



Vermont-NEA

TODAY

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Representative Assembly approves 2002-03 budget, sets Association direction

MONTPELIER — Delegates representing Vermont-NEA's local Associations met April 5-6 at the Capitol Plaza for the annual Vermont-NEA Representative Assembly. They approved the 2002-03 Vermont-NEA budget, made additions to Vermont-NEA Resolutions, debated and acted on 17 new business items, approved changes in the Bylaws, and on Friday evening attended the Association's annual Award Banquet.

The Budget

Delegates approved the budget unanimously, after a supportive statement by Linda Owen of Barre and without debate.

Resolutions

Proposed changes and additions to Vermont-NEA Resolutions also were approved unanimously and without debate. The new Resolutions, which are posted on the Vermont-NEA website -- www.vtnea.org -- address these issues:

- ✓ The need for affordable, high-speed, seamless internet access.
- ✓ Employment protection for education employees called to active duty military service.
- ✓ The right of employees to organize.
- ✓ The value of ethnic diversity among education employees.
- ✓ School policies that do not interfere with members participating in the Association.
- ✓ Retired members participating in Association activities.
- ✓ Promoting teaching as a career choice.

Bylaws

The Vermont-NEA Bylaws were amended by secret ballot at a Corporation meeting which was convened during the RA. These ballots, plus ballots mailed in by Association members not attending the meeting, were added and all three changes passed. They deal with the numbers of members represented by each member of the Board, the appointment of members to the Resolutions Committee, and moving the deadline for candidate pe-

titions from February 1 to January 15.

New Business

The major RA debate occurred over new business. Of 17 New Business Items proposed, nine were approved, three were defeated, three were withdrawn, one was referred to the Board of Directors, and one was tabled.

The NBI sparking the most debate was proposed by Judy Allard of Burlington. It asked that Vermont-NEA "research, recommend, publicize and actively support professional development programs that lead to national recognition/certification." Those in favor argued that the Association should support programs that recognize the expertise of teachers. Others questioned the need for the NBI and expressed concern about listing particular certification programs. Delegates voted to table the proposal, and later defeated an attempt to bring it up again.

Other New Business Items eliciting debate were:

- ✓ A proposal to establish a sliding scale for dues "to reflect the teacher's percentage of a fulltime position" was defeated.
- ✓ A proposal by David Schoales of Colchester to require pre-approval for field service expenses above the budgeted amount was referred to the Board.
- ✓ A proposal by Kathy Buley of South Burlington that no dues money be spent on alcoholic beverages was defeated.
- ✓ A proposal by Teri Vest of Twinfield that the Board of Directors hold no fewer than three regular meetings in southern Vermont was withdrawn. The most persuasive argument was by Frank Davis. "I live in Derby Line," he said, "and Montpelier is in Southern Vermont."

ESP Action

Education Support Professionals made their presence felt at this year's Representative Assembly, proposing and getting passed New Business Items aimed at improving Association



Alison Sylvester of Green Mountain-NEA proposed a New Business Item asking that the Association research, publish, and, where necessary, construct exemplary contract language dealing with working conditions.

services for ESP, including:

- ✓ A proposal by Linda Howard of Twinfield to examine professional development funds for ESP.
- ✓ Another proposal by Linda Howard to support professional development programs for ESP, focusing especially on ESEA and IDEA.

✓ A proposal by Sue Rusten of Windham Southeast to study ESP wages and develop a recommended salary schedule.

Professional Issues

Other professional issues received broad support from RA delegates, including: *Continued on page 5...*

INSIDE

Safe and hospitable schools for all 2

Candlelight vigil supports ESP 3

BEA organizes Kids Day ... 3

Kathryn Grace wins Award for Teaching Excellence 5

Human & Civil Rights Awards 6

Carolyn Godbout wins ESP Award 8

ESP at RA 9

Christine O'Donnell wins History Day prize 11

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Safe and hospitable schools for all

"I think we can't go around measuring our goodness by what we don't do or by who we exclude. I think we have to measure goodness by what we embrace, what we create, and who we include." In the award-winning film *Chocolat*, that unexpected Easter sermon message from suddenly emboldened Pere Henri defines a new moral imperative for his formerly hide-bound and suspicious French parishioners.

Similarly, the recent Report of the NEA Task Force on Sexual Orientation sets a higher standard for daily interpersonal relations in schools and asks us for assistance: "All members should be engaged in making the Association — and America's public schools — safe and hospitable for all." The Report was submitted to the NEA Board of Directors and approved without change. Most of its recommendations regarding NEA policies and programmatic activities then were forwarded to NEA President Bob Chase and to the NEA Executive Committee for consideration and implementation.

The 19-member Task Force comprehensively reviewed data from many sources and even evaluated personal testimony about the learning environments of students and the working conditions of school employees. Sadly, the Task Force concluded that "gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered students and education employees encounter a pervasive atmosphere of hostility at school, all based on individuals' actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identification." Verbal and sexual harassment, intimidating threats and obscene gestures, demeaning graffiti, and even physical abuse and assault characterize the "hostility" in classrooms and hallways and on school playgrounds and athletic fields. In addition, school employees also face employment discrimination, including the issuance of dismissals, suspensions, and transfers.

The Report recognizes that persistent sexual orientation/gender identification bias and reprehensible behavior too often is accepted and even condoned by society generally. In contrast, our schools must be stalwart community institutions of courage and justice. They must resist the tendency to look the other way or to minimize blatant attempts to humiliate and harm others, to crush the human spirit. In this regard, the Report indeed provides the background information needed by Association members and citizens to better understand why programs must be thoughtfully designed and funded to foster a safe and hospitable school climate for all students and employees, regardless of sexual orientation.

The Task Force found NEA's current policy framework adequate for more active advocacy. NEA already supports counseling and anti-bullying programs and age-appropriate health and sex education developed locally with representative parents in the community. It has long-standing language that promotes equality and respect for diversity, while deploring discrimination, stereotyping, and harassment. NEA also addresses employment rights by endorsing strong collective bargaining provisions, school district policies, and legislation that prohibit sexual orientation/gender identification discrimination.

The Report outlines further organizational steps that can and must be

Ruth Dwyer touched off a campaign furor by giving credence to a talk show caller's charge of a "homosexual agenda" in Vermont public schools backed by the National Education Association. A group of post-election House Republicans subsequently created bill H.259 to prohibit any school district employee from "encouraging, promoting, or sanctioning homosexual or bisexual conduct," or from advising that homosexual or bisexual orientation is "innate or unchangeable." The bill has not gained sufficient support among legislators, and an effort to use Town Meeting Day referenda to demonstrate widespread public acclaim for H.259 failed miserably.

The historical commitment of NEA and its State Affiliates to human and civil rights is part of our core mission. With Association assistance, racial, ethnic, and religious minorities have made substantial progress towards equal protection and equal opportunity under the law in our schools and

All students and school employees, regardless of personal sexual orientation, deserve equal treatment and a safe, inclusive, and hospitable learning and working environment within our public schools.

taken, however. It recommends that the NEA Legislative Program be amended to include overt Association support for a federal statute banning employment discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identification. It calls for the establishment of an advisory committee to provide guidance on these issues to NEA governance and staff. And, the Task Force suggests that pertinent essential information about sexual orientation/gender identification matters be refined and integrated more fully into existing NEA training and leadership programs, workshops, and conferences.

Associations at the state and local level and individual members have a role, too. The Task Force reaffirms our respect for local control and encourages schools and communities "to decide for themselves what [sexual orientation/gender discrimination] information should be included as part of the curriculum and what should be available as supplemental resources." Parents, community representatives, educators, and school board members all need to work together to provide curricula materials that are age-appropriate, fair and non-judgmental, and relevant to the subject matter and learning goals. State and local affiliates can help provide the advice, encouragement, and member support required to preserve local and respectful decision-making.

The Task Force findings and recommendations should be of special interest to Vermont-NEA members. Approximately 20 months ago, in the aftermath of the Legislature's controversial civil unions law, conservative Republican gubernatorial candidate

communities. However, the struggle for equality still is at an early, pivotal stage for students and adults who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered (a person who does not identify with his/her traditional gender role based on biological traits).

Unfortunately, constant critics of NEA view our stance against sexual orientation discrimination as a chance to tarnish NEA's public image and as a wedge issue to divide NEA's members and coalition partners. They realize that sexual orientation and gender identification issues are volatile and often tap into social and religious beliefs. The same nefarious ploy created internal and external criticism of NEA for its leadership role in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

All students and school employees, regardless of personal sexual orientation, deserve equal treatment and a safe, inclusive, and hospitable learning and working environment within our public schools. Students who struggle with sexual orientation/gender identification issues should have access to school support services that acknowledge the fact of higher at-risk rates for quitting school, for substance abuse, and for suicide. Teachers and ESP who happen to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered still should be able to rely on the same protections and rights as their colleagues.

Aren't such expectations simply fair and reasonable? If so, our Associations and public schools have key roles to play in helping to fully achieve the U.S. ideal of equal rights for all.

Copies of the Report of the NEA Task Force on Sexual Orientation can be obtained by calling Vermont-NEA.

Angelo J. Dorta, President

Candlelight vigil supports Hartford ESP

HARTFORD — Teachers and friends of the support staff in Hartford joined staff members for a candlelight vigil as contract mediation began on April 3. Some 80 people attended to support beleaguered Hartford paraeducators, secretaries, custodians and maintenance employees, who have been working for 21 months to settle their first contract.

The main sticking points in the prolonged negotiations are health insurance and wages. Support staff in Hartford must wait 4 years to be eligible for health insurance, and their co-pays are so high that insurance is unaffordable.

The wage situation is equally bleak. The Hartford staff proposes an \$8.75/hr starting rate for paraeducators, and \$9.33 for secretaries. It should be noted that according to research conducted by the Vermont Legislature, a livable wage in 2002 is \$10.93 an hour for a single Vermonter.

"We are dedicated to our students and our jobs, but without better pay and benefits, many of us may need to seek employment elsewhere," wrote Denise Post, library para at the high school, in a message to the Hartford Community. She added: "It will be hard to find a staff as qualified and dedicated as the staff we have now."

The mediation following the candlelight vigil failed, and the Hartford staff are continuing their work to achieve a contract. ■



Diane O'Bryan is a secretary at Hartford High School. She attended the candlelight vigil to support Hartford Education Association negotiators before their April 3 mediation session.

Burlington Education Association presents Student Achievement Awards, organizes Kids Day Parade

BURLINGTON — Public school students are center stage this month in Burlington, thanks to an ambitious recognition program organized by the Burlington Education Association. The Burlington School District and local businesses have joined the BEA effort as partners in celebrating the achievements of students.

First on the agenda are Student Achievement Awards to honor "those students who have attained the skills and attitude necessary to become productive members of the workforce or to further their education and training." Classroom teachers are recommending students who have met the qualifications in the area of Academics, as well as the qualifications in two of these three areas: Attendance, Community Service, and Behavior.

The recommended Student Achievers will receive certificates

signed by BEA President Terry Buehner and Superintendent of Burlington Schools Lyman Amsden at ceremonies at their schools.

Students are invited to march in a "Kids Day Parade" April 18 on Church Street in Burlington. Students

and their teachers will march behind a banner that reads:

BURLINGTON STUDENTS — BELIEVE, ACHIEVE AND SUCCEED.

Finally, Burlington area business are participating in this celebration of student achievement by donating prizes to be presented following the parade at a recognition ceremony on the Kids Day stage at the Burlington waterfront.

"We are looking forward to a great celebration and hope our Burlington community continues to support our school system by attending this celebration," says BEA President Buehner. "We believe that when our children imagine all the possibilities a well-rounded education can afford, anything can be achieved. When students' educational achievements are recognized, they are well on the road to a successful adulthood." ■



Rankings of the States

Vermont teacher salaries slip to 28th in nation

According to rankings compiled by our National Education Association, the average salary of public school teachers in Vermont in 2000-01 was \$38,254. This placed Vermont 28th among the 50 states and the District of Columbia, down from a ranking of 27th in 1999-2000 when the average salary was \$37,714.

The national average teacher salary was \$43,335 in 2000-01, \$5,081 more than the Vermont average. These are the 2000-01 rankings:

1	New Jersey	\$53,281*
2	Connecticut	\$52,693
3	California	\$52,480
4	New York	\$52,040
5	Michigan	\$50,694*
6	Pennsylvania	\$49,528
7	DC	\$48,704
8	Rhode Island	\$48,474
9	Alaska	\$48,123
10	Illinois	\$47,847
11	Massachusetts	\$47,789
12	Delaware	\$47,047
13	Maryland	\$45,963
	United States	\$43,335*
14	Indiana	\$43,311
15	Ohio	\$42,764
16	Georgia	\$42,216
17	Minnesota	\$42,212
18	Washington	\$42,137
19	Wisconsin	\$42,122
20	Oregon	\$41,711
21	North Carolina	\$41,151
22	Nevada	\$40,443*
23	Virginia	\$40,197
24	Hawaii	\$40,052
25	Colorado	\$39,184
26	Texas	\$38,361
27	New Hampshire	\$38,301
28	Vermont	\$38,254
29	Florida	\$38,230
30	Alabama	\$37,956*
31	South Carolina	\$37,938
32	Tennessee	\$37,431
33	Missouri	\$36,722
34	Kentucky	\$36,589
35	Iowa	\$36,479
36	Utah	\$36,441
37	Idaho	436,375
38	Maine	\$36,373
39	Arizona	\$36,302*
40	Kansas	\$35,901
41	West Virginia	\$35,888
42	Wyoming	\$34,678
43	Arkansas	\$34,641
44	Oklahoma	\$34,499
45	Nebraska	\$34,175
46	New Mexico	\$33,785
47	Louisiana	\$33,615
48	Montana	\$33,249
49	Mississippi	\$31,954
50	North Dakota	\$30,891
51	South Dakota	\$30,265

* estimated

Full page UVM Ad

ASSOCIATION

Representative Assembly continued from page 1...

✓ A proposal by Judy Allard of Burlington to establish and fund an Association Teaching and Learning Program as described already in Vermont-NEA Bylaws.

✓ Another proposal by Judy Allard to support professional development programs for teachers.

✓ A proposal by Jeff Isham of Valley EA to initiate pilot programs to form student local Associations.

✓ A proposal by Teri Vest of Twinfield to promote career opportunities in education for secondary students.

✓ Proposals by Alison Sylvester of Green-Mountain-NEA and Teri

Vest to investigate and publicize educators' working conditions and to publish exemplary contract language.

Awards Banquet

The banquet on Friday night opening the Vermont-NEA Representative Assembly has become a tradition that reminds all who attend how important the Association's business is. Delegates, award winners, and their guests gather to honor the recipient of Vermont-NEA's Teaching Excellence Award, to celebrate contributions to human and civil rights by students, citizens and teachers, and to reward the potential of students with \$1,000 Maida F. Townsend scholarships. ■



Scholarship Committee members (L-R) Ann Lavery, Corrie Palmer and Lucinda Clark congratulate Abby Gelin, winner of one of six \$1,000 Association scholarships. She is the daughter of Winton and VT-NEA member Linda Gelin.

Scholarship winner Richard Waite, the son of VT-NEA member Richard Waite and Laurie Hurowitz, could not attend the awards banquet. But the other winners are pictured here...



Delegates Joyce Sullivan of Brattleboro and Chris Wood of Chittenden South discuss a proposed New Business Item.



Scholarship winner Heather Martel is the daughter of VT-NEA member Frank Martel and Evelyn Martel.



Scholarship winner Daniel Kahn is the son of VT-NEA members David and Joyce Kahn.



Barre City delegates at the Rep. Assembly were (seated L-R) Pat Woodward, Tom Luce, (back L-R) Gary Baack, Sharon Baack, Maggie Bensen, and Tom Roberge,



Kaitlyn O'Donnell is the daughter of VT-NEA member Martina O'Donnell and John O'Donnell.



Kit Basom is the daughter of VT-NEA members Nash Basom and Mariel Hess.

Kathryn Grace wins Vermont-NEA Award for Teaching Excellence

MONTPELIER — Kathryn E.S. Grace, special educator at Founders Memorial School in Essex Town, is winner of the 2002 Vermont-NEA Award for Teaching Excellence. She was honored April 5 at the Awards Banquet at the start of the Association's annual Representative Assembly.

Kathi was nominated for Vermont-NEA's most prestigious award by Ann Rathbone, a fellow teacher at Founders School, who wrote: "I think Kathi Grace is what this award is all about. Her tireless efforts, her energy, her considerable knowledge, her sacrifice on behalf of her belief that every child can read surely qualifies her for this award..."

Kathi Grace holds a BS in Elementary Education, an MEd in Reading and Language Arts, and a CAGS in Language and Learning Disabilities. She has been teaching for better than 26 years, serving her district as a classroom teacher, remedial reading specialist, assessment specialist, language arts coordinator, and now, after years of broad experience in education, Kathi has chosen work as a learning specialist, where she has daily learning interactions with children.

"For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to be a teacher," said Kathi in her award nomination essay. She continued, explaining how her upbringing is the basis for her commitment to teaching and her faith in education: "I have fond memories of playing school with my eight siblings and accompanying my older sister to her fourth grade classroom to spend time with her struggling readers. My mother, who worked long hours at a clothespin factory, would quiz us on spelling words and times tables as we washed the dinner dishes. She would sing rhymes from storybooks that still dance in my head.

"My father, who reluctantly quit



Kathi Grace of Essex accepted the Vermont-NEA Teaching Excellence Award from Vice President Bonnie Tuscany (L) and President Angelo Dorta (R) at the April 5 Awards Banquet.

Graduate Equivalency Degree at age 52 after mass tutoring sessions with his children. Education was clearly a family affair in our house..."

Kathi believes in the potential of every child. "My experiences, which range from the severely challenged autistic child with limited language abilities to the mildly learning disabled, have confirmed for me the possibilities that lie within every child when treated with respect, love, patience,

the third grade, often based on their inability to read and write. This problem, plus a proposed cut in special education funding in 1993, prompted Kathi to contact Jeb Spaulding, then chair of the Vermont Senate Education Committee. At his request, she recruited professionals to enlighten the committee about literacy issues in Vermont, and after weeks of testimony, language that stressed early intervention and the goal of reading by

workings of Vermont classrooms."

Kathi has written an individualized reading inventory and several literature units that match text to readers. She has authored a procedure that teaches children and teachers how to map sounds to print, known as Phoneme-Grapheme Mapping, which she will be presenting at the International Orton Dyslexia Society's annual meeting next year. She authored and taught a workshop called "Teaching Writing Effectiveness" to practicing teachers and special educators; it offers implementation supports and strategies for Vermont's Writing Portfolio program.

As Vermont-NEA Vice President Bonnie Tuscany presented the Association's Award for Teaching Excellence and the accompanying \$1,000 prize to Kathi Grace, she read aloud one of Kathi's reflections:

"My life's work rests in the hearts and dreams of children. Each child is a special gift, loaned to us for a brief school day. By working together, I do believe we can affect their destiny."

Kathi Grace now is Vermont-NEA's nomination for the NEA Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence, which carries with it a \$25,000 prize. Vermont-NEA certainly is well represented! ■

I think Kathi Grace is what this award is all about. Her tireless efforts, her energy, her considerable knowledge, her sacrifice on behalf of her belief that every child can read surely qualifies her...

school at age sixteen to work on the family farm, instilled in us the value of a good education, the 'richness of being poor,' and the importance of community service... Although he often had three jobs to support our large family, he still found time to serve in the legislature and on the local school board. His most prideful accomplishment, however, was the earning of his

understanding and acceptance," she said.

Literacy is an area of special interest for Kathi, and she believes that all children must and can learn to read, given appropriate instruction. But she became concerned when she observed that increasing numbers of students were being given behavioral or attention labels before they reached

age nine was embedded in House Bill 527.

Kathi also has been involved in the TIME for Teachers project, serving as a Master Teacher, Mentor, Mentor Coordinator, and TIME instructor since 1994. She says: "I have continually advocated to improve the course content and delivery so it is 'teacher friendly' and grounded in the daily

AWARDS



Above: Vermont-NEA Human & Civil Rights Committee Chair Beth Dutton (L) presented an HCR to Emily Lester, a student at Twinfield Union School.
 Left: HCR Award winners (top) Edwards “Chip” Porter of Burlington, (center) Louella “Peg” Bryant of Green Mountain-NEA, and (bottom) Donna Sweaney of Woodstock. Not pictured: Dale Newton of Twinfield.

HCR Award winners honored

MONTPELIER — Four teachers and a student were honored at the Vermont-NEA annual Awards Banquet for their work supporting civil rights. Vermont-NEA Human & Civil Rights Committee Chair Beth Dutton presented the awards and described the good work of award recipients.

Emily Lester, a student at Twinfield Union School, is engaged in creating a system that would provide tuition options for children in Vermont’s Foster Care Program in order to allow these children to attend colleges in Vermont.

Emily worked with teacher Dale Newton looking into similar programs in other states and then met with legislators to tell them her idea, and testified in committee in the House of Representatives in support of her proposal, which now is a House bill.

Dale Newton of Twinfield, the teacher who assisted Emily Lester with her extraordinary project to help other students, teaches a unit called “Project Citizen/We the People.” Its purpose is to encourage social respon-

sibility and activism among middle school students, goals that Dale Newton achieves. “Dale is the kind of example and guide to Emily and his other students that all teachers hope to be...” said Beth Dutton.

Chip Porter of Burlington is widely known for his efforts in the arena of human and civil rights. He raises funds for diversity learning materials; he is involved in state and local politics; he is an Association negotiator; and he serves in Vermont LEADS: Leadership for Equity, Anti-Racism, and Diversity in Schools. According to Beth Dutton, “His is a record of humanitarian concern.”

Louella “Peg” Bryant of Green Mountain-NEA was nominated for the HCR Award by President Angelo Dorta for her professional work with students and her authorship of two novels -- *The Black Bonnet* and *Father Blood* -- which focus on issues of racial and gender equity and broad appreciation of cultural diversity.

Peg has designed a literature based, multi-cultural unit, with books

and short stories by authors from a variety of racial and ethnic heritages.

Donna Sweaney, a guidance counselor in Woodstock, is the only Vermont-NEA member who is a member of the Vermont House of Representatives. Her voting record on issues that concern the Association is 100%.

Beth Dutton nominated Donna for the HCR Award, saying: “She is a committed and devoted advocate of human and civil rights... She has worked with us to assure that there will be safe public school environments for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students of our state; and she successfully coordinated legislative efforts for the removal of the Windsor County Youth Court’s 2001 sunset provision, making it possible for Vermont’s only such court, made up entirely of young people, to continue its civic work with young people.”

Beth says, “All of Vermont’s communities should have the good fortune to have a Representative such as Donna Sweaney.” ■

Colorado's JoAnn Falk wins national ESP Award

BIRMINGHAM, ALA — Our National Education Association has bestowed its Education Support Professional (ESP) of the Year Award to JoAnn Falk of Pueblo, Colo. The ESP of the Year Award is the NEA's highest honor for professionals in the field of educational support. Jo Ann Falk, central office secretary for Pueblo District 70, is the eleventh recipient of the award. Ms. Falk's work for public education, her leadership among ESP staff, and her dedication to students earned her this honor.

NEA President Bob Chase had words of praise for the award winner. "JoAnn is a tribute to the hardworking education support professionals across the country," he said, recalling how she fought for bargaining rights for her fellow ESPs. "From convincing colleagues to join the Colorado Education Association, to recruiting school board candidates sympathetic to the needs of classified employees, to standing up to the administration, JoAnn has put her fellow support professionals and the students they serve first."

Over her many years of work in Pueblo District 70, JoAnn has demonstrated a strong commitment to the development of school programs and the role of ESP employees. While working as a media technician at South Mesa Elementary, JoAnn created the first Elementary School Media Center in Pueblo District 70.

Serving as president of the Association of Classified Employees/CEA/NEA since 1994, JoAnn won bargaining rights for ESP workers and organized grassroots campaigns for board member elections. In 1999, she won the CEA's ESP Award, in recognition of her contributions of behalf of public education.

JoAnn currently works as the central office secretary for Pueblo District 70, and is active in her church council. She also serves on the advisory board of ACOVA (A Community Organization for Victims Assistance), under the direction of the county sheriff and police department.

NEA's ESP of the Year receives a \$10,000 award, half of which is presented to the charity of his or her choice. JoAnn Falk's contribution will help support the Pueblo District 70 Educational Foundation, which provides funding for special reading, math and science programs outside the classroom. ■

Carolyn Godbout wins Vermont-NEA ESP Award

BURLINGTON — "Carolyn Godbout is an exceptional paraeducator!" says Rutland teacher Carolyn Ravenna, who submitted the successful nomination of Carolyn Godbout for the 2002 Vermont-NEA Education Support Professional (ESP) Award. Godbout is a member of the Rutland School Staff Association.

In the nomination, Ravenna said that Carolyn Godbout "makes each classroom that she works in the most rewarding educational environment for all students. She works closely with both special educators and regular educators at Rutland High School."

Carolyn Godbout was honored on March 22 at the Vermont-NEA ESP Leadership Conference at the Radisson Hotel in Burlington. Her achievement was celebrated by more than 200 people at dinner, where she received a \$1,000 prize.

Godbout heads a district-wide innovation called STEP — Standards, Education and Training for Paraeducators. The STEP committee was organized in response to the enactment of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1997, which recognized the role that paraeducators play providing services to students with disabilities. STEP, whose effort was featured two years ago in our NEA newspaper, works for professional training and high standards for all school support staff.

Godbout designed courses for paraeducators that were offered at the Stafford Technical Center last spring and at the start of this school year. "Carolyn Godbout is an incredible leader," according to Ravenna. "We have seen that during the past few years the amount of training and support for paraeducators has increased. This is evident within the Rutland Public Schools because paraeducators are seen as an integral part of the faculty and staff."

As winner of the Vermont-NEA ESP Award, Carolyn Godbout will be Vermont-NEA's nominee for the National Education Association's ESP Award. "Carolyn is exactly the high



Carolyn Godbout (L) was nominated for the Vermont-NEA ESP Award by Rutland teacher Carolyn Ravenna (R).

quality professional that we are proud to put forward for the NEA Award," says Vermont-NEA President Angelo J. Dorta. "The Rutland community is very fortunate to have a person of Carolyn's calibre serving its school children."

Honorable mentions for this year's Award went to Sue Rusten of the Windham Southeast Education Association and Loriann Darrell of the Springfield Staff Association.

Vermont-NEA has presented the ESP Award each year since 1993 to recognize the important role of Education Support Personnel within the Association, and to honor their outstanding contributions to children,

school and community.

Past winners of the ESP Award are: Janice Sicard, Paraeducator, Orleans Central EA in 1993; Christine Allard, Paraeducator, Chittenden South EA in 1994; Mary Smokoski, Cook, Orange Southwest EA in 1995; Ron Watts, Custodian, Woodstock Elementary EA in 1996; Mary Hobbs, Library Assistant, Blue Mountain Union EA in 1997; Alfa Gautreau, Secretary, Orange East EA in 1998; Lynnca Perkins, Paraeducator, Fairfield EA in 1999; 2000; Karen Greene, Paraeducator, Winooski EA in 2000; and Cheryl Currier, AV Coordinator, North Country Union EA in 2001. ■



Sunshine from Northfield

BURLINGTON — Not all was hard work and study at the Vermont-NEA ESP Conference at the Radisson Hotel last month. Paraprofessionals from Northfield Elementary School were greeted at the Conference banquet by two of their colleagues decked out in Hawaiian flowers and sunshine headbands.

Dotty Rowe (L) and Julie Herbert (R) got there early to decorate the Northfield table with soap bubbles, plastic sunglasses and plastic bracelets, a plastic airplane, a couple of hula dolls, a pail for sand, and a pineapple. Dotty and Julie explain: "We're currently in the middle of contract negotiations and they've been going extremely well. We've so far gotten everything that we've asked for. We figured we couldn't take our people to Hawaii to celebrate, so we'd bring Hawaii to them. This is kind of our little Hawaii away from home. ■

ESP action at the Rep Assembly

MONTPELIER — Education Support Professionals made their presence felt at this year's Representative Assembly. They proposed and got passed New Business Items aimed at improving Association services for ESP, including:

- ✓ A proposal by Linda Howard of Twinfield and seconded by Corrie Palmer of Ferrisburgh to examine professional development funds for ESP.

"Vermont-NEA will examine professional development funding needs for ESP members. The Board of Directors will construct a plan for providing subsidy funding for ESP professional development activities. The Board of Directors will present this plan, including budget accommodations, at the 2003 Representative Assembly."

- ✓ Another proposal by Linda Howard and seconded by Corrie Palmer to support professional development programs for ESP, focusing es-

pecially on ESEA and IDEA initiatives.

"Vermont-NEA will research, recommend and actively support programs that provide professional development opportunities for ESP. This activity will especially focus on addressing professional development needs in response to the ESEA and IDEA initiatives. The Board of Directors will report on the status of this initiative at the 2003 Representative Assembly."

- ✓ A proposal by Sue Rusten of Windham Southeast to study ESP wages and develop a recommended salary schedule.

"To request that Vermont-NEA form an ESP wage study committee in order to develop a salary schedule similar to the \$35,000 - \$70,000 teacher salary proposal. The goal is to consider the Vermont Livable Wage figures in these calculations to raise the level of ESP wages."

200 attend VT-NEA ESP Leadership Conference

BURLINGTON — Education Support Professionals from throughout Vermont spent a Friday night and Saturday late in March at the Radisson Hotel in Burlington celebrating the past year's ESP bargaining successes and learning how to accomplish even more.

Attendance this year was higher than ever. At the ESP banquet on Friday evening, over 200 ESP, their guests and Association staff cheered as Carolyn Godbout of the Rutland Support Staff Association accepted Vermont-NEA's annual ESP Award.

An ESP Success Panel rounded out the evening, with: Mary Ann Black of Rutland; Barb Bouffard of Swanton, Cindy Bubrowski of Montpelier, Shelly Jones of Lamoille UHS, Sue O'Brien of Winooski, and Denise Post of Hartford each describing successful activity in their local.

"We certainly learned a lot," said Mary Ann Black after describing organizing work in Rutland. "And now, our school board knows who we are."



Gilbert Marsh, a janitor at Hazen High School, was the founder of the ESP union at his school. Here he enjoys the ESP banquet.

Cindy Bubrowski of Montpelier got a laugh when she told about the but-tons Montpelier Education Support Staff (MESS) wore during their contract crisis: "Ask me why I'm a MESS."

On Saturday, conference participants attended workshop tracks on Wages & Benefits; Working Conditions & Rights; Bargaining Skills & Behavior; Organizing Winning Campaigns; and Building Strong & Effective Associations.

Retirement benefits for ESP are long overdue

As members of the Retirement Committee representing the Education Support Personnel of the Windham Southeast Education Association, we would like you to give serious consideration to this article: Retirement Benefits for ESP Are Long Overdue. We hope you will support our cause. Please contact us with any questions or comments you might have.

*Claudia Fanto 257-1194
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Last year, after devoting over thirty years to the Brattleboro School District, one of our co-workers decided to leave the field of education. During those years, she always went above and beyond her job requirements to help in any way she could. In order to better herself and bring more knowledge to her job, she attended workshops and even got a degree from Norwich College. Her personal life was very difficult at times, but she never let it effect her work at school. She was an inspiration to many of us and much loved by the children.

And so, after all those years of dedication to the Brattleboro School District, making little more than thirteen dollars an hour, she was given two thousand dollars for accumulated sick leave, a good-bye, and no retirement benefits.

Many of us found this to be so unconscionable that it became apparent we had to become more involved in seeking retirement benefits for educational support personnel. Our goal is to begin with the Windham Southeast Supervisory Union, but, hopefully, this effort will expand to all of Vermont and, yes, to the rest of our nation, as well. It is time!

For years when ESP negotiations were taking place, many of us would list retirement benefits as our number one priority. Our negotiators would come back with reasons why retirement could not be negotiated: it had to come from the district, or it had to come from the state, or teachers' retirement would be affected -- all excuses we were never clear about.

Since we are told that we are an integral part of the educational system, shouldn't we be receiving benefits that other members of the team are receiving? The educational system does not run smoothly by just administrators and teachers. Take away the paraeducators, take away the custodians, take away the secretaries, bus drivers and cafeteria workers, and how well would the system work? We think you will agree, as would most administrators and teachers, that the system just

could not function. Since we are such an essential part of the Windham Southeast Supervisory Union, we want to be treated and respected like every other member.

Initially, 'aides' were hired primarily to run off paperwork for teachers and to oversee students at recess, lunch and bus time. They generally worked part-time and did not stay in the position for long durations. However, over the years, their role has changed significantly. Today, paraeducators not only continue to do the above tasks, but have many more complex responsibilities.

Paras now are expected to work directly with students in a teaching capacity, often including preparing lesson plans. Classroom paras are also expected to sub whenever the teacher is absent and to do this without para support. Because of these new expectations, paras participate in many workshops, courses, and other educational training programs in order to be more effective in their jobs. Having gained much expertise, they are now considering these positions as careers rather than short term jobs.

If the educational system wants a staff of well qualified members, committed to long-term employment, then the members must be provided with proper incentives, such as a retirement package. An excellent staff is needed to achieve excellence in education.

Any company hiring a staff of members benefit packages which will entice employees to remain with the organization. The longer they remain with the company, the more skilled they become. The more skilled they become, the better the company functions. One of the drawing factors to keep employees is a retirement package. If you look in the want ads, even McDonald's offers retirement benefits. Surely, the educational support personnel are worthy of benefits too.

We strongly believe the time has come for retirement benefits to be available to all employees, not just some!



PTSSR offers complimentary book to teachers

MONTPELIER —A complimentary copy of *Stronger than the Storm*, a novel based on the real life of a teenage girl in South Africa who is raped and then contracts AIDS, is still available to teachers without charge — thanks to a special grant from Vermont-NEA through the Association's

Partnership/Sponsorship Committee. The book is being promoted for use in American high schools by Parents, Teachers & Students for Social Responsibility. To get a copy, plus some information about PTSSR, email Dr. Glenn Hawkes at ptssr@together.net

Hartford and Otter Valley teams win Vermont State Debate Tournament

MONTPELIER — Hartford High School and Otter Valley Union High School teams won top honors at the Vermont State Debate Tournament in March.

According to judges, the novice debate team from Hartford had the rationale and a plan to demonstrate that United States foreign policy could significantly limit the use of weapons of mass destruction.

After three rounds of preliminary debate at Montpelier High School and a championship round at the Vermont State House, Courtney Merrill and Jonathon Kent of Hartford won the championship as best novice policy debate team in Vermont.

The Burlington High School Team of Nina Meijers and Ali Biss, their op-

ponents, placed second as they tried to prove the weakness of the affirmative case.

Aimee Rosato and Lee Varian of Otter Valley UHS won the varsity division competition for the second year. Hannah Fjeld and Ethan Nelson, also of Otter Valley, placed second.

Judges for the tournament included educators, attorneys, legislators, and business people who had debate and judging experience.

The Vermont State Debate Tournament is sponsored by Vermont-NEA, the Vermont Bar Association, Cabot of Vermont, the Vermont Principals' Association, and the Vermont Debate and Forensics League. Call William Haines, VDFL President for information 229-9303. ■

Advice of counsel

Protect yourself: Be sure any school field trip is extremely well organized, supervised

Vermont-NEA Associate General Counsel Donna Watts offers this advice to educators planning field trips with students:

School sponsored field trips, whether for the day or an extended trip, can be a great experience for the students. However, they also are full of opportunities for problems for the educators who chaperone them. As spring break approaches, lessons can be learned from a recent trip from a Vermont high school which lead to the resignation of the two staff members who accompanied students to the Dominican Republic.

✓ You should be intimately aware of your District's policies around chaperones and standards for student and chaperone behavior.

- Are you responsible 24 hours a

day, even if the students are staying with host families?

- What is the plan if a student violates alcohol, drug and smoking policies?

✓ There should be a meeting with parents, students, chaperones and the administration before the trip to clearly articulate the rules and the consequences for breaking those rules. The consequences should be rigidly enforced.

✓ Be sure that the chaperones either are school employees or are parents.

Your job and/or your license could be on the line if a trip goes awry. Think about the purpose of the trip and the difficulty of the supervision involved before committing to lead one of these trips. School boards and communities will not be very understanding in today's climate if the students' behavior gets out of hand. You may pay the price, so be sure any trip is extremely well organized and supervised. ■

1/4 page Canter Ad

Christine O'Donnell wins Vermont-NEA History Day Award

MONTPELIER — Students from throughout Vermont show their projects and compete each year at the Vermont History Day competition,

sponsored by the Vermont Historical Society. The kids win awards and the right to compete in the National History Day contest.



Vermont-NEA Partnership/Sponsorship Committee chair Joyce Sullivan (R) surprised Christine O'Donnell (L) with the Association's History Day Award.

One award presented at Vermont History Day recognizes the tremendous effort of teachers who participate in the History Day program. Teachers guide their students' research and coach History Day teams, all on top of a demanding classroom load.

This year, Vermont-NEA member Christine O'Donnell of Champlain Valley UHS was honored at the annual Vermont History Day competition. "She is just a wonderful teacher," said student Adriene Katz of CVU. "Her classes are very challenging."

Eric Peterson, National History Day Coordinator for Vermont also appreciates Christine as a teacher. "She has been involved in the program for a number of years," he points out, adding: "She has been involved both as a judge and a teacher. Her support and advice have been particularly helpful since I am still a bit of a rookie at this."

Christine was honored at the History Day Competition at Montpelier High School on April 6. She won a certificate of appreciation and a \$250 prize. ■

Essex HS team wins 2002 Vermont-NEA Scholars' Bowl

BURLINGTON — The questions put to student scholars competing in the Vermont-NEA Scholars' Bowl are tough, ranging from computer science to the wives of Henry VIII, from complex math problems to the Tea Pot Dome Scandal. But Vermont student scholars are tough, too. Each year since the start of this formal intellectual challenge fourteen years ago, our Vermont students have proved their academic prowess.

This year, it is the student scholars from Essex High School, coached by English teacher Sue Pasco, who prevailed at the Vermont-NEA Scholars' Bowl Championship. They defeated the Champlain Valley Union High School team, coached by John Bennett, 210-180, for the championship. In playoffs earlier in the day, they beat the Burlington High School team, coached by David Rome, 240-200.

The Essex High School team will represent Vermont at the Panasonic Academic Challenge in Orlando, Florida in June. This is the second championship for Essex, which also



The Essex HS team won the 2002 Vermont-NEA Scholars' Bowl Championship April 13. L-R: Scholars' Bowl President David Rome, Essex HS Coach Sue Pasco, team members Andrew Bickford, Jack McClintock, Kyle Bokash, Jimmy Vanzo, John Son, Peter Ebbers. On the right is Bill Haines, representing Vermont-NEA, sponsor of the Scholars' Bowl.

won the statewide competition in 1995.

Scholars' Bowl President David Rome says that years ago, it was assumed that a championship team from a small state like Vermont didn't stand much of a chance in competition against teams from larger states. But,

he reminds us with pride, "Team Vermont" has made the semifinals three times in the past five years.

The Scholars' Bowl is a Vermont-NEA partner organization. The Association is the chief sponsor and major funding source for this academic competition. ■

Letter

Celebrate the Labor Movement on May Day

This letter is in reference to your article about Law Day.

May First was designated as Law Day, late in the McCarthy era, as a cold war tactic.

Law Day was just one more reaction to the Red Scare of that time. It became Law Day vs. May Day (International Labor Day).

May Day has been an honored tradition amongst people in the Labor

Movement around the world. Even though we associate it with Communism and the Soviet Union, the movement started in Chicago as a result of the Haymarket Affair, which produced a trial that resulted in the hanging of four innocent labor leaders. That injustice reverberated around the world and resulted in International Labor Day being adopted in 1889 to honor those executed in the cause of the eight-hour workday movement.

On May 1st in Brattleboro, we will

be celebrating on the Common our 18th May Day in honor of labor and the labor movement. We have no real objection to Law Day except in the context of its being an historic slap in the face against workers. Law and Justice must always go together.

For more information on our big day, please call me at 387-4060! Or email me at badgefox@together.net.

In Solidarity,
Mal Herbert
Retired Member

Vermont-NEA 3-1(g) Plan to Achieve Ethnic Minority Representation at the NEA Representative Assembly

1. Vermont-NEA Statement of Commitment: Vermont-NEA supports the policy set forth in NEA Bylaw 3-1(g) and shall take "legally permissible steps" to achieve at least an acceptable level of ethnic minority representation at the NEA Representative Assembly. Our State Association intends to include delegates who also are members of ethnic minority groups and to include them in numbers at least proportionally commensurate with Vermont's total population.

2. Identification and Location of Ethnic Minority members: As part of its annual membership recruitment, Vermont-NEA elected officers and staff shall continue to identify ethnic minority members through its print and electronic membership documents, shall seek to cultivate their interest in the NEA Representative Assembly, and shall provide relevant information and appropriate assistance in their efforts to secure positions as state or local delegates.

3. Minority Involvement Program: The Vermont-NEA President, assisted by other elected Association leaders and staff, will continue to recruit Association members to participate in the annual NEA Northeast Region Minority Leadership Training Seminar and to work with those individuals and others to establish a Vermont-NEA Minority/Multicultural Affairs Committee as a Standing Committee under Article XI of Vermont-NEA's Bylaws. These members will continue to be the first tier of candidates for inclusion in our state delegation and will continue to assist with additional Association outreach efforts to other ethnic minority members.

4. Vermont-NEA Communications: The *Vermont-NEA Today* monthly newspaper, the twice-per-month "Leadership Update" newsletter, and the "Vermont-NEA Monday" electronic newsletter will disseminate the plan and other necessary information targeted to encourage participation of ethnic-minority members at the NEA Representative Assembly and in all Association activities.

Full page Vermont College AD