



Union Messenger

November 2007

A Busy WSTU October

More than 35 Local 571 council officers and building representatives spent an evening focused on their role as union leaders. IFT field service directors Mike Linder and Tom Smith led the annual building representatives' workshop on October 4.



At the 571 Legislative Breakfast on October 20, Suzette Gacek (left), Proviso HS Teachers Council member, was one of the lucky winners of a "gift basket" donated by Local 571 councils, officers and staff. Each of the 33 baskets was delivered to the winners by Cicero Council member Julie Maciejewski and other members of the committee. Proceeds from the raffle help fund 571's scholarships.



Local 571 President Jane Russell welcomed Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) to the IFT/Local 571 Robert M. Healey Conference Center in Westmont on October 10.

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Senator Durbin (second from left) chatted with Illinois union labor leaders on October 10 at the IFT/Local 571 Robert M. Healey Conference Center in Westmont. The meeting provided an opportunity to address national issues and concerns.



On October 24, IFT political director Nick Yelverton briefed members of the IFT retirees chapter on legislative and political issues facing educators in the years ahead.

Genesis Through Passage of a Law

from your president

One person can make a difference. It is true. Nora Waliczek, a Riverside Council member, has made a difference, so much so that a quest to help obtain a comprehensive vision and eye exam by an optometrist or ophthalmologist for children starting school is now the law. Nora's story appears elsewhere in this issue of the *Union Messenger*. When you read Nora's words, you will understand her persistence. (See page 5.)

In 2004, Nora brought information and materials to a spring meeting of the West Suburban Teachers Union House of Representatives outlining details of the newly formed Vision First Foundation and the Kid's Eyes Count Campaign. Nora also shared a Riverside PTA resolution which Local 571 passed on to the IFT's PreK-12 Education Committee. The committee submitted the PTA resolution to the IFT where it became the foundation of an IFT resolution eventually adopted at the February 2005 IFT Convention.

The IFT resolution reads, "*Resolved...that the Illinois Federation of Teachers support legislation to require a comprehensive eye and vision examination by an optometrist or ophthalmologist for all children entering kindergarten (or first grade) as a necessary prerequisite to academic learning...*"

Resolutions adopted at IFT Conventions become part of the IFT legislative platform and are acted on by the IFT Department of Political Activities. Sharon Teefey, IFT Legislative Director, working with sponsors Illinois Senator Deanna Demuzio (D-Carlinville) and Illinois Representative Jil Tracy (R-Quincy) created Senate Bill 641 (Student Vision Examinations) based on the IFT Convention resolution while amending school code. Under Sharon's careful watch and working with all of the appropriate interest groups, SB641 passed the Illinois Senate 56-0 in April 2007. Representative Tracy reported success in the Illinois House of Representatives a month later with a 116-0 vote of approval.

On August 28, 2007, the Governor used an amendatory veto to make changes substantially weakening vital aspects of the legislation. The IFT immediately launched a campaign promoting legislators to override the veto.



Word went out to Local 571 members to immediately contact state representatives and senators. Members' efforts, along with vigorous IFT lobbying, proved successful. Senator Don

Harmon, 39th District, wrote in an October 2, 2007, email, "*Jane, We voted to override the veto earlier this afternoon. Now it's off to the House! Don*" In fact, the senate vote was 53-2 in favor of the override.

Sharon Teefey reported, "*Representative Tracy immediately filed for the bill in the House and... prepared to call it at her first opportunity.*" Finally, on October 10, members of the Illinois House unanimously voted 112-0 to override the Governor's amendatory veto. The new law will take effect on January 1, 2008.

Janet Hughes, founder of the Vision First Foundation, was also instrumental in getting this legislation passed. Janet is both an advocate and a resource. Important information about vision and eye exams, a reference guide, a video, and forms for school districts and parents is available at a temporary website, www.VisionFirstFoundation.org. Please refer to the website for additional information.

Through this long process, everyone who worked on SB641 remained driven and focused. It paid off for Nora and Illinois children starting school in 2008. Congratulations and thanks to everyone who was a part of changing the Illinois School Code. Passing a law may take the efforts of a village, but often starts with one person.

In unity,

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Jane A. Russell".

Local 571 President

Councils Prepare for Contract Negotiations

Contracts for 5 of Local 571's 24 councils expire at the close of the 2007-2008 school year. DuPage District 88 Teachers Council, in the last year of a three-year agreement, selected its negotiations committee last spring. A first poll of membership is complete, and a negotiating team is being finalized.

According to IFT field representative Mike Linder, recent contracts have covered longer terms than years ago. The Morton Council is in the last year of five-year agreements covering teachers and clerical workers. Argo HS, Indian Springs, and Leyden Councils are at various places in five-year agreements.

Contracts for Elmhurst Teachers, Indian Springs Custodians, and Lyons Councils also have agreements ending in 2008. PAEC and Proviso PSRP Councils are still negotiating this year's packages. The Bloomingdale Council settled its 2007-2008 contract in early October.

Third Annual Local 571 Legislative Breakfast

By Bonnie Saracco, Local 571 Breakfast Committee Chairperson

Local 571 President Jane Russell began our Third Annual Legislative Breakfast by welcoming over 150 members who came to hear from our legislators and IFT leaders.

IFT President Ed Geppert spoke first, characterizing the situation in Springfield as gridlock, with the state urgently needing revenue amid talk of recession and a faltering stock market. But he reminded us that we have many friends in the General Assembly and that we all need to nurture these relationships. Regarding the presidential race, he reported that the AFT has endorsed Hillary Clinton and the IFT has endorsed Barack Obama, both of whom are excellent candidates worthy of our support.

IFT Director of Political Activities Steve Preckwinkle was master of ceremonies for the program. He began with an overview of the current state of dysfunction in Springfield, calling it a "meltdown" that has not really produced a budget. He emphasized that we need to remain vigilant about pension funding, which is a very good deal for school districts compared to retirement costs in the private sector. We must continue to resist the pressure to reduce benefits for new hires and also fight the move to defined contribution plans, which would require contributions of approximately 20% of our salaries to duplicate our present benefits.

Secretary of State Jesse White, a longtime Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) member, spoke next. He explained the stricter laws for young drivers that go into effect on January 1, including restrictions on night driving and for underage, unrelated passengers. He also urged increased organ donations and talked about reducing street racing.

U.S. Congresswoman Judy Biggert (R), District 13, a member of the Education and Labor Committee, spoke about NCLB reauthorization which is now a 900+ page draft. She hopes for improved, bipartisan legislation. She opposes performance-based pay provisions that undermine negotiated agreements and said that using test scores alone provides an inadequate measure of teacher quality, which should also be looked at qualitatively. However, Congresswoman Biggert does see some possible positive outcomes of the reauthorization, including the use of growth models to measure school success and the provision of more flexibility for special education and ELL testing. She concluded that we do not want to create a "National Board of Education" in this process.

Several other legislators and a legislative liaison also spoke, covering many important topics including the high quality of our IFT lobbyists, the lack of trust at the leadership level in Springfield, internet safety, restricting the privatization of support personnel services, and affordable housing. These were our other speakers:

Illinois State Senator Ed Maloney,
(D), District 18

Illinois State Senator Dan Kotowski,
(D), District 33

Illinois State Senator Don Harmon,
(D), District 39

Illinois State Representative
Karen Yarbrough, (D), District 7

Illinois State Representative
Jim Meyer, (R), District 48

Kareem Kenyatta, Legislative Liaison
for Illinois Attorney General
Lisa Madigan

Thanks to all of our councils for providing great baskets for our scholarship raffle and to all of the members of the Legislative Breakfast Committee for their hard work and dedication. We are already looking forward to our Fourth Annual Legislative Breakfast next October.

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ISBE to Audit Teacher Recertification/HQ Records

Again this year the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) expects to randomly audit teacher records supporting online entries made on CeRTS. Teachers selected for audit will be notified by letter and required to submit original documentation of professional development to their Regional Office of Education (ROE) by the end of November.

Keeping documentation for all continuing professional development units (CPDUs) and college credits is the responsibility of each individual teacher. Members should make copies of any documents submitted to the ROE, as documents submitted for ISBE audit may not be returned. Teachers who claimed Highly Qualified status through HOUSSE may be asked to provide that detail as well.

Members may request, from their council president, a special oversized envelope designed to keep professional development records together.

Are You Highly Qualified?

Helping classroom teachers find out if they meet the Highly Qualified requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is easier thanks to a special web-based tool developed by the IFT.

The IFT's Highly Qualified Interactive Worksheet can be accessed at <http://hq.ift-aft.org>. The worksheet was designed to help teachers determine if they are Highly Qualified in specific core content areas simply by entering the requested information and following the worksheet instructions. At the end of the worksheet, teachers can print out a report for their records. The information entered on the worksheet is totally confidential.

Educational issues director Lanita Koster, union professional development directors Sue Walter and Amy Alsop, and membership data/computer services director Charles Li developed the interactive worksheet.

The IFT worksheet is also available on the Illinois State Board of Education's website, <http://www.isbe.net>.

**IFT tool
helps to
determine
Highly
Qualified
NCLB status**

Local 571 Convention Announcement

Members in good standing, interested in delegate positions for the Local 571 Convention scheduled for Thursday, February 21, 2008, should inform their council president as soon as possible. Council presidents are listed below.

Argo HS PSRP: Vickie McAlpine

Argo HS Teachers: Paula Panfil

Argo-Summit: Scott Forman

Bloomingtondale: Leslie Fischer

Cicero: Alice Kautsky

District 88 PSRP: Pamela Sifuentes

District 88 Teachers: Brett Blair

Elmhurst PSRP: Marilyn Borowski

Elmhurst Teachers: Nan Loerop

Franklin Park Custodians: Gregory Fisher

Franklin Park Teachers: Julie Phillips

Indian Springs Custodians: Tom Zolecki

Indian Springs PSRP: Mary Ellen Nawara

Indian Springs Teachers: Nancy Calkins

Leyden: Jon Pazol

Lyons: Toni Brandt

Morton: Steve Fox

PAEC: Joe Mular

Proviso PSRP: Ida Chester

Proviso Teachers: Mona Johnson

Retirees: Maryann Karlovsky

Riverside: William Howes

Rosemont: Cathleen Pope

AFT Union Plus Scholarship Program

\$500 to \$4,000 one-time cash awards for undergraduate study beginning in the fall of 2008 are open to members, spouses, and dependent children. Go to

www.unionplus.org/benefits/education/scholarships/up.cfm to download the application. If you do not have internet access, call Local 571 for an application form. Applications must be post-marked by January 31, 2008.

A Vision of Comprehensive Eye Exams for Illinois Students

By Nora Waliczek, Riverside Council Member

Over 30 years ago, my oldest son's teacher called me in to talk about his reading difficulties. When I asked about taking him to an eye doctor, she checked his record and told me that he had passed a vision screening and that an exam would not be necessary. A false sense of security allowed another six months to pass before an optometrist's exam revealed a vision problem that was interfering with his learning.

Not wanting other children to needlessly suffer, I set out to inform parents, teachers, and administrators about the inadequacies of screenings. Simple vision screening identifies about 5% of vision problems and often gives false positive and false negative results. As the parent education chair of our school's PTA, and later as president, I continued working to prevent this from happening to other children.

After the Illinois PTA, in convention, passed a resolution on behalf of comprehensive eye exam legislation, I enlisted the help of Representatives Bill Walsh and Herb Huskey. Although I testified before the Illinois House Education Committee, too many seemed to believe it did not have merit. Unfortunately for Illinois children, these first efforts to get legislation failed.

I never understood the resistance that I encountered. In my mind it was simple: "Is it good for children?" Then, five years ago, a newspaper article about Janet Hughes caught my attention. Janet's success was getting parent notification legislation. Schools

would be required to advise parents of their child's screening and that screening was not a replacement for a comprehensive vision and eye examination.

I called to congratulate her and shared my own story. We have worked together ever since. Continuing resis-



Nora Waliczek and her son, Rich, Jr., pictured in the early 70's

tance was disappointing, especially from school administrators. The cost of comprehensive exams was always brought up. Of course, undetected reading problems have costs as well. Observations, tests, meetings, and then services provided by the school can be expensive. Unaddressed vision-related problems contribute to remediation costs and higher drop-out rates. The impact on future employment, as well as personal relationships, may be life-long. Today one in four students have an undetected vision problem that interferes with learning.

Janet and I formed the **VisionFirst Foundation** to educate, enact legislation, and to help families falling between cracks in the system. Background information and a resolution written by Janet for the Illinois PTA and National PTA were eventually adopted. As a member of the IFT, I presented this resolution to Local 571. With the WSTU's help it was adopted by the IFT which worked with other organizations to win passage this year. The Governor's last minute attempt to replace mandatory "exams" with "screenings" was overwhelmingly rejected in both houses of the state legislature.

Some news stories give all the credit to the Illinois Optometric Association and American Optometric Association. The impact of the **VisionFirst Foundation** has not been sufficiently acknowledged, and without the hard work of two moms, especially Janet, it's unlikely this would have happened at all.

The new law goes into effect January 1, but more needs to be done, if only to assure its proper implementation. The **VisionFirst Foundation's** web site (visionfirstfoundation.com) provides information and resources for parents, teachers, and school administrators. Donations to the foundation are welcomed and will keep the site available and up to date, as well as continue the campaign.

I am grateful to Jane Russell of Local 571 and Sharon Teefey, IFT Legislative Director, for helping to make this dream come true.

Geppert Takes Helm of Illinois Federation of Teachers

When Ed Geppert, Jr. took office as president of the Illinois Federation of Teachers on July 1, one of his major tasks was pushing for meaningful school funding reform at the General Assembly during the extended overtime session.

Geppert, elected president of the 90,000-member AFL/CIO-affiliated union in March, is no stranger to the long struggle to change how the state of Illinois funds public education. He stepped down as a member of the Illinois State Board of Education and came back to lead the IFT after a long career of activism on education funding reform.

"I have been involved in numerous efforts over the years to resolve the issue of inadequate funding for our public schools," said Geppert. "There have been blue ribbon task forces and gubernatorial commissions that proposed more money for schools, but the recommendations were never implemented. Constitutional amendments have been put to the voters and have come within a percentage point of victory. Class-action lawsuits were filed, but judges ruled that school funding was a legislative issue."

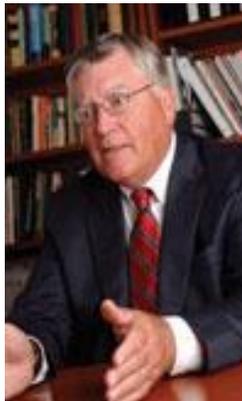
"What became clearer after each attempt was that the solution to funding education must come from the Illinois General Assembly. They have the power and the responsibility to craft a solution to this pressing problem."

"Adequately funding public education is one of the most important public policy issues we face in Illinois," Geppert noted. "I saw clearly during my years as an educator, and more recently as a member of the Illinois State Board of Education, how schools across this state struggle to provide high-quality education with woefully inadequate resources. This is a problem for urban, suburban, and rural school districts."

Geppert says he will continue the IFT's partnership with A+ Illinois, a leading coalition of community, civic, religious, and education organizations that is in the forefront of the fight for school funding reform.

Geppert has been an education leader in Illinois for nearly 40 years, serving as IFT chief of staff from 2002-2004 and as IFT secretary-treasurer from 1994-2001. In the decade prior to 1994, Geppert served as IFT assistant to the president for organization, supervising the field staff of the union. In each of these posts he worked to boost state support for elementary, secondary, and higher education. He began his education career as a high school social science teacher in Cahokia, Illinois.

Serving with Geppert is Marilyn Stewart, who became IFT Secretary-Treasurer. Stewart also continues to be the president of the Chicago Teachers Union. Stewart worked nearly three decades as a special education teacher, beginning her career at the Illinois School for the Deaf in Jacksonville. She later moved to Chicago and taught special education students in the Chicago Public Schools for 28 years before becoming CTU president in 2004.



WSTU Calendar

November

- 11/2-3—IFT PSRP Conference - Oakbrook
- 11/5—571 EB Mtg.-Westmont - 5:30 p.m.
- 11/5—571 HOR Mtg.-Westmont - 6:45 p.m.

December

- 12/10—571 EB Mtg. - Westmont - 5:30 p.m.
- 12/10—571 HOR Mtg.-Westmont - 6:45 p.m.
(Deadline for proposed amendments to the Local 571 Constitution & Bylaws)
- 12/14—Registration deadline for Reading Comprehension ER&D Course
- 12/21—Deadline for submission of names of delegates to the Local 571 Convention

January

- 1/14—571 EB Mtg. - Westmont - 5:30 p.m.
- 1/14—571 HOR Mtg.-Westmont - 6:45 p.m.
(Deadline for AFT Convention delegate nominations)
(Deadline for proposed amendments to the AFT Constitution & Bylaws to be presented to the AFT Convention)
(Deadline for applications for AFT PSRP Conference - committee to choose attendees)

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