



AFTerthoughts

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A Union of
Professionals

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AFTCA
Award Winner

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Springfield Lobby Day 2005

On April 13th, eleven of your colleagues made the journey to Springfield for Lobby Day. A new experience for many of us, myself included, we hoped for an opportunity to speak with our legislators about important education issues facing the state, as well as in our communities.

When we met with IFT officials to be briefed, three issues were put to the forefront: changing how we fund schools, the perilous nature of ERO, and protecting the pensions we have worked so hard for. These are issues I'm sure you are familiar with as they have appeared in the headlines over the last few months- in the case of equity in school funding, for the past few decades!

Along with many members of the IFT and IEA, the capitol was packed! Teachers and other education professionals had made the trip in order to speak with their senators or representatives, if only for a few minutes. Although not everyone was fortunate enough to talk to their representatives, many of the people there did.

After leaving the capitol, we enjoyed lunch at the governor's mansion. Unfortunately, he was not available to take any of our questions! We made our journey home knowing that we played a part in the IFT's plan to hold our government accountable on education issues.

We realize that alone one person's voice may not sway a member's vote. However, coupled with

by Dan Leib, Orland Park 135



Pictured seated: Tony Demma, 124; Debbie Gibbons, 124; Kathy Setlak, 943 President; and Eddie Caffey, 143½. Standing: Eileen McIntyre, 124; Nan Slewoski, 135; Dan Leib, 135; Deneen Pajeau, 135; Judy Spirakes, 943 Webmaster; Lori Johnson, 124; and Christine Dewey, 124.

the actions of our members such as the e-mails, postcards, and phone calls, we hope to employ enough clout to influence our lawmakers to make their decisions with the interests of our children in mind. That is why the time people have taken to do little things means so much. Without the messages and piles of mail that preceded our visit, our message and the significance of our presence would have been diminished. A thank you goes out to all those who contributed to the effort regardless of how small it may appear on the surface. As in many cases, the sums add up to a much greater whole!

Our Values Do Count!

By Karen Smith, Sahs 110

The joint conference of AFT Higher Education, Civil and Human Rights, and Women's Rights was held April 15-17 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The committees converged upon Washington D.C. in November and decided that this conference would be entitled Making Our Values Count: Advancing Equality, Education and Economic Security in Challenging Times.

The conference attendees ranged from university professors to health care professionals, and the plentiful workshops were open to everyone, regardless of position.

These included: "Moral Values, Politics and the Faith Factor," "Strengthening Women's Rights in Challenging Times," "Public Support for Public Education," and "The AIDS Pandemic."

AFT President Edward McElroy gave a rousing keynote speech connecting the issues educators and healthcare professionals face day to day with the moral values that were such key issues in the last presidential election. Other speakers included Donna Brazile (chair of the Democratic Party Voting Rights Institute), Norma Cantu (former Assistant Secretary of Education for

Human Rights), and Martha Burk (National Council of Women's Organizations).

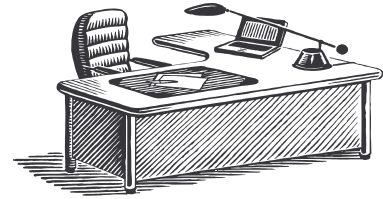
The conference exhibited that people can be involved in preserving human rights, yet these people also possess very strong religious and personal beliefs about values. A central theme was that the main issues in today's political world should be the economy, education, benefits, healthcare, and the creation of progressive values-based policies. The conference proved to be successful in sharing ideas, experiences, opinions, and strategies.

"Union gives strength"

Aesop
Author of a collection of Greek Fables

POLITICS! It's Your Life!!!!

Part 2---Social Security



At issue this month is Social Security. Local 943's membership consists of teachers and support staff members. Teachers are not entitled to a pension from Social Security. Some may qualify with credit from jobs worked outside of the teaching profession but will receive diminished pensions from Social Security. However our support staff members are covered by Social Security and IMRF. Social Security is an important part of their retirement income. Most of our family members are covered by Social Security. (See enclosed insert for more information.)

Right now we keep hearing from President Bush that Social security is going broke. His plan to fix it consists of two parts:

- privatization
• raising the retirement age and cutting benefits

Is Social Security going broke? The Social Security trustees calculate that Social Security will not have to reduce benefits until 2042. Changes need to be made but we must take time to strengthen Social Security. Modest commonsense measures such as lifting the cap on the amount of income taxed for Social Security and repealing the Bush tax cuts for the top 1% of taxpayers would strengthen the program. Recently Senator Barack Obama said we need to help working families build private pension funds like 401K's and increase savings on top of Social Security.

Go to http://www.unionvoice.org/campaign/sspledge to send an e-mail to your congressman and senators on this issue.

What is the union doing to combat this attack on our members' retirement? Local 943 has joined with the Illinois State AFL-CIO and the Illinois Federation of Teachers on this issue. Your building reps will be circulating a petition to save Social Security. Please sign it. Including your e-mail address will allow us to send alerts this summer for rallies and opportunities to picket at various investment companies that are supporting the privatization plan. Check our website--www.aft943.org--regularly for any updates on this issue.

ERO Efforts Continue. The IFT is continuing to work on Early Retirement Option (ERO) legislation for TRS. House speaker Michael Madigan has laid out four conditions that he says must be met for the ERO to be extended:

- 1. ERO cost must not be state's responsibility
2. The costs to the pension system for end-of-career salary bumps must be shifted away from the state
3. The way "unused" sick days are added to boost pensions must be reformed
4. Any contributions required to purchase additional service credit must be in line with other state employees.

As we go to press, nothing is certain. There is hope for those who are caught in the vise of having to put in for retirement two years ahead of the actual date of retirement to take advantage of district incentives.

Thanks for all your orange post-cards and e-mails. From now until the General Assembly adjourns, the IFT and Local 943 will keep delivering the message at every opportunity. Your help is vital in this campaign. Continue contacting legislators and checking the IFT website for updates and action alerts. Check for pension campaign information on the special "Protect Our Pensions! Protect Our Professions!" link on the IFT website www.ift-aft.org or

http://ift-aft.org/involvement/pension_campaign.htm.

Have you donated to COPE yet? This year, more than many others in the near past, certainly emphasizes the need for political action. Please see the article on the back page and make a donation today. Last month we received about \$500.00 in voluntary COPE donations. Thanks to all those who have already contributed.

In Unity,

Kathy Setlak

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PSRP Conference

by Donna Flanigan, Ridgeland Council 122

I want to thank Local 943 for giving me the opportunity to attend the PSRP conference in Anaheim on March 31 and April 1. I attended 5 different workshops relating to paraprofessional issues and union interests. I met many wonderful presenters and paras from states as far away as Alaska. The presenters were wonderful and showed us several useful tools that paraprofessionals can use in their schools.

I was most impressed with the workshop about portfolios. I learned the importance of a portfolio for paras as it pertains to the NCLB (No Child Left

Behind) act. I also learned that your portfolio should contain accomplishments, articles you have written or were written about you and/or recognition you have received professionally, as well as career choices you have made in your life. It is almost like a history of your life on paper. It isn't a very complicated project. All you need to begin is a 3 ring binder, several tabbed index dividers, protective sleeves and your certificates. I have plans to present a similar workshop to the support staff in our district at the beginning of next year.

I also had the opportunity to meet with media assistants from several states and compare job responsibilities. I was amazed at the diverse range of responsibilities paras have across the country. It was interesting to note that there isn't a standard for everyone to follow.

I believe that all paras in our local should experience a conference such as this once in their career. You can bring back to your constituents so much valuable information. I thoroughly enjoyed this learning experience and I look forward to attending future conferences.

NEGOTIATIONS UPDATE



The following contracts expire this year:
SAHS 110—teachers
Burbank 111—teachers and support staff
Oak Lawn- Hometown 123—teachers
Oak Lawn-Hometown 123—custodians
Orland Park 135—support staff
(reopener on salary)
Hoover-Schrum 157—teachers
Reavis High School 220—support staff
Southwest Cook County Cooperative for Special Education—teachers and support staff
We are also still working on contracts for two newly organized units—the Alsip 126 support staff and

the Ridgeland 122 custodians. We have been in negotiations with the Alsip group since last July and feel we are close to a settlement. We are hopeful that we will have a contract before school ends. In the case of the Ridgeland 122 custodians, we have filed an unfair labor practice charge against the district with the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board. The school board has refused to meet with us since mid-January.

The good news is that we **finally** got a settlement for the Lincoln 156 paraprofessionals. It is a two year agreement (for 2004-05 and 2005-06). Their next contract will be negotiated as a merged unit with the teachers. The settlement reflects a 3.5% increase for everyone in each of the two years of the

agreement. There is also additional money for education—50 cents an hour for 60 hours and an additional 25 cents per hour for those with 90 or more hours. In the second year of the agreement, those with 90 or more hours will get another 25 cents per hour increase. Thanks go to Mary Ellen Uribe, teacher union president for all her help and to the rest of the bargaining team: Thomasina Torres, Tammy Goede and Rosemary Flowers.

A petition has been filed to represent the teacher aides in Hoover-Schrum District 157. They are requesting to be represented in a merged unit with the teachers. If that election is successful, then we will be bargaining for them also.

Endorsements

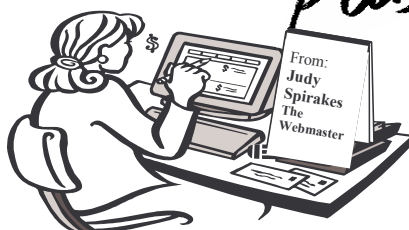
June 30 is the deadline for adding endorsements under old rules.



New endorsement requirements went into effect beginning July 1, 2004. However teachers may apply for endorsements under previous requirements through June 30, 2005. After that date teachers will have to apply under the new requirements, which in most cases require passage of a content area test. Through June 30th teachers can still add endorsements through a transcript evaluation process. Form 73-52, the Application for Endorsement of Issued Certificate, is available on the ISBE website:

http://www.isbe.net/certification/pdf/73-52_application_elem_hs_admin.pdf

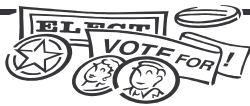
Membership Benefits



Since summer vacation time is almost here, don't forget to take advantage of the benefits available to you as a member of the AFT. Whether it is to save on lodging, rental cars, theme parks, or even arrange an exotic vacation tour – all of these and more are offered through AFT Plus. Just sign on to our website www.aft943.org and click on the About Us button to access the Benefits page. There you will find direct links to all travel-related benefits plus links to all the other benefits you are entitled to as a member.

If you have any questions concerning any of these benefits, you may either call me at (708) 424-4142 or e-mail me at jspirakes@ift-aft.org and I will be happy to find an answer for you.

Hoping everyone has a safe, happy and exciting summer vacation.



Politics: It Means Your Life

by Deneen Pajeau
Local 943 Vice President Political Action

For some it is difficult to conceptualize that being a school employee equates to politicians managing a portion of your life. When it is all said and done, one needs to realize that politics plays in to many facets of our daily lives, even more so because we are part of the public sector. The following may be blunt, but it is the truth.

Fact: When you are born your birth is registered by someone appointed by an elected official.

Fact: When you die, someone else appointed by an elected official records your death.

Fact: In between the cradle and the grave elected officials and their appointees determine:

- Collective bargaining rights
- The size of your class and the textbooks you may use
- The quality of air you breathe
- The amount of your pension
- Whether you can have a union represent you
- The cost of gas, electricity, water and phone service
- When you may retire
- The interest rates you pay

- The way education is funded
- The qualifications and certifications you need to teach
- The state revenue that will be provided to your district
- The cost of health care
- The income tax you will pay
- The protection of due process rights like tenure laws
- The nutritional value of the food you eat

These issues and many more are decided upon by the people we elect. Ask yourself if it is important enough for you and your union to stand behind the people that will stand up for your rights and benefits? If you believe it is important, there are many ways to get involved to make sure this happens. You can do any or all of the following; contact your legislators, develop a relationship with your school board, attend the IFT Lobby Day, contribute to Local 943 COPE (Committee on Political Education) fund or contact the Local to find out what else you can do. The Local is doing all of these and more to ensure that school employees' rights and benefits are being protected.



THANK YOU!

to those who represented their councils at the April Senate Meeting:

- 110 -- Karen Smith
- 111 -- Audrey Bukovsky and Janet Lence
- 122 -- Joan Salvaggio, Donna Flanigan, Janet Turek, Mary Stockwell and Dawn Stanovich
- 123 -- Nancy Tauchman
- 124 -- Lana Madsen
- 126 -- Bob Goldsbury
- 133 -- Adrian Harper
- 135 -- Donna Rehm,
Karen Kendall**, Deneen Pajeau,
Karen Ritter and Dan Leib
- 143½ -- Eddie Caffey
- 155 -- Judy Gerenda and Kristine Cochrane
- 156 -- Sue Benigni
- 229 -- Ruthann Jenkins, Janice Rooks and Beth Murphy
- SCCCASE -- Theresa Long**
- Kathy Setlak
- Sue Mirabella
- Judy Spirakes
- Ava Harston and Tavey Wright
- IFT Field Staff



** raffle winners



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SCHOOL IN
THE FALL



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Advance reservations required. Blackout dates may apply. Discounts cannot be used with other programs.



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