



Union Messenger

August-September 2008

Presidents' & Treasurers' Workshop Prepares WSTU Leaders For 08-09

The dog days of summer portend the coming school year. New as well as returning Council presidents and treasurers know summer's end is close when Local 571 holds its annual Presidents' and Treasurers' Workshop.

This year's workshop, conducted August 18, involved presentations by WSTU officers and staff. Council officers were briefed on changes voted at July's AFT Convention, educational issues being influenced by state and national politics, and Local 571 budget and financial management requirements.



Pam Sifuentes, Leslie Fischer, and Tiffany Denning study resource binders provided workshop participants.

After a short break, each group met separately to review duties specific to each leadership role to assure a successful 2008-2009.

IFT President Ed Geppert Addresses Local 571 Executive Board and House

IFT President Ed Geppert's visit with the Local 571 Executive Board and House on Monday evening is part of a campaign to talk with union members and leaders about the **No on Con Con** effort.



Geppert, IFT Secretary-Treasurer Marilyn Stewart, and members of the IFT administrative staff are traveling the state to convince members that a constitutional convention is unneeded and unwise.

The IFT has joined the Alliance to Protect the Illinois Constitution (APIC) which consists of a broad cross-section of people and groups including teachers, farmers, workers, and small business owners opposed to calling a constitutional convention.

A story on page 5 of this issue provides basic facts on this issue and challenge. October's *Union Messenger* will include additional details and explanation.

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AFT Endorses Obama

Thousands of delegates, gathered in July at Chicago's Navy Pier, gave an overwhelming endorsement to Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama.



Local 571 delegates receive information on the Convention floor from WSTU President Jane Russell.

New Members Ask: "Why Union?"

Union workers earn more and receive more benefits than workers who don't have a voice on the job through a union.

According to U.S. Department of Labor figures, the median weekly earnings of union workers is 30% greater than nonunion counterparts.

Health benefits are 59% greater, pension benefits 347% greater, and paid vacation 28% better than that of nonunion workers. Why union?

National Compensation Survey, 2007

American Federation of Teachers 2008 Convention—Unity and Strength

from your president

Forty-eight delegates from the West Suburban Teachers Union participated in the AFT's 2008 Convention on Navy Pier, July 10-14. Backdrop to the convention was a huge mosaic, each piece an image of the face of a member from one of the AFT's five divisions. **Together Greater Than >1 One**, the convention's theme, seemed to be reflected in every activity.

3,500+ AFT delegates enthusiastically supported teachers from Zimbabwe whose courage was acknowledged by AFT Bayard Rustin Human Rights Awards. Zimbabwe's ruling party has waged a brutal campaign of violence and intimidation against teachers and their unions. The fight for human rights and democracy in Zimbabwe continues.

Convention delegates opened their wallets in true solidarity after hearing a heart-wrenching story from a Resurrection Health Care worker fired from her hospital housekeeping job for union organizing, supposedly on the job. In addition to donating \$7,600 for the worker and her family, delegates signed petitions asking Resurrection Health Care to recognize the right of employees to form a union and not unfairly dismiss employees for supporting the organization of a union.

Illinois Federation of Teachers President Ed Geppert and Chicago Teachers Union President Marilyn Stewart warmly welcomed delegates to the Windy City on Friday. Chicago's Mayor Richard Daley and Illinois' U.S. Senator Dick Durbin also greeted the delegates.

On Saturday, Hillary Clinton thanked the AFT for its support in her presidential bid and rallied AFT members by asking them to put America back on the right track by electing Barack Obama as the next president of the U.S.

AFT delegates endorsed Obama shortly before he spoke to the convention via live satellite. Obama asked AFT delegates to "stand up with me and help secure a new direction for education which allows true opportunity for all students and doesn't blame educational failures on the teachers."

WSTU delegates witnessed the retirement of two long-standing AFT members and officers. Ed McElroy has served as an officer for 16 years, as the AFT President

since 2004. Nat LaCour, a union activist for over 35 years, has served the last four years as AFT Secretary-Treasurer.

Election of new AFT officers on Sunday was unique. The AFT is the only AFL-CIO affiliate to select three women for the top union positions. By now you probably know that Randi Weingarten, Toni Cortese, and Loretta Johnson were elected AFT president, secretary-treasurer, and executive vice-president respectively. Additionally, IFT president Ed Geppert and IFT secretary-treasurer Marilyn Stewart were among the 39 AFT vice-presidents elected to two-year terms on the AFT Executive Council.

Local 571's delegates attended convention sessions, divisional meetings, and various committee meetings. Over 100 resolutions and special orders of business were discussed, debated, and voted upon. The AFT's *Constitution and By-Laws* were amended.

There were also opportunities for networking and fun. WSTU delegates joined other IFT delegates for an IFT-sponsored dinner cruise. At the Pride of the Union Award reception, WSTU President Jane Russell represented the Local 571 and its Councils, accepting AFT awards for membership growth during the last two years. An AFT COPE reception recognized an "honor roll" of locals and state federations for raising vol-

untary political funds for the AFT's Committee on Political Education. Local 571 has participated in the AFT's Partners in Political Education for the last several years.

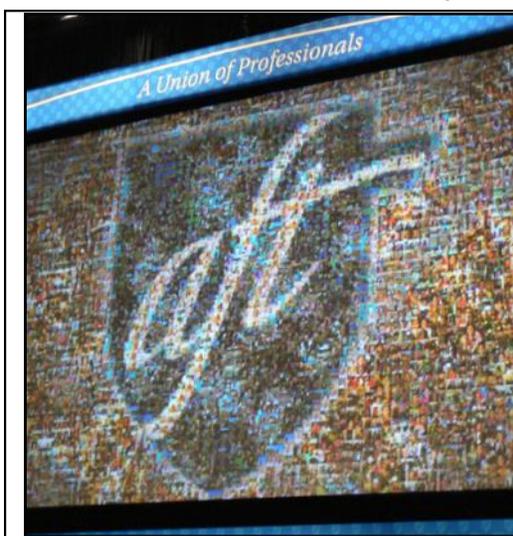
Monday morning, the Women's Rights Breakfast was held in Navy Pier's Grand Ballroom. In this wonderful setting, two Local 571 members were honored along with 73 other women with the AFT Women's Rights Living the Legacy Award. WSTU Treasurer Sandy Erickson and WSTU Area Trustee Kathy Greenawalt each received Silver Recognition for 30 years of union leadership and service.

We are already looking ahead to having a Local 571 delegation attend the 81st AFT Convention in Seattle Washington, July 7-11, 2010.

In unity,



Local 571 President



AFT Teachers Division Presenter Criticizes “Curricular Chaos”

by Bonnie Saracco

Michigan State University distinguished professor William Schmidt delivered a scathing analysis of U.S. curricular decision-making at the AFT Teachers division meeting of the summer AFT Convention. Contrasting U.S. math and science instruction with that of top achieving countries, Schmidt stated that the U.S. curriculum lacks focus, rigor, and coherence.

Schmidt’s research shows that in top achieving countries, there is a uniform progression through topics generated by the academic discipline itself. In the U.S., curricular decisions are made arbitrarily by nonexperts, resulting in “mile wide and inch deep instruction.”

An example of this is how first and second grade math students master only whole number meaning and operations in top achieving countries, giving them a solid and automatic foundation. U.S. students are bombarded with many additional topics.

Schmidt emphasized that the problem is exacerbated by the huge array of academic choices in high schools, as

many as 59 math courses and 55 science courses. The resulting tangled mess of course-taking sequences contrasts sharply with top achieving countries, where a common, rigorous sequence of courses is provided to nearly all students.



“KNOWLEDGE IS POWER”

The outcome, according to Schmidt, is greater opportunity to master high level skills. Schmidt said the idea in the U.S. has been that schools “should teach everything everywhere because somehow someone somewhere will learn something.”

One consequence is that many students, especially in low SES schools, are still learning arithmetic in high school. Remedial coursework in college is not uncommon. *The National Center for Educational Statistics* reports that 76% of college students who take remedial reading and 63%

of college students who take remedial math never earn degrees.

A few audience members contended that comparison with higher achieving countries is invalid because of a more heterogeneous U.S. student population. Schmidt countered that many of the top achieving countries have a similar diversity of ethnic and SES groups. The data in his research indicates that differences between our achievement and theirs is largely due to curriculum.

Although fixing this situation is beyond the power of individual teachers, Schmidt suggested possible action steps for teachers, such as continuing to develop the deep subject matter knowledge on which curricular coherence is based, pushing to reduce the number of high school courses, and working for rigorous and common national standards.

AFT Secretary-Treasurer Antonia Cortese pledged that the AFT will work on this issue, concluding that the quality of curriculum needs to be a major focus of today’s educational discussion.

Together We Are > 1

“After a long summer of fun, it’s finally over and time to get back to school! Instead of complaining and thinking about all the negative things happening in our education system, let’s take this time to jot down a list of things to improve in your classroom or your child’s education. We may not be able to fix it over night; but if we all work together and improve on the little things, things will get better.” Matt Rector—President, Guam Federation of Teachers

“Vision disorders are among the most common disabilities in the United States. We require children to have the appropriate immunizations, health examinations, and dental examinations before they attend school to make sure they are healthy and ready to learn; requiring comprehensive eye exams is just as important. We believe that a child should not have to fail to see. We proudly support this new law.” Jane Russell—Local 571 president in the August 26 *Chicago Tribune*

Local 571 ER&D Courses

READING COMPREHENSION

February 5, 12, 19, 26, March 5, 12, 19, 26

THINKING MATHEMATICS FOR MIDDLE

SCHOOL— JOURNEY TO ALGEBRA

February 5, 12, 19, 26, March 5, 12, 19, 26

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES THAT

WORK FOR ALL DISCIPLINES

June 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, September 26

MANAGING ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

August 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, September 26

Join West Suburban colleagues

**Taught by Local 571 Master Teachers
At the Robert M. Healey Conference Center
30 CPDU’s or 30 PTP’s**

**Credit Hours available for an additional fee
from Governors State University
or Prairie State College**

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2008-2009 Union Leadership Courses Announced

Professional development courses for the 2008-2009 school year are now posted on the IFT web site. Interested members are encouraged to speak with their Council president about council needs as soon as possible. The deadline for registration and payment is October 3. Courses are filled in the order registrations are received. Classes fill quickly.

- ◆ Courses presented and completed over a single weekend include **Bargaining Salary Schedules** (November), **Bargaining for Health Insurance Benefits** (February), and **TRS-Inside and Out for Leadership** (April).
- ◆ Courses requiring three weekends spread across the school year to complete include **Union Leadership Development**, **Introduction to Collective Bargaining**, **Grievance Administration**, and **Building a Political Powerhouse**.

Classes take place at the Robert M. Healey Conference Center in Westmont on November 8-9, February 7-8, and April 25-26. The IFT web site and Council presidents can provide complete course details and reimbursement information. Forms may be downloaded from www.ift-aft.org.

Local 571 Leaders Change Roles

Rosemont Council's Cathleen Pope assumed professional development coordinator duties for Local 571 on July 1 following the resignation of Leyden Council's Christine Schulz. Bonnie Saracco, Rosemont Council, will assist Pope. Schulz, who served several years as the professional development coordi-

nator, continues as a Local 571 trustee, and Pope continues as the Local 571 Secretary and Rosemont Council president.

Retireess Council member Joy Joyce assumes duties as a Local 571 trustee. Joyce was formerly a District 88 Teachers Council executive board member.

Cicero Council Members Attend June Fundraiser



Cicero Council members surround candidate Dan Kotowski (center). Pictured (from the left) Candy Svehla, Alice Kautsky, Roseanne Caravetta, Pam Servas, Kelly Walters, and Angela Caravetta-Strazzante. Kotowski is a former business executive running for the 33rd Illinois Senate district seat.

PSRP: In the News

News important to Local 571's PSRP members will regularly appear on this page of the *Union Messenger* again this year. Additional PSRP news and information will be posted on Local 571's web site: www.wstu571.org as well as on the IFT's web site: www.ift-aft.org.

The AFT represents more than 350,000 school support staff in K-12 districts, colleges, and universities. PSRP jobs include office employees, custodians, maintenance workers, bus drivers, instructional paraprofessionals and teacher aides, food service workers, school nurses and health aides, technicians, groundskeepers, secretaries, bookkeepers, mechanics, special education assistants, and hundreds of other job titles. In some schools PSRP members are called classified school employees, in others they are called support staff.

PSRPs make up the fastest-growing constituency group in the union. The IFT is officially recognized by the State of Illinois as a provider of professional development courses and workshops for teachers and PSRPs. Local 571 and the IFT are approved to award professional development credits to PSRP members. Information on training opportunities is available on the IFT web site under the **UNION PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT** listing.

Mark your calendars for the IFT 2008 PSRP Conference

October 10-11 is the date; Springfield's Crowne Plaza Hotel is the place for the IFT Paraprofessional and School-Related Personnel conference. From popular motivational speaker Dawn Mushill, whose emphasis is exceptional customer service, to workshops on legal, legislative, and political arenas, the conference has something for everyone. IFT President Ed Geppert will also address conference attendees. Proceeds from an annual gift basket raffle are used to fund scholarships for future conference attendance from locals which have not participated in the event. See your Council president for more information.

Illinois Budget Battle Continues, Cuts Remain

While legislators and citizens wait to see if Governor Rod Blagojevich will call another special session to address a Fiscal Year 2009 budget about \$2 billion out of balance, the governor's vetoes remain in place. Blagojevich summoned the Illinois General Assembly to Springfield in August to consider education funding and capital construction issues.

Legislative insiders expected little likelihood of any comprehensive action taking place because no consensus exists on how to pay for expanded state support for schools or how to pay for bonds to fund a \$25 billion capital plan.

Despite the governor's efforts to force the General Assembly to respond, the House and Senate refused to vote on either of the governor's announced special session topics. Also untouched were scores of cuts totaling over \$1.4 billion affecting many agencies, services, departments, and higher education.

Illinois higher education took some severe budget cuts from the gubernatorial vetoes; those cuts remain in force. In past years, the state shortfall has been made up by tuition and fee increases.

The IFT provides continuing legislative news related to educational issues on its web site. Look for the Legislative Update links at www.ift-aft.org.

Say "No on Con Con!"

On November 4, 2008, the question of whether to call a constitutional convention, or Con Con, will appear on Illinois ballots. The 1970 Illinois Constitution requires this question on the ballot every 20 years. In 1988, 75 percent of 3.6 million voters casting ballots voted against the issue.

To pass, the Con Con question requires a 3/5 vote, or 60 percent, of those voting on the question. It can also pass by a simple majority of total votes cast in the general election.

If voters approve Con Con, the Governor and General Assembly will decide how to structure the convention and how to elect 118 delegates (two from each of Illinois' 59 Senate districts).

Subject matter would not be limited. The entire constitution could be changed or rewritten. The cost of a convention would likely exceed \$100 million. Constitutional convention delegates would decide how to submit their proposals for a new constitution to the voters.

The IFT Executive Board is opposed to a constitutional convention. On December 11, 2007, the board adopted a resolution committing the IFT to educate voters that a constitutional convention is "unnecessary and unwise."



Grant Deadline Nears

KIDS IN NEED FOUNDATION Teacher Grants provide funds for K-12 classroom teachers with innovative ideas but no budget to bring them to life.

Projects may qualify if they make creative use of common teaching aids, approach the curriculum from an imaginative angle, or tie nontraditional concepts together for the purpose of illustrating commonalities.

Innovation and merit account for 40 percent of the evaluation. The maximum award is \$500 and the application deadline is September 30, 2008. Application information is online at <http://www.kidsinneed.net/grants>.

2008 Voter Registration Deadlines

GENERAL ELECTION November 4

Last Day to Register to Vote
October 7

GRACE PERIOD REGISTRATION & VOTING
First Day: October 8
Last Day: October 21

EARLY VOTING FOR ELECTION
First Day: October 14
Last Day: October 30

More information is at www.chicagolabor.org

WSTU Calendar

September

9/8—571 EB Meeting - Westmont - 5:30 p.m.
9/8—571 HOR Meeting - Westmont - 6:45 p.m.
9/23—990N Workshop - Westmont - 4:30 p.m.
9/24—990N Workshop - Westmont - 4:30 p.m.
9/27—TRS Benefits Seminar - Westmont
(for teachers retiring in 4-10 years) - 4:30 p.m.

October

10/10-11—IFT PSRP Conference - Springfield
10/18—571 Legislative Breakfast - Oakbrook
Doubletree Hotel
10/20—571 EB Meeting - Westmont - 5:30 p.m.
10/20—571 HOR Meeting - Westmont - 6:45 p.m.

November

11/4—Election Day - *Don't Forget to Vote*
11/8-9—IFT ULI Westmont
11/17—571 EB Meeting - Westmont - 5:30 p.m.
11/17—571 HOR Meeting - Westmont - 6:45 p.m.

New ISB Certification Requirements

All college and university transcripts must now be submitted in a sealed envelope directly from the college or university. Transcripts received that are not in a sealed envelope from the university, or not sent directly from the university, are to be considered unofficial and cannot be used for evaluation purposes. Also, as planned, individual teacher credentials are now available to the public on the ISBE web site. The IFT urges K-12 teachers to visit the ECS site to be sure their information is correctly posted.

Retiree News: Together We Are > 1

Members who were active in the union during their careers are staying connected in the IFT Retirees Chapter. The chapter organizes social events and outings, as well as lobbying trips to Springfield to press for improvements in retiree health insurance and to monitor legislation that impacts retirees.

Members interested in joining this very

active group should contact Judy Jennings at 630-468-4098 or by e-mail at jjennings@ift-aft.org.



Matt DuPree, Robert Angelica, and Bill Robinson take part in a summer Social Security and Medicare seminar.

Close to retiring? Members thinking of retirement will find the *Retiree Handbook*, written by members of the IFT Chicago Suburban retirees chapter, full of helpful information. A pdf copy can be reviewed, saved, or printed from the "CONSTITUENCY" link on the IFT web site.

Council Correspondents / Liaison Sought

Local 571 Councils are encouraged to appoint a publications correspondent, or liaison, who can provide Council items of recognition and interest for web or newsletter publication. Any member interested in such a role should contact her/his Council president for additional information.

Reminders...

571 TRS Pension Benefits Seminar
(for teachers retiring in 4-10 years)
Reservation deadline September 19

571 Legislative Breakfast 2008
Reservation deadline September 25

2008-2009 Union Leadership Courses
Reservation deadline October 3

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