



# TODAY

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Vermont-NEA photo by Art Huse



Milton support staff negotiators (L-R) Trish St. Amand, Kelly Hughes, Bonnie Rowe and Norma Wells are a strong hard working team. Fifth team member Cheryl Lamphere, a cook, was, in fact, hard at work serving lunch when this photo was taken.

## Milton ESP settle “an awesome” 3 years

MILTON — The 63 education support professionals of the Milton Education & Support Association ratified a new three-year contract in September that boosts wages by 3% this year, 4% in 2006-07, and 4% in 2007-08. The deal, which covers the district’s paraeducators, secretaries, cooks, and custodians, also provides longevity raises of 1 cent, 2 cents, and 2 cents per hour for each year of service, respectively, over years one, two and three of the contract.

On top of these impressive numbers, support staff:

- Maintained current health insurance coverage;
- Raised the course reimburse-

ment pool to \$800 a year;

- Added Martin Luther King Day as a paid holiday in the second year; and
- Won new and better language dealing with making up delayed opening days and guaranteeing a duty free lunch.

In a message to Association members, MESA president Karen Vallencourt said support staff negotiators Trish St. Amand, Cheryl Lamphere, Norma Wells, Bonnie Rowe and their “fearless leader” Kelly Hughes deserve a pat on the back for a job well done. “This is an awesome deal!” she declared.

Vermont-NEA UniServ Director

David Boulanger agrees. He says Kelly Hughes did a great job as chief negotiator, adding: “I never appeared at the table — not necessary because of the work of Kelly and her team.”

Kelly Hughes, a 19-year veteran instructional assistant who works with special needs students in the ninth grade, is quick to share credit for successful negotiations with her colleagues. “We had a strong team that represented everyone well,” she said. “Our team worked really hard and did a great job.”

In Milton, teachers and support staff are merged as a single Association. The position of MESA president has been held by a support staff mem-

ber in the past, and is currently held by Karen Vallencourt. This close relationship between support staff and teachers benefits all employees. “Our Association has become much stronger over the years under Karen’s leadership,” says Kelly.

Milton’s strong Association has earned the respect of school district board members and administration. Asked for another key to the MESA support staff success story, Kelly describes a superintendent and school district negotiating team comprised of board members who understood the work that support staff do. “They wanted to do everything they could to help us,” she said. —LBH

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# Talking Professional Pay

By Angelo J. Dorta, President

To no one's surprise, salaries consistently are among the few most difficult final issues to resolve in bargaining impasses. Recent Vermont experiences from Orleans to Bennington to Colchester remind us that *professional* pay gets much lip service and precious little commitment from school districts. Consequently, low pay still ranks among the top reasons why educators abandon their careers or decide against entering the public school workforce at all.

For teachers, more than one-third (37%) who plan to leave the profession before retirement age blame low wages (*Status of the American School Teacher*). The figure climbs to 43% for male teachers and 47% for teachers under 30 years of age. Fully 50% of minority teachers plan an early departure from teaching, at a crucial time when we need a more diversified workforce and greater "cultural competence" to better serve all students and their families.

In Vermont, the average salary for a public school teacher in 2003-04 was \$42,007 (*National Education Association 2004-05 Estimates & Rankings of States*). This ranked Vermont 27th in the nation, \$4,719 behind the national average. The "average" Vermont teacher, however, has taught for twelve years or more. Over 40% have earned a master's degree.

NEA data also shows Vermont as one of only a handful of states that experienced an actual decline in its average teacher salary — approximately 4.5% — in inflation-adjusted "constant" dollars over the past decade. Modest salary increases are quickly lost to inflation, while employees' higher health insurance deductibles, co-payments, and shared premiums worsen the problem.

ESPs, of course, also are plagued by the same low-pay problem, sometimes barely above minimum wage and often compounded by salary scales that increase compensation very slowly. Too often, school districts say to ESPs as well, "We'd like to pay you more, but..."

That's why the Vermont Legislature's research-based, non-partisan Joint Fiscal Office Livable Wage Study and the national Jobs with Justice movement ([www.jwj.org](http://www.jwj.org)) are such powerful tools for ESPs. It anchors the discussion of better compensation for school staff to bedrock beliefs that school employees should not have to live in poverty, that all workers deserve basic rights and economic justice, and that these concerns warrant community attention beyond solely the school labor-management arena.

Besides personal economic survival, teacher and ESP pay essentially are pivotal issues of education quality and of effective personnel recruitment, development, and retention,

Few people question the importance of fair and adequate compensation in other occupations. Why should our work in public schools be any different?

Furthermore, inadequate salaries threaten to undermine the proven excellent quality of Vermont's educator workforce. That's why state economic development policies should be discussed in ways that also emphasize proper investments in public education's workforce and infrastructure. In fact, the Teaching Commission 2005 survey says 70% of the public favors raising educator salaries across the Board, even if it requires higher taxes. Last year's Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll found 88% of the public would raise salaries to address recruitment and retention challenges.

ography. Bennington, for example, loses teacher candidates and experienced educators to better paying communities in Massachusetts and New York.

ESPs often are plagued by high job turnover rates, by varying and competing viewpoints inherent in different ESP job categories, and by school districts' deliberate attempts to limit work hours to less than 30 per week. Keeping weekly work hours below 30 lessens employee benefits as well as wages, precluding participation in the statewide Vermont Municipal Retirement System (VMERS), for instance. Overall, these realities can have a truly debilitating impact on the aspirations and motivation of individual ESPs and can weaken local Association advocacy.

*...lower starting salaries and consistently lagging income later in life results in large financial disparities between teachers and other professionals with comparable college qualifications and adult work experience. A Vermonter who spends an entire career in teaching could forego over a million dollars in pay by retirement age.*

*Consider the current substantial starting salary gaps nationally between bachelor's degree graduates hired to be teachers and some other BAs:*

<i>Teaching</i>	<i>\$29,733</i>
<i>Management trainee</i>	<i>\$35,811</i>
<i>Sales</i>	<i>\$37,130</i>
<i>Registered nurse</i>	<i>\$38,775</i>
<i>Public accounting</i>	<i>\$41,039</i>
<i>Financial analysis</i>	<i>\$45,596</i>
<i>Design engineering</i>	<i>\$47,058</i>
<i>Software development</i>	<i>\$53,729</i>

Teachers will continue to retire at accelerated rates in the near future. To attract and retain top college graduates and to entice older career-switchers with interest and aptitude for teaching, salaries must keep pace with higher paid professions and neutralize other financial incentives that now lure potential teachers away from the classroom. Qualified individuals might choose to become licensed teachers if they were better compensated and generally treated as true professionals. No one needs to remind IBM, IDX, Husky, and other competing Vermont corporations of this basic fact of life in the marketplace.

For several years, school districts across the state have noted shortages of candidates for teaching assignments in science, math, technology, special education, world languages, limited English proficiency, and technical/vocational specialties. In some districts, shortages are linked to ge-

Burlington ESPs, however, have taken charge by trying to get the Livable Wage issue directly addressed. They showed up at a September school board meeting accompanied by teachers and residents. They asked, "If the city of Burlington could commit itself to Livable Wage pay scales for other municipal employees four years ago, then why not for Burlington School District's 170 paraeducators?" Currently, nearly 60% of Burlington paras make less than \$9.25 hourly, while beginning city workers receive the applicable \$12.02 per hour Livable Wage figure. Apparently Board members won't make any wage decisions, however, until next year, when the para contract is renegotiated.

A noted Vermont economist and a national survey by *Education Week* analyzed the magnitude of substandard teacher salaries just a few years ago. Their research revealed that sala-

*Continued on page 3...*

# REA starts the year off right

Vermont-NEA photo by Sean Leach

RUTLAND — As the Local Association President, Ellen Green delivers remarks on opening day in her school district. This sort of recognition of the Local Association and respect for its president is an excellent practice that is on the increase in Vermont.

This year, Ellen's remarks were upbeat and struck the right note with the Rutland faculty. She reports that the whole day was quite positive, with good feedback as well as lots of new members joining the Association. "One person who signed up is a person we've been inviting for years," she said, adding, modestly: "I doubt my speech convinced him, but probably Jerry's update on the pension/negotiations saga didn't hurt."

Here are excerpts from Ellen's speech. Read and see if you don't get an irresistible urge to sign a membership card!

...Yesterday your Executive Board met at my house for about 2 1/2 hours planning for this year and discussing issues currently facing the REA — that means YOU. We began by talking about what message we want to convey to you this year, and what message we want you to convey to prospective members. The message is in three parts: 1) The REA is working for you, 2) Know your contract (the expired one we're currently using), Know your rights, and know what's going on, and 3) Speak up and stick together.

The first part of the message is that the REA is working for you — We are here to serve you. For any of you who have had a union rep accompany you to an administrative meeting, you know we are here to serve you. For any of you who have had questions about your contract, you know we are here to serve you. For any of you who took the opportunities last year to have input in the bargaining proposal, you know we are here to serve you. For all of you, the step increases pursued by your leadership demonstrate clearly that we are

here to serve you.

The REA is part of the larger professional organizations of Vermont-NEA and NEA. Your membership entitles you to the services of our Vermont-NEA UniServ Director, Sean Leach, who was at our planning meeting yesterday and who has trained our negotiators and building reps.

Your membership also entitles you to the services of our Vermont-NEA attorneys, Donna Watts and Jeff Fannon. Jeff has been integral in our staying on top of the Pension issue. Your membership entitles you to so many services from the NEA, which you can find in the news magazines/papers from both NEA and Vermont-NEA...

The second part of the message is: Know your contract, know your rights, and know what's going on. An association is only as strong as its membership. This is a professional association, and each of us is responsible for upholding our Master Agreement. Many of you have heard us say repeatedly to know your rights and look at your contract. Let's face it, if you have any problems with insomnia, reading your contract will solve them! Seriously, though, being familiar with your Master Agreement means that you won't be taken advantage of. You expect that when your students learn something, they'll be able to use it. Learning about your professional rights should lead to your



REA leaders (L-R): Chief Negotiator Jerry Kreitzer, President Ellen Green, Building Rep Kirsten Vascik, VP and Grievance Chair Jim Woodward.

being willing to talk with your building rep or officer about any questions or problems you are facing in your job. If in your gut you know something isn't right, then it's your right and responsibility to ask.

Our current Master Agreement carries forward until a new one is ratified and you sign your individual contract. That means that even though we are "working without a contract," all of the rights and conditions of the expired contract are in effect until the new one is completely in place. If you ever have any question about that — ask! This can be a confusing time, and we need to exercise our rights to uphold the contract under which we are working.

Also, there has been some confusion about your Weingarten rights. Again, it is your responsibility to know about and use these rights. Allow me to read them to you... This is the law, and no one can deny you your rights. Sometimes a meeting with an administrator starts out on a perfectly

innocent note, but evolves into a discussion that could become disciplinary in nature. That is when you should invoke your Weingarten rights. Remember, knowledge is power. That's why we teach, isn't it?

The third part of the message is: Speak up and stick together. One person on the Executive Board wrote, "We are working for you — be active!" Being active means staying in the know, encouraging others to join, speaking up for your rights, and sticking together as a professional association... Especially during negotiations, it is crucial that we stick together. Speaking up and sticking together are how we show our respect for ourselves, our profession, and our Master Agreement. As another person wrote, "Together we are strong!" Our strength lies in committed leadership and large numbers of active, informed members. Work with us this year to increase our membership and show our strength in negotiations. The REA is here to serve you! ■

## Continued from page 2...

ries of novice Vermont teachers were 25% or more below wages offered to new college graduates without job experience in non-education occupations. This finding was based on two different measures: the prior 10 years of data from the Salary Survey Report of the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) and the respected occupational pay research compiled by the American Federation of Teachers.

Consider the substantial starting salary gaps nationally between bachelor's degree graduates hired to be teachers and some other BAs: teaching, \$29,733; management trainee, \$35,811; sales, \$37,130; registered nurse, \$38,775; public ac-

counting, \$41,039; financial analysis, \$45,596; design engineering, \$47,058; and software development, \$53,729.

Those analyses also showed that comparatively low pay persists throughout a teacher's lifetime, regardless of advanced college courses and degrees or additional years of work experience. The salary gap increases to more than 40% for teachers with master's degrees and 10 years or more on the job. Graduate studies yield only half the payback for teachers as for their college-trained peers in other occupations.

Lawrence Mishel's Economic Policy Institute study proves that the wage gap between teachers and com-

parable occupations has accelerated from 1.9% in 1996 to 12.2% in 2002 (*How Does Teacher Pay Compare*). Weekly pay for teaching has grown more slowly than in professions with similar requirements, deteriorating almost 15% since 1993.

If the pay gap were the same in 2000 as it was in 1959, then the national average teacher salary would have to be about 13% higher, according to NEA's Research Division. If the relative comparison with other college-prepared occupations were the same in 2000 as it was in 1940, the national average teacher salary would have to be over 38% higher.

Using conservative assumptions to estimate lifetime earnings, it's clear

that lower starting salaries and consistently lagging income later in life results in large financial disparities between teachers and other professionals with comparable college qualifications and adult work experience. A Vermonter who spends an entire career in teaching could forego over a million dollars in pay by retirement age.

Smart, energetic, and caring new teachers and ESPs are essential. New and veteran educators work hard. Vermont student achievement scores and local school improvement efforts are promising. Eventually, however, Vermont's students, schools, communities, and the teaching profession may pay a high price for persistently low teacher salaries. ■

# Vermont teacher working with Katrina and Rita survivors

By Larry O'Keefe

The recreation room of Mystic Manor suddenly filled with joyful music. A dozen or so kids bounced and danced into the room, singing and circulating among the wheelchairs. Their energy brought smiles, foot tapping, and a sparkle to the eyes of the elderly nursing home residents, my own mother among them. "EnMasse" had arrived!

For many years Stephen Weibust has been a music teacher and colleague at Edmunds Middle School in Burlington. Afternoons and weekends he has volunteered his talents to organize, train and direct students in quality performances for a community service program they called EnMasse. They performed at fairs and community events to raise money for the program, then rented vans and hit the road. Traveling to nursing homes around the east, they brought joy to people wherever they went. My mother will certainly attest to that.

In June, Stephen retired from the Burlington schools. An accomplished jazz musician, he followed a long time dream to live and work and play music in New Orleans. He found a job as a music teacher in Boothville, Louisiana, south of New Orleans, and headed to the bayou country to follow his dream. Two weeks later Hurricane Katrina made landfall, directly on Boothville. The town has been wiped out. Stephen fled the area and joined the throng of evacuees on the move.

At the same time, Evelyn Martin and her family fled their home in New Orleans. For twenty years the Martin family has hosted Edmunds students in their home whenever we traveled south as part of the Paradise Project. Many times Stephen had joined us on

our trips and was hosted by the Martins also. When the winds died and the levees broke and the floods brought chaos to New Orleans, Stephen Weibust and the Martins had both "disappeared from our radar screens."

## Shelters in Shreveport

Stephen was the first to surface. As of the writing of this article, he's an evacuee, living in Shreveport, Louisiana. Rather than giving up and coming back home, he's determined to stay there in Louisiana where he can work with the survivors of the hurricane. He's working at a shelter at the Morningside Baptist Church, one of forty "Katrina" shelters in Shreveport alone.

Just days later, after an agonizing two week search, we finally found the Martins — in Shreveport! Of all the hundreds of places survivors could land, Stephen Weibust and the Martin family have found each other, right there in Shreveport. But the story doesn't end here.

Karen Martin, the director of Travelers Aid in New Orleans, has been asked to go into the Salvation Army shelter and establish a program for counseling, supporting, and providing comfort to the survivors. She needs a volunteer to work with her to bring some hope to the children. Enter Stephen Weibust and Music for Hope! One of our much respected Vermont teachers and one of our most beloved host families from New Orleans will join forces to bring joy and hope to the children of the storm. And we couldn't be more proud to have brought them together.

Once desperate basic needs of evacuees are met, Stephen intends to do what we all know he does best... teach kids to sing. We're calling his



*Stephen Weibust retired from Burlington schools in June and traveled to New Orleans to live and work and play music. Two weeks later Hurricane Katrina made landfall...*

plan "Music for Hope."

He will go into the shelters and organize children into singing and performing groups, somewhat like the EnMasse program that he did in Burlington. He feels that joyful singing can help draw people from their despair. He'll train groups of children and have them sing for the shelter residents, and for the community groups who are supporting the shelters, and maybe even for other shelters. He'll give these kids a way to say "Thank You" to a community that's supporting them throughout this crisis. He'll give them a way to focus on the positive. He will give them hope.

But right now, Stephen is doing whatever is needed. Here are excerpts from email he sent to me, his account of his first night's work at the Morningside Baptist Church:

**Larry,**

*You'll be happy to know, as I am, that I am finally in a shelter... They welcomed me wholeheartedly and put me immediately to work... I intended to stay for only a few hours but it didn't work out that way.*

*We were at capacity but took in a family of a mother, Dad, and baby.*

*Then we received word that six cars full of people were on their way from Beaumont, Texas, and we agreed to fit them in, even though things were very tight both with space as well as beds and linens.*

*Finally, at about midnight, we got a call from the nearby WalMart. They had 23 refugees parked in their lot, planning to sleep there in their cars — many were children. So, we agreed to take them.*

*I was on the intake desk along with one of the church deacons. When the people came we checked ID's, filled out a background form, wrote down any special needs... It was late and they were exhausted,*

*having been on the road for 11 hours.*

*Once they were settled, the deacon went around and found out who was where, while I was assigned to sort and fold sheets and pillow cases and then put the pillow cases on the pillows so we would be ready for the six cars that hadn't arrived yet.*

*I had arrived at 7:15 PM and finally left at 1:40 AM... You know, the church people are so nice and welcoming and giving that I love being with them — you lose track of time and just want to stay... I find that I can't wait to get back there... I haven't given up on the music idea.. Well, gotta go. Finally I am being allowed to do the Lord's work.*

**Stephen**

What a fantastic and inspiring email message! It made me want to jump in my car and drive right down to help.

## Music for Hope

I can't do that, but I am supporting Stephen's work in the shelters. I hope other Vermont-NEA members will join me by sending checks payable to "Music for Hope" to me, Larry O'Keefe - 132 Wyndham Rd., Colchester, VT 05446 or to Eric Mortensen - 314 Douglas Rd., Cornwall, VT 05753.

Stephen, a Katrina evacuee, now is working to meet the needs of the next wave of evacuees, and of all those poor souls who've been driven from their homes by Rita.

We can, at least, help Steve bring music to those still in shelters, especially the children. ■

**Larry O'Keefe** taught 32 years at Edmunds Middle School in Burlington. For 20 years, he traveled to New Orleans with small groups of students from the Paradise Project, an experiential program, where students were hosted by families and churches. Larry retired six years ago.

## NEA Provides \$500,000 for Hurricane Relief Efforts

*Students, Teachers and School Employees are Recipients of Aid*

HOUSTON – Our NEA already has provided almost \$500,000 in direct aid to students, teachers and school employees affected by Hurricane Katrina.

NEA President Reg Weaver presented checks to NEA affiliates in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. "I will never forget what I have seen," Weaver said. "These children need a sense of security and safe place to call home. School is an important way to help fulfill those needs. It's vital to their health and well-being that they attend great public schools and continue their learn-

ing." The funds provided by NEA will help displaced students buy school supplies, textbooks and in some cases, clothes.

NEA's goal is to raise \$1 million in aid. NEA assistance includes setting up a toll-free helpline (1-866-247-2239) for school employees affected by the hurricane and creating the NEA Adopt-a-School program to match donors with schools and classrooms in need of assistance.

For more information about the NEA's hurricane relief efforts, or to make a contribution, visit [www.nea.org/katrina](http://www.nea.org/katrina).

# Brattleboro art teacher leads *Pinwheels for Peace* project

BRATTLEBORO—When Ginny Rockwood, art teacher at Brattleboro Area Middle School, learned through a Getty Foundation listserv that Ann Ayers and Ellen McMillan, art teachers from Florida, had organized an art and literary installation project called *Pinwheels for Peace* to recognize world peace day in the fall, she thought it would be a wonderful way for her art students to make a public statement about their feelings and reflections about the idea of peace.

Ginny says participation in the project seemed to be an ideal way to teach the idea of art as a medium for communication. She shared her *Pinwheels for Peace* plans with her principal, who not only liked the idea, but thought it had “all school” potential.

### Support from an Extraordinary Faculty

With a deadline of only two and a half weeks, Ginny introduced the project to the faculty as a voluntary all school activity. She promised to provide all materials and any additional assistance. “To my surprise and delight, and despite so little time, all four core teams agreed to provide all



Paraeducator Karen Robb helps a student make his pinwheel.



Ginny Rockwood learned about the *Pinwheels for Peace* installation project on a Getty Foundation listserv for art teachers.

*“Peace and the futility of violence as a means to create peace are and continue to be a part of what we believe and live.”*

students with the opportunity to create a pinwheel in time for September 21st,” she says, adding: “With nary a complaint, and overwhelming support from the extraordinary faculty and staff at Brattleboro Area Middle School, the project proceeded.”

Ginny describes proudly how some of her colleagues focused on the literary aspect of putting thoughts and ideas into words, some provided a variety of media to decorate the pinwheels, and one science teacher recognized student interest and taught one of her groups to calculate the wind speed of a whirling pinwheel.

According to Ginny, student response was “all positive.” The project evolved into a school-wide community building activity. Virtually everyone made or assisted in making a pinwheel.



On International Peace Day (Sept. 21), pinwheels and signs were attached to the top of the chain link fence at the Brattleboro Middle School entrance.

### A Magical Project

On September 21, pinwheels flew at over 1,320 locations around the world. “What made the project sort of magical was that people all over the world (and Vermont!) were making pinwheels at the same time, thinking about peace at the same time, and they were displaying them at the same time,” Ginny explains. “We were connected to students and schools all over the world.”

In Brattleboro, the seventh grade open house was scheduled for the 21st, International Peace Day, so the pinwheels and signs were attached to the top of the chain link fence by the school entrance for parents to enjoy. “We are in the midst of a major construction project and have no front lawn,” Ginny explains.

The next day, all the pinwheels were reinstalled downtown on the lawn of the Brattleboro Museum and Art Center, which readily offered its space for the public installation.

### Still Doing Our Thing

What motivates a teacher, in the hectic first weeks of school, to take on such a big project, and to organize an entire school to join in?

“My colleague, Paula Schultz, and I had a conversation about this very topic as we installed the pinwheels at the museum this afternoon,” said Ginny.

Her answer: “We are old hippies. While in high school and college (1960s-1970s), we marched in and participated in peace demonstrations and protests. Peace and the futility of violence as a means to create peace are and continue to be a part of what we believe and live. We’re still doing our thing.” ■



NEA provided trainers for the Diversity Workshop for ESP in Bennington.

### Bennington ESP present in-service

Education Support Professionals in Bennington who negotiated the right to plan and implement half an in-service day followed through during the opening of school in August, with an assist from their state and national Association.

Vermont-NEA helped local leaders plan the agenda for the half-day training, “Our Diverse Community: Living, Working and Learning Together - Diversity Training for ESP.” NEA sent six trainers who serve on the National Cadre for Diversity. The trainers came from all over the country — California, Texas, Kentucky, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Connecticut — to work with 150 Bennington ESP.

The training was very well received. “This course was an eye opener to how other people treat people that are different,” said one participant.

“I appreciate this program because it was directed to paraeducators,” commented another.

### VCTELA presents fall conference

The Vermont Council of Teachers of English and Language Arts is presenting a conference on Wednesday, October 19, from 6 - 8:30 pm at the Windjammer Conference Center in South Burlington. The program title is “Reading James Hayford’s Poetry with Children and Adolescents.” Presenters will include Helen Hayford (poet’s widow), X.J. Kennedy (poet and literary critic) and Michael McCurdy (artist).

Send \$35 per person (check payable to VCTELA) for the conference and buffet dinner to: Kerry Burns-Collins, Otter Valley Union High School, Brandon, VT 05753 Be sure to include your Name, Mailing Address, School, Grades Taught, Phone and email. The deadline is Friday, September 30, 2005.

## Vermont-NEA Board members devote summer days to training

Rose Wenzel, a teacher and paraeducator in Vergennes, tackles the challenges of service on the Vermont-NEA Board of Directors with great passion. She relishes the experience her new role provides, and she welcomes the confidence that comes with learning new skills. "Vermont-NEA has given me so much," she says, "Being a board member lets me give back to the organization."

Rose is one of 16 Vermont-NEA Board directors. They are elected volunteers. They are not paid. They give up Saturdays through the year to conduct the Association's business. Each one of them, like Rose, serves out of loyalty to Vermont-NEA and a felt need to "give back."

In August, Board members contributed again by participating in two days of specialized training presented by NEA and aimed at improving and strengthening Board operations.

"As a brand new member of the Board, I felt really privileged to participate in this training," said Mary Ann Barnes. "It was a wonderful opportunity to ask questions and begin to understand my role and responsibility. I am very eager to do the best job that I can and this workshop was an important first step."

Sue Rusten, an experienced Board member, said members came away from the training with "a shared sense of purpose and greater confidence in our commitment as a group to be a more effective board."

Vermont-NEA President Angelo Dorta thought the most rewarding part of the training was the sense that Board members were together in their commitment to improve and strengthen Board operations and relationships.

The Board Training was been rewarding, according to Joyce Sullivan. "I learned a lot about what makes us tick as we discuss issues at the table, and how I can be a more effective communicator," she said. "It was well worth our time to develop or renewed appreciation of one another."

Rose said the training provided skills needed to effectively carry out the responsibilities of the Board of Directors. "We worked diligently to make this training very successful and we are planning on implementing these new skills in Montpelier."

Board Directors are elected by Association members in their area and serve three year terms. Consider running for election!



*Vermont-NEA Board members, L-R kneeling: Tom Gallagher, Jeff Isham, Rich Wise, Sue Rusten, Bonnie Tuscany, Mary Ann Barnes and Brian Walsh. L-R seated: Rose Wenzel, Martha Allen, Terri Vest and Angelo Dorta.*

## Why I Serve

*Vermont-NEA's elected board members give freely of their time and expertise to conduct the Association's business. Here's what some of our board members say motivates them. Here are reasons you should consider serving yourself...*

Vermont NEA is my professional organization and has worked hard over the years to bring about the best working conditions for members. We are a union and can proud of that because we continue to be professionals while we fight for our rights.

It is important to me that we develop strong working relationships with board, administration and community. As chief negotiator for close to 20 years, I believe these relationships have existed in Morrisville and as a result, we have settled contracts in a remarkably short period of time and built strong rapport. Settlements have been achieved in one school day with understanding and compassion on both sides.

I feel it is my responsibility to represent my constituents and represent my area.

—**Bonnie Tuscany, Morrisville**

I serve the Vermont-NEA for several reasons. I believe that the strength of the organization rests upon the involvement of its members; we are the association, and the association is us. When each of us gives what we are able to, then we truly shine. We COULD accomplish virtually anything we wished were we only to fully

put our minds, time and effort into it! I feel connected both to the union aspect of the association, and also to the professional aspect. I have benefitted greatly from the bargaining work of the association and from the professional development — the trainings, the workshops, the knowledge I have gained from serving on committees. Finally, I believe that truly democratic organizations (and societies!) are dependent upon shared, changing leadership; I see my current tenure on the BOD as "taking my turn." I am eager to do the best job I can, and then will be gratified to pass the torch to the next participant.

—**Mary Ann Barnes, Colchester**

I serve the organization at the board level because I believe we work extremely hard in our classrooms, offices, etc. and need to continue to promote public education.

—**Cherrie Torrey, Hartford**

Service to our local, state, and national organization is really about service to our profession. Each of us, as we enter the teaching profession, needs to decide on an individual basis what we feel is the scope of our commitment. Do we see our role as consisting totally of the children we deal with in our classroom, or do we see our role as an educational professional to be broader than that. I believe that we each have a responsibility that extends beyond the classroom. We have a responsibility to be advocates for children and families, and

to be advocates for public education. If educators do not exert their voice in this larger dialogue, we leave the decision making to others who are far less knowledgeable, and who frequently have motives far removed from students, teachers, and education.

In addition, it's an opportunity to stay current and informed regarding educational issues that will directly impact you and your students. And if that's not enough — I have also met some wonderful folks that I am happy to call my friends, as a result of being a board member.

—**Rich Wise, So. Burlington**

Next to teaching, union work is the most noble work there is. Without unions, where would workers be? Unions made it possible for working people to live, not just survive. Many of the rights we enjoy today were made possible by strong unions. With the most openly anti-worker administration in over 100 years currently in power, the only way workers can protect what they have is through unity. That's why I serve in the EJWEA and Vermont-NEA.

—**Brian Walsh, Essex Junction**

I'm a Board member because I am passionate about workers' rights and public schools. Participation on the Board gives me an opportunity to help make schools a great place to work and learn. It allows me to voice my concerns and act on them.

*Continued on page 7...*

## NEA Director: Attend NEA Northeast Regional Leadership Conference

By Joyce Sullivan, NEA Director, NERLC Co-chair - jas3@sover.net

Vermont-NEA local leaders are encouraged to attend the NEA Northeast Regional Leadership Conference (NERLC) in Philadelphia on January 20-22, 2006. The regional conference committee has planned an exciting conference for you. Our theme is Responsibility, Respect, and Resources: The Recipe for Great Public Schools.

Conference activities include a wide range of choices for workshops, caucus meetings, hearings, and speeches by NEA officers. Some of the workshops will focus on indoor air quality, identity theft, International issues, political action and ESP engagement, gang awareness-not just an urban issue, the Asian Pacific Islander in the classroom, and many more. Workshops are designed to address the interests of all membership categories: students, retirees, higher educators, ESPs, and teachers.

There will be hearings at the conference that guide the direction of NEA committee work and issues to be brought forward at the summer convention. We traditionally include budget, resolutions, and legislative hearings. This is an opportunity for officers and committee members to hear your thoughts on the direction of NEA. This year there will be an additional hearing on ESEA/NCLB that will be up for reauthorization.

NEA Secretary-Treasurer Lily Eskelsen, Vice-President Dennis van Roekel, and Reg Weaver will speak. If you haven't had the opportunity to hear them before, you're in for a treat!

Please contact Vermont-NEA President Angelo Dorta if you are interested in participating in the conference. Vermont-NEA will pay the \$150 registration fee for participants who are able to pay for their own transportation and lodging. Hotel parking is \$29/day.

### Why I Serve - Continued from page 6

I'm also a Board member because it's part of my job as the NEA Director to understand what's going on at the state level in order to represent our views on issues at the national level. I act as a liaison between the two Boards explaining NEA Board views to our Vermont-NEA Board members as well as making Board members aware of opportunities for training through NEA.

—Joyce Sullivan, Brattleboro

I have served the Association in many ways for over 25 years. For me, it is an integral part of being an educator. I can't imagine working in a public school without participating in the work of the Association. We, as professionals, must monitor the profession, improve the image of the profession, seek out innovative ways to improve student and educator learning, support each other in times of difficulty, and work to educate the government on what is best for our kids. Without the NEA and Vermont-NEA, we couldn't do these things and have an impact.

—Martha Allen, Canaan

Since a union's strength is a measure of the activism of its members, I believe it is my responsibility to do my part. I have served in many different roles in my local union and felt that experience would be of value to the Vermont-NEA Board of Directors. Although my job is in the ESP category, being a member of a merged

local puts me in a good position to understand the issues that concern all our members at every level of the organization. I value the democratic structure of NEA and am an enthusiastic participant.

—Sue Rusten, Windham

I serve on the Vermont-NEA board of directors because I feel it is a professional responsibility. Teaching is important to me and I feel it's important to give back to the organization that has made education what it is today in Vermont and in the nation. I think this organization is vital in helping teachers do their jobs. Without Vermont-NEA and NEA, not only would our salaries and benefits be virtually nonexistent (ask a teacher from a non-bargaining state), but the direction of the entire public education system would be different (like NCLB). This organization, which gives all of us a voice in our profession, relies very heavily on volunteers. So, I'm volunteering.

—Terri Vest, NBCT, Twinfield

When I was appointed to the Board in 1991, I really did not know or understand the Association very well. I knew the work of a Board member was important but the importance of our decision making did not reach me until I started listening more closely to what members from my region and from across the state were saying. As I listened I knew that I wanted to make sure that our Asso-

ciation worked for our members in advocating, supporting and leading them forward. My involvement in the Association continues to grow and my commitment deepens with every meeting of the Board or discussion with members.

As the Secretary-Treasurer I participate in many activities that connect me with my counterparts in all the other State Associations. During these times I listen and share with my colleagues information about what is happening around the country. Many times I find out that we are further ahead and better off than other states are currently. When I return from these meetings I feel even prouder of our State Association and am even more committed to advancing and protecting how educators are treated in Vermont.

A quick answer to the question of why I serve the Association would be that I am proud to serve the Association and what we have been able to do in Vermont and want to ensure that we continue to pursue the best for our members. I feel a sense of pride and dedication to the Association. Any and all of my actions as a Board member are always to ensure that our members are well represented and not taken for granted by their Association.

—Jeff Isham, Moretown

I serve because I love my profession and the kids of Vermont! I want the best possible for all of us.

—Ann Lavery, Richford

## Association members march on Labor Day

Vermont-NEA photos by Shannon Walters



Brian Walsh of the Essex Junction Westford Education Association and Vermont-NEA President Angelo Dorta marched in Burlington's Labor Day Parade. Brian addressed the crowd at Battery Park, along with Congressman Bernie Sanders.



Lisa McGuire of Vergennes and Mary Ann Barnes of Colchester with the Vermont-NEA parade banner.

## Upcoming Association events...

### October 10

Vermont-NEA Seminar on Retirement Security and Financial Planning at the Double Tree (formerly the Clarion), South Burlington

### October 19-21

Vermont-NEA Educators' Exposition, Essex Junction

### October 20

Vermont-NEA Board meets at the Educators' Exposition

### October 24

Vermont-NEA Seminar on Retirement Security and Financial Planning at the Putney Inn

### October 31

Vermont-NEA Seminar on Retirement Security and Financial Planning at the West Mountain Inn, Arlington

### October 31

Deadline for November-December issue of *Vermont-NEA Today*

## NEA Response to President Bush's Suspension of the Davis Bacon Act

WASHINGTON—Amid the efforts of thousands in the Gulf Coast area trying to dig out from the debris caused by Hurricane Katrina, President Bush dealt another blow to those already reeling from the hurricane. In September, President Bush issued an executive order suspending the Davis Bacon Act, which guarantees high quality standards and prevailing wages for workers on government funded projects.

### Statement from NEA President Reg Weaver:

"It is imperative that the children and families displaced by Hurricane Katrina are able to return to a sense of normalcy. The NEA is concerned about anything that would make those recovery efforts more difficult. President Bush's order does just that.

"The suspension denies the workers rebuilding in Louisiana, Florida, Mississippi and Alabama much needed funds to care for their families. But beyond that, it also relaxes the quality standards in the construction process. We simply cannot afford to cut corners as schools, homes and other buildings are rebuilt. The welfare of the children and students who eventually will return to those schools and live in those homes is at stake. Every effort should be made to provide relief to the displaced and ensure they have a sound infrastructure when they return home."

# OPPORTUNITIES

Vermont-NEA photo by Art Huse



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## Attend Expo Workshops, Get FREE Tote Bag

Those who register in advance and participate in workshops at the Vermont-NEA Educators' Exposition will get a FREE tote bag this year. Go to [www.vtnea.org/Expo05.htm](http://www.vtnea.org/Expo05.htm) to check out the impressive selection of workshops being offered on Wednesday evening, October 19, and Thursday, October 20. Plus, there will be a few other surprises:

- Participants at every workshop will be eligible for a prize drawing.

- The Vermont-NEA Union Shoppe will offer Dr. Suess items.
- A raffle for an iPod.
- Everyone who makes a purchase at the Vermont-NEA Union Shoppe will get a clear, plastic pocket calendar cover FREE (while they last!).
- The Education Sales Association of New England (ESANE) will award two \$300 mini-grants. Go to the ESANE table and complete a form to enter the random drawing.

## THE NEA SEAL OF EXCELLENCE



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The product or service must have a successful track record and be available nationwide to all members.

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