and I got transferred to the high school. It was then that I realized how good of a teacher and person that Tony Tocco is. This big scary and intimidating man has a heart of gold inside. Over the next decade, we would become friends. He would come to realize that I only opened my mouth to speak truth to power about injustices I see. And I came to realize that Tony had a huge heart and only wanted to bring out the best in his students, athletes, and colleagues. He strives to bring out the best in everyone he meets, and I was no exception.

In 2019 when I became union president, our relationship grew again. Many times he would come to my room to give me advice or share stories and some history of the RVF. These talks would prove to be invaluable as they gave me a different perspective on current issues. Tony became my unofficial mentor and advisor, and I am going to miss that.



In his more than 33 years in this profession, Tony has been a coach, mentor, and teacher to more students and adults than he may even realize. I am warmed by the season his lacrosse team had in his final year coaching. This storybook Cinderella season being Section IX champions is the perfect way to end his career.

They say that someone "just knows" when it is time to retire. And Tony has reached that point in his career and life. It is time for him to move on to his next chapter and next adventure. Tony will always be a teacher, striving to educate others and improve their lives. I have no doubt that, even in retirement, Tony will still be teaching and coaching others. Hopefully he will pick up the phone for me when I call. Congratulations, Tony, my friend. I wish you nothing but happiness in retirement. You have spent your whole life helping others, and now it is time for you to enjoy life. Godspeed, Tony Tocco.

~ Rob McDonough

Tones--

Through the years

personal or professional

in good times or bad

you have always had my back.

Brother for life!

~ Dave Mahoskey

Intermediate Retirees

LISA BULLOCK



Lisa spent most of her career at Marbletown Elementary School. When students entered her third-grade class, they looked forward to her creativity and fun as she delivered the curriculum. Every year she would host her class in an overnight scavenger hunt. Parents and students would be invited to sleep over in our library, and part of the festivities would be a curriculum scavenger hunt. She would hide clues all over the school, and the students would eagerly set out to find them. Then they would debrief, eat pizza and ice cream, and settle down for the night. On one occasion, they did this overnight excursion in NYC on the Intrepid. These are just two examples of Lisa's creativity and her ability to think outside the box. She also inspired her students to be expressive, an essential quality for children in order to become lifelong learners and contributing members of our community. Enjoy your retirement, Lisa, and have fun traveling with Brian!

~ Laurie Knapp & Mindy Shaw

ELIZABETH HARRINGTON

Last week the sixth grade team took on the impossible task of replacing Liz Harrington with a new member for our team. After each highly-qualified candidate finished interviewing and we praised and complimented them, we always ended with, "But she is no Liz." Anyone who has met Liz, especially her students, can't forget her and her unmistakable zest for life. Many times I have been out with her, and from across the room we hear a delighted scream, "Mrs. Harrington!" She always recognizes and acknowledges her former students, and they take a quick trip down memory lane. Two questions usually come up:

"Do you still have dance parties?" and "Do you still have your class answer your questions in unison with 'Yes, Mrs. Harrington'?" She smiles and says, "Of course, I'm still always right, and I will never stop dancing!"

She has directed many theatrical productions over the years and has given many tips on how to have great stage presence. She brings her love for theater and entertaining into the classroom. She takes her students on imaginary journeys through her entertaining voices of each character in the book, and through the stories she shares with them her many world travels. Her love for life and travel is evident and is not slowing down. So far she has told me that she will be moving to or visiting Hawaii, Belize, South Carolina, and Alaska just to name a few--and she looks forward to substitute teaching, public speaking, and maybe becoming an actor.

I am happy that she is continuing on her life journey, but I will miss seeing her on a daily basis. Liz is my favorite dance partner, hiking comrade, dinner companion, karaoke buddy, and shopping ally. If you have had the opportunity to experience any of these activities with Liz, you know what fun she is. Good luck to you, my friend, I will not say goodbye as I know our paths will continue to run parallel and intersect, and I know our friendship will endure and flourish.

~ Colleen McGarril



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