



# UPDATE

American Federation of Teachers Local 604, AFL-CIO

[www.aftlocal604.org](http://www.aftlocal604.org)

April / May 2024

## 2024 Scholarship Winners

With over 70 applicants for Local 604 scholarships, Josie Edlefson, James Bretzlaff, and Shelby Einhaus each won \$4,000 to help defray the cost of their college studies.

Josie, a senior at Bureau Valley High School and daughter of Ohio Federation of Teachers member Sara Edlefson, won the Paul O. Johnson Scholarship for education majors. She plans to attend Edgewood College with a major in Human Development and Family Studies – Child Life Specialty.

She said, "I am thankful to be selected as the recipient of this scholarship. It will lighten my financial burden and allow me to focus on my studies. As I continue my education at Edgewood College, I am reminded of the importance of giving back and inspiring others to achieve their goals."

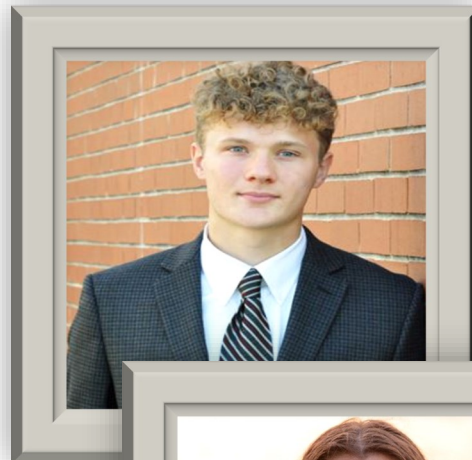
James, a senior at Kankakee High School and the son of Kankakee Federation of Teachers member Peter Bretzlaff, has not decided on a major or which university to attend.

He said, "I am deeply honored to receive the Jacqueline B. Vaughn Scholarship. I have had the privilege of being taught and raised by many union teachers, and for that I am grateful. By earning this scholarship, I hope to reflect the hard work and dedication put forth by my many teachers and mentors over the years. Without their help, I would not be where I am today. I have always known I wanted to attend college but found I needed ways to make this dream a reality. Receiving this scholarship does just that and will let me focus on my academics in college. It is truly an honor to be recognized by an organization that many of my past teachers are members of. I look forward to discovering the many opportunities this scholarship will lead me to."

Shelby, a student at Illinois Valley Community College and the daughter of Lostant member Melissa Einhaus, is the first winner of the scholarship for someone already enrolled in college. Her major is Associate of Science in Agriculture.

She said, "Thank you so much for this scholarship opportunity and the recognition that comes with it. ."

Continuing my studies has proven to be very rewarding, and I appreciate your financial support and continued guidance in all educational environments.



James  
Bretzlaff,  
Kankakee  
High  
School...  
Jacqueline  
Vaughn  
Scholarship  
Winner



Shelby  
Einhaus,  
Illinois  
Valley  
Communi-  
ty Col-  
lege...  
College  
Scholar-  
ship  
Winner



Josie  
Edlefson,  
Bureau Valley  
High  
School...  
Paul Johnson  
Scholarship  
Winner

2

Solidarity in Manhattan  
By Bill Briggs

3

Someone You Should Know  
Colleen Guccione

4

Ridge & Downes  
Addressing the Trend of Student/  
Teacher Assaults

## Not the St. Valentine's Day Massacre-but,

# Solidarity in Manhattan



Bill Briggs

Normally, my column at the end of the year is one that reflects and encourages our members to have a well-deserved, relaxing, restful summer. Those thoughts are still there, but times are different.

Already, we have had discussions on the anti-education laws passed in Florida, like those banning certain books from libraries or the anti LGBTQ legislation. But I am not sure it really hit home because Illinois is a "blue state." It just won't affect us.

But it has, and not that far away: Manhattan here in Will County.

Like most elementary teachers, bulletin boards were decked out for Valentine's Day with traditional hearts and colors. You already have the image with colorful borders and maybe some streamers. We all remember the candy hearts with "I Love You" or "Be Mine" printed on them.

And in most cases, this might have been the case this time until one professional educator felt she was addressing the times and included some LGBTQ symbols in the hearts.

Council president Susan Kubik said, "We all know that there was not ill intent with the content of the bulletin board. It has been hanging since before school started in August."

Natalie Fritz, a well-respected, 18-year veteran, created the bulletin board with 12 hearts on it that included messages, like 'open heart' and 'open minds.' In addition, 10 hearts had different colors. So, what started the controversy with some parents? One heart had a rainbow design, symbolic of the LGBTQ community and one heart (pink & blue) represented support of the transgender community.

Susan noted that the students never asked about the meaning of the colors or hearts displayed in the hallway where the first-grade class is located. In a Chicago *Tribune* article, she added, "In our building and our district those kids see those hearts as love and acceptance, and that's it. We've never had conversations about gender or sexuality. We don't even talk about the Easter bunny and God. When things are brought up, we say, 'Have a conversation with your grown-ups.'"

One upset parent did not express her concerns with the teacher, the building principal, or the superintendent at first. Like so many cowards, she turned to social media. And the domino effect started with complaints to board members who demanded the content be removed.

After board members called the superintendent, his response was to tell Susan and the building principal to take it down. And like a good Union leader, Susan "asked for a directive to be put in writing with the rationale cited."

The result, with no further interaction with the Union, was a rewrite of board policy and the addition of 'administrative approval and curriculum-based bulletin board content' is acceptable.

Susan added, "We have 36 hallway bulletin boards. Most are decorated and linked to Wilson Creek, the name of the school, 'family.' The teacher who put up this bulletin board has the symbol for her Wilson Creek family as a heart, which is why she chose the bulletin board to begin with.

After the board vote on February 14<sup>th</sup>, president Kubic personally took down the hearts on the bulletin board, and in a show of solidarity, the building teachers also removed the content of their bulletin boards but left the colorful backgrounds and borders.

In anticipation of the board's action, Susan kept her membership informed of the possible policy change. "We have significant support from members at the board meetings." She also told the *Tribune*, "My only sadness comes with seeing colleagues that I respect and that I've worked with for years hesitate and question what I know they've been doing with credibility and grace all along for students and our families in Manhattan."

Have there been attempts to ban books or follow other actions like what has happened in Florida and other right-leaning states? So far, the answer is no, but she added, "there are still quite a few conservative members of the community, and I am waiting for the next wave of attempts at censorship to appease a minority of parents. The importance of taking a stand now is significant to our teachers' union in Manhattan."

This is one reason why many of her members sat through two board meetings, listening to a lot of support to ease the negative comments made.

As tough as this board action has been on the staff in Manhattan, listening to some parents call the teachers "groomers and supporters of child pedophilia" stood out. "Unfortunately, what we did not hear was our superintendent defend us or explicitly tell these parents that they were out of line" for using these terms.

That said, the affected teacher has been showered with support from parents and community members. The voice of the "unity was strong and well-received by the teacher. The community received our message."

Lesson learned. We should all take note that if actions like this can happen in Manhattan, they can happen in your district. This message has been fostered by one group with a goal of destroying public education.

And as much as some of our members do not want the Union to be too political, that is another task we must now take on. With that said, enjoy your summer. Just think, it won't be long until more election ads begin to control the airwaves.

See page 7 for pictures

# Someone you should know:

## Bolingbrook's Colleen Guccione



Since 2017, Colleen Guccione has been developing Bolingbrook High School's AP Human Geography program "for 9<sup>th</sup> grade students who are historically underrepresented in AP programs," according to the Illinois State Board of Education. The Board recently named Colleen as one of its *Those Who Excel & Teacher of the Year* recipients.

During this seven-year span, over 1,000 students have regularly outperformed school, state, and national averages on the AP exam. Awards are not uncommon for her. In 2022, she was named an American Geographical Teacher Fellow. Not one to rest on past accomplishment, next year Colleen will bring the Illinois Global Scholars program to the Valley View School District next year.

### ***You developed the Advanced Placement Human Geography program at Bolingbrook High School. Can you explain what makes this program so special?***

First off, I did not develop the AP Human Geography program at BHS. WE did. There were four teachers on our original team, the rest just were not newly hired like I was at the time. Since then, two more teachers have joined the course. Programs always work better with a team behind them! What makes BHS's AP Human Geography program special is the wide variety of students it enrolls. Our class is designed for 9<sup>th</sup> grade students reading at grade level and encourages students to see themselves as "AP kids."

### ***Did you have any problems/issues in developing this course. If so, how did you work through them.***

AP Human Geography was a new course for all of us teachers. VVSD supported training our team by sending us to an AP Summer Institute, where we were able to learn and plan together. We were also lucky to have some local schools share their current curricula with us. One teacher trick is to always find the sources for the best resources for the courses you are teaching; in our case, that was joining a Facebook group filled with AP Human Geography teachers from across the nation.

### ***What advice would you give to anyone who would like to develop a program similar to yours?***

It is important that you know your audience when devel-

oping a program, and ours is ninth graders. The first few weeks APHG is filled with ways to introduce students to BHS as well as AP Human Geography. We understand that our students need to feel comfortable at school before they are ready to dive into AP material. We also encourage students to think beyond their one period of APHG, to build study networks with peers, and seek class help from any of the AP Human Geography teachers not just their own.

### ***Describe how your students have reacted to this program.***

When the AP Human Geography program started at BHS, we spent most of our time explaining to families what this program was. Now the program is well known. The great part of teaching Human Geography, at any level, is watching students learn to look at the world in different ways. This class has daily practical implications from exploring how rising or falling population numbers impact countries, to investigating where the food we eat and the shoes we wear come from, to examining how cities are designed. I love when students contact me after the course is done to tell me how they once again have applied Human Geography concepts to what they see in their world.

### ***What do you like most about teaching?***

I love classroom teaching. As exhausting as it is, there is nothing better than being present when a student truly understands something they did not before. I also enjoy that teaching always keeps me learning along with my students!

### ***In addition to this class, what is your day like at BHS?***

My day is filled with freshmen! This year I start my day co-teaching, with Special Education teacher Krishna Mahakul, in our Standard Human Geography program. Then I have four APHG classes and an AP Human Geography Homeroom. After school, I am the BHS JV Scholastic Bowl Coach as well as a Rho Kappa, the Social Studies Honor Society, Co-Sponsor. I also can often be found promoting the Illinois Global Scholars program which is coming to VVSD students next year.

### ***Any closing thoughts you would like to add.***

Thanks to Jared Ploger, an amazing union leader, for nominating me for this award! He is always great at recognizing others, both staff and students.



# Your rights under the workers' compensation act

By James M. Ridge, attorney at law

## ADDRESSING THE ALARMING TREND OF STUDENT-TEACHER ASSAULTS

At Ridge & Downes, we understand the importance of ensuring a safe and secure learning environment for both students and educators. Unfortunately, student teacher assaults have become an increasingly prevalent issue in educational settings raising serious concerns about the safety and well-being of everyone involved. Considering these challenges, we would like to provide you with some important legal considerations and guidance and how to address and prevent student teacher assaults.

First and foremost, it is crucial to understand that student teacher assaults can have serious legal implications for all parties involved. As educators you have a duty of care to your students which includes taking reasonable steps to prevent foreseeable harm. This duty extends to ensuring your own safety and will be in the classroom. In the event of a student teacher assault, it is essential to document the incident thoroughly including any witnesses, injuries sustained, and any previous incidents or warning signs.

Additionally, it is important to familiarize yourself with your school or district's policies and procedures regarding student discipline and violence prevention. By adhering to these protocols, you can help ensure that incidents of student teacher assaults are managed swiftly and appropriately. Furthermore, it is important to remember that student teacher assaults can give rise to legal liability for the school or educational institution if it could be demonstrated that the school failed to take reasonable steps to prevent or address known risks of harm they may be held liable for any resulting injuries or damages.

It is also essential to take proactive steps to prevent fu-

ture occurrences. This may include implementing anti bullying programs, providing training and conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques, in fostering a culture of respect and empathy within the school.

At Ridge & Downes, we are here to support you in addressing student teacher assaults and ensuring the safety and well-being of everyone in the educational environment. If you have any questions or concerns regarding legal issues, especially workers' compensation claims resulting from student teacher assaults, please do not hesitate to reach out to one of our lawyers for further advice.



For more information on your rights contact:

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## Valley View to receive 40,000 books **If You Don't Try, You Can't Win!**

**K**atie Thomas, LMC Director and Building Rep at BJ Ward Elementary School and Renee Calabrese, council president, took a chance and applied for the AFT's Schools Across the Nation program that would provide free books for the school, teachers, and families. And guess what, they won!

As a result, Valley View will receive 40,000 books and \$10,000 to spend on books with First Book as a celebration on May 11<sup>th</sup> when the AFT will celebrate giving away its 10<sup>th</sup> million book to students across the country.

But how time consuming was the application? Renee said, "It only took about 10-15 minutes to fill out. It's simple and easy. And within a few months, we found out we were chosen!"

AFT locals from Texas, New York, and Ohio will also benefit from the program.

"We are beyond thrilled to host this Family Literacy Festival at Bolingbrook High School," she said. "We will be giving away 40-50 books for all of our members to fill their classroom and libraries and up to 10 books per family in the communities we serve." These books will be for their home libraries as well.

Congratulations Renee, Katie and the Valley View family.





# A time for sharing ideas

For the first time since before the Pandemic, the IFT offered an in-person Presidents Conference. Of the 180 attendees, Local 604 was represented by 20 council leaders plus staff in Springfield the weekend of March 15-17.



With the theme—together we lead—attendees’ workshops included Artificial Intelligence: Opportunities, Risks, and Priorities for Our Unions and Work; Empowering Union Leaders: Using Digital Organizing for Unprecedented Impact; and Make Space, Take Space: Cultivating New Leadership Within Our Unions.

Michael Hancock, IMSA, said, “I enjoyed the chance to talk with fellow presidents and IFT staffers about both shared and unique challenges and opportunities on our councils. The Friday night reception was fun, and it was nice to see presidents and members get recognized for their accomplishments.”

On Friday night, the group was entertained by IFT union members from Chicago’s Second City. At that event, Susan Kubik, Manhattan Council, spoke about the solidarity displayed by her members in support of Natalie Fritz, a first-grade teacher who was told to remove a bulletin board because the hearts included a rainbow. In addition, Natalie had a taped message explaining what had happened to her.

From the delegation, the most popular workshop was Make Space, Take Space. Emer Flanagan, Peotone Council, said, the breakout “was interactive. Cross-generational conversation was interesting and diversity in regions led to great talks.”

Vicki Morris, Park Forest Council, added, “It gave us an opportunity to talk to other leaders and learn how to increase involvement.

But for Jeanne McDonald, Waubensee Community College Council, it was the next generation leadership session. “It was important for everyone to begin thinking and finding strategies to identify leaders for carrying on the work of the Union.”

Not surprisingly, the discussion about Artificial Intelligence was captivating. Emer felt although she wanted more of a consensus of what to do, “Councils need to quickly have a plan to address the issue before it’s too late.”

Michael added, “The AI session contained information that was new to me, but the format did not promote audience engagement.”

Stephanie Piper, Homer, 33C Council, felt “all of the workshops were beneficial in their own way. I was able to take away something from each one of them. It was the overall theme of the weekend that stood out to me the most, empowerment.”

Local 604’s newest council, Kankakee Bus Drivers, were represented, too. New president, Darrell Damper was impressed. He said, “I really enjoyed the building leaders’ workshop. The reason was the looking for your replacement. This one hit home. If someone didn’t give me a chance, I wouldn’t be in this situation. So I am going to do the same thing and build up some future leaders.” He went on to say that listening to other presidents and “hearing the wisdom and knowledge gave me the confidence that I didn’t know I needed.”



AFT Local 604 Council Presidents and Field Staff Directors who attended the conference.



# The Election for Local 604 Officers Takes Shape

It's election time at Local 604! Paper ballots will be provided to all councils with the results due back to the office no later than May 20.

President Bill Briggs is retiring in August and is not on the ballot. Dan Mercer, current IFT Field Service Director, is the sole candidate for president. The current treasurer, Sean Hunt is running unopposed, as is the current secretary, Julie Harris. They may all be elected by acclamation at the April Senate meeting.

Fourteen members will be elected to serve as Vice Presidents of Local 604. The order of the names on the ballot as determined by a blind draw are Heather Pilch, La-Grange Highlands; Alicia Edwards, Valley View Office; Jared Ploger, Valley View; Margaret Janke, Wilco; Vicki Goebel, retired; Michael Hancock, IMSA; Therese Skwarczynski, Joliet #86 Teachers; Gerry Mestek, East Aurora; Grasia 'Grace' Gonzalez, Lockport Support; Vicki Morris, Park Forest; Kristen Ryan, Ohio; Michelle Nevin, Lemont-Bromberek; Sofia Thomas, Joliet #86 SRP; Beth Anderson, Kankakee; Yvette Justice, Joliet Township High School; and Phil Staley, retired.

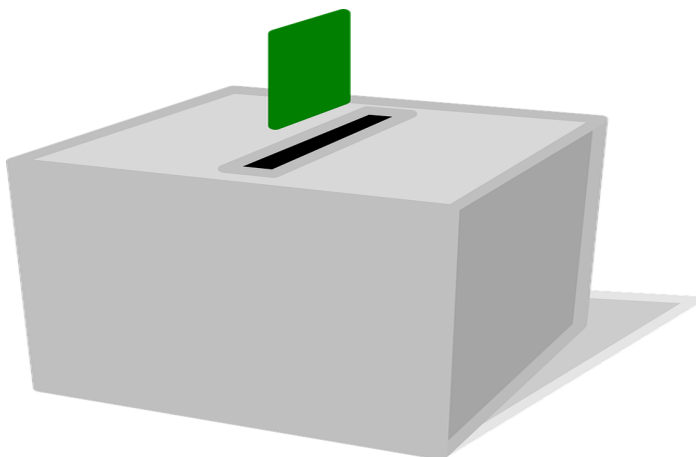
If more than one candidate from the same council is running, the individual with the highest number of votes will take the seat. In an effort to have more councils represented on the board, the Local 604 Constitution states that no more than one from a council can serve as a vice president.

All elected officers will begin their terms on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024.



Susan Kubik, council president at Manhattan, spoke at the recent IFT Presidents Conference and detailed what solidarity means as she explained to the crowd what member Natalie Fritz went through for displaying an all-inclusive bulletin board in her building.

See the article by President Briggs on page 2.

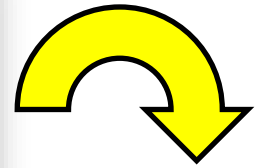
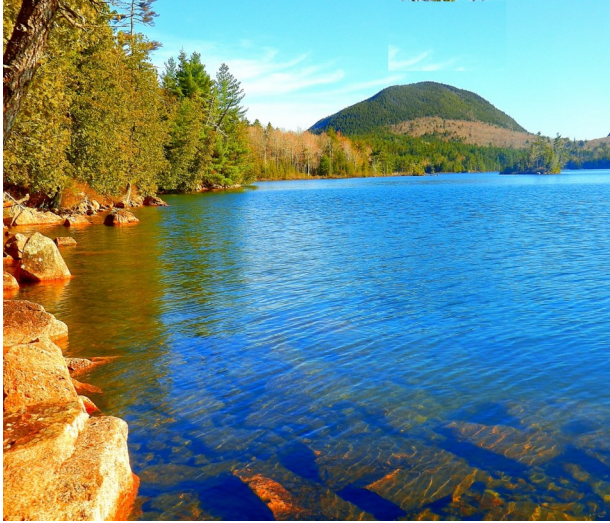




# Retiree Council Meeting

Tuesday, May 14, 10:00am  
Lake Renwick Heron Rookery Nature Preserve  
230 W. Renwick Road  
Plainfield, IL

Guided tour of Lake Renwick



Next Senate Meeting Date: August 7, 2024 @  
6:00pm  
Held at the Local 604 Office

## Calling All Upcoming Retirees

The Retiree Council is looking forward to expanding its membership at the end of this school year.

We are 624 members strong and we are excited to have the opportunity to vote in the AFT Local 604 election for the very first time this May as now we are an official council.

Not only do retirees now have a voice and vote in the Local, but they are also eligible for the \$5,000 Accidental Death and Dismemberment Insurance Policy from the AFT as well as opportunities to meet with other retirees to enjoy outings and comradery. All this for a mere \$20 a year.

Please contact the Local 604 office to speak with Kathy Harris (815/725-0402.) She can email you a membership card to fill out and return and she'll explain the process of paying your dues.

This is a great opportunity to stay involved in education and your union.

Any other questions, please email me at [vleuck13@gmail.com](mailto:vleuck13@gmail.com)

Vicki Goebel, Retiree Council Treasurer



IFT/AFT, AFL-CIO

## UPDATE

American Federation of Teachers Local 604  
[www.aftlocal604.org](http://www.aftlocal604.org)

Darlene Mercer, Office Mgr./Editor/[darmercer@ift-aft.org](mailto:darmercer@ift-aft.org)

1520 N. Rock Run Drive #1  
Crest Hill, Illinois 60403-3232  
PH: 815.725.0402  
FAX: 815.729.2130

Bill Briggs, President  
Sean Hunt, Treasurer/Business Mgr. / Julie Harris, Secretary

### Vice Presidents

Sofia Thomas	Gerry Mestek
Beth Anderson	Heather Pilch
Renee Calabrese	Kristen Ryan
Vicki Morris	Phil Staley
Robert Marcink	Therese Skwarczynski
Yvette Justice	Michael Hancock
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