



UPDATE

American Federation of Teachers Local 604, AFL-CIO

www.aftlocal604.org

February/March 2023

Giving throughout the Holiday Season

Here are a few of the pictures sent to us of the food donated...there was much more than the pictures reveal!



East Aurora Council collected from members 250+ boxes of cereal for the Marie Wilkerson Food Pantry.



The Summit Hill Teachers Union hosted a food drive from November 15th – November 22nd to help support their community and the Frankfort Food Pantry.

Union Members give generously during the holiday season

The last five years, members of AFT Local 604 have shown their true holiday spirit by collecting donations for various food drives. This year was no exception. The generosity has not surprised us, but food banks are often taken aback by the amount donated.

Participating councils could either drop the food off in Crest Hill or donate the items in their own communities. This year, Joliet #86 PSRP, East Aurora, Joliet Junior College Faculty and Tech & Office Support Staff, Tinley Park #146, Homer Certified & Support Staff, Will County District #92, Summit Hill Teachers, and Waubonsee Community College, and the staff of Local 604 were involved.

JJC's combined effort greatly affected two different groups in need, the students at the college and the 604 drive.

Kim Crowe, Tech & Office Support Staff president and 604 vice president, said, "After gathering all the food, we pulled out the items on the list for our student food bank at JJC." The remainder of the donation, which was large, was brought for the Local collection.

At the December Senate meeting, three council names were drawn from the list and given an additional \$100 for the food bank of their choice. Winners drawn were:

- Summit Hill Teachers:** Frankfort Food Pantry
- Homer Certified & Support Staff:** Lockport Fish Food Pantry
- JJC Faculty and Tech & Office Support Staff:** JJC Foundation

In addition, the Waubonsee faculty collect food and money second semester because so many of the organizations have been depleted after the holidays. In the past, besides food, they collect around \$2,000 from members for additional purchases.

We send out a warm thank you to all who participated in this drive or one of their own choice to help those less fortunate have a little better holiday.



Joliet District 86 Support Staff & Teachers collected food to be donated to Morning Star Mission.



Homer 33C Certified and Support Staff Food Donations to be donated to the Lockport Fish Food Pantry;



Food collected at the Local 604 office by staff and food brought in for us to donate by JJC Faculty, Tech & Office Staff

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Optimistically, I have hope for 2023



Bill Briggs

For as long as I can recall, I have been an optimist, maybe to a fault at times.

For example, I still believe that my university will again rise to the power they were for a few years when Larry Bird led the Sycamores to the #1 ranking and the final game of the 1979 NCAA tournament. Or, having attended Catholic grade school for eight years, I still have hopes that the Church will finally allow women to be priests.

That said, the start of the 118th US Congress has given me hope that something good will come out of all the disarray to elect the Speaker. Why the optimism? Let me explain.

While the Congress was going through six votes, unsuccessfully, to elect their leader, President Joe Biden and Senator Mitch McConnell (R, KY) were in Lexington, KY, shaking hands with each other and political leaders from Kentucky and Ohio in the spirit of cooperation.

Why, might you ask? It was because of the bipartisan infrastructure bill passed last year that included the rebuilding of a dilapidated bridge over the Ohio River, a project that has been anticipated for years.

When Biden was elected two years ago, he pledged to bring the country together. Sometimes, it takes an awakening to make elected representatives finally listen to their constituents and start to work together for the betterment of the country.

Maybe, some of these out-of-touch congress men and women of both parties will start to work on the concept that we are more alike than different, just listen to what we are saying.

So where is this article going? I recently had an epiphany when a member of Local 604 reached out to me with concerns that a large block of our membership feels left out. Two articles that I wrote for the December Update upset them.

In my column, "Democracy is worth saving," I conveyed my view of the reaction to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband being brutally attacked. The second article, "School board election could be crazy," I wrote about the importance of upcoming elections, and I cited sources of concern about what is happening in some school districts and states.

On the surface, many of our members might ask, what's the problem? But to what could be 40% of our members, Republicans and independents, I was "alienating a lot of members with your extremist views." Boldly, the member pointed out others concerns seen from different eyes.

It was also pointed out that at Senate meeting last April, survey results from the IFT showed that membership is not always lockstep in agreement on political issues. For example, 22% of our membership said they are independents and 18% lean Republican.

To be honest, I was a little taken aback by the long, detailed letter. Upset, no. However, it did make me start to question. I have always felt that I was inclusive; that at Local 604 we tried to think of all angles. This letter took me back to my days in the classroom when I was challenged. Did I tell my students they were wrong? No, I asked them to explain their view with "concrete support."

The result, my mind was opened. That is not to say that I agreed with everything the students said, but I listened. And that is what happened with this individual who reached out to me. We did not just exchange emails; we had a long conversation with no raised voices. I listened, and so did the member.

So how do I move forward as the president of 11,000+ members? To be sure, I will continue to battle for our members, and I will continue to point out, with factual support, issues that bother me.

The task for me, though, is to take into consideration how all our members might feel, especially when the AFT or IFT supports an idea that a segment might question. And that is the difficult side of change. I don't want to abandon my beliefs or goals, but I do want to make all feel they are part of the best local in the AFT.

Because this individual took the time to read the articles and express an opinion, I grew, my mind was opened, and I feel I am on the path to being more inclusive. If I stray, and I probably will, I hope that someone else will not shy away from expressing displeasure and reach out.

In the past, I have not been one to make New Year's resolutions. That has changed. For 2023, I will strive to be a leader for all, and I will listen more. Afterall, I am an optimist.



Your rights under the workers' compensation act

By: James M. Ridge, attorney at law

Winter's Back! What To Do If You Slip & Fall on Snow Or Ice

Workers' Compensation Parking Lot Cases with Hazardous Conditions

Winter is here again, besieging facilities with ice, snow, and melting pools of water. Every year, thousands of teachers and support staffers get hurt in slip and fall accidents. One in every five of these falls result in a serious injury, such as broken bones or head injuries. A slip and fall injury occurring because of a hazardous condition, either in a parking lot or in an interior entrance/hallway, may constitute a work injury. These cases are determined on a factual basis, and you should consult with an attorney to discuss compensability. Please remember that there is currently a three-year statute of limitations, starting on the date of the accident, to when your case must be filed at the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission.

After A Slip & Fall On Ice or Snow, Always Follow These Three Important Steps:

Report The Fall

A slip and fall on ice and snow often leaves no trace, other than the damage to your body. Insurers often use this fact to their advantage. The best thing you can do for your claim after the accident is to immediately notify the school/property owner. Be very careful about what you say and do after a slip and fall accident! Even simple phrases like "I'm Ok," or "I didn't see that there" could be used against you, so keep quiet as best you are able. If you need to describe the accident, stick to the facts.

Gather Evidence

Take photographs of the icy conditions that caused your injuries. If anyone witnessed your fall, take note of their contact information, and ask them to provide a statement. Find out if any surveillance cameras were in the vicinity of your fall and request copies of the footage. Remember that if you wait too long, the evidence will disappear.

Seek Medical Attention

The only way to tell if your injuries are serious and how to help them get better—is to seek medical care. Seeing a medical doctor is not just good for your physical recovery, it is also important to the success of your legal claim.

Getting Help For Your Slip & Fall Accident.

Slip and fall accidents often lead to considerable medical bills and time away from work. In order to receive compensation for medical expenses and lost wages, injured individuals often choose to file a claim against the person or company responsible for the conditions that caused the accident. A great first step in pursuing a potential claim is to contact an *experienced lawyer at Ridge & Downes for a free claim evaluation.*



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Someone you should know:
 Mary Ann Stubler
 Someone who never stops giving

When AFT Local 604 was growing into a powerful force with Dick Manley's leadership, two Joliet #86 teachers must be included in the conversation: Mary Ann Stubler and Lucy Hoffman. These two partners in crime created a strong union for their members and for the Local.



In September of 1983, she and Lucy led a teachers strike that lasted 13 days. The stories the two told about their strike are legendary. Together, they were a force.

Mary Ann was honored at the Local Holiday Party Dec. 13th with the AFT's 2022 Living the Legacy Award presented by the Women's Rights Committee instituted to recognize outstanding women leaders.

One might ask, "Why Mary Ann?" The answer is simple. She has been a Union activist since 1970 in many capacities.

- 1970-72 Joliet #86 building rep
- 1972-74 Council Secretary
- 1974-78 Vice President of District #86 Council and worked on the merger of two councils
- 1978-2007 President of Joliet #86 Council and AFT Local 604 Vice President
- 2000-2019 AFT Local 604 Vice President
- 2019-present Active advisory position to the 604 e-board with an emphasis on Local 604 history

In addition, in 2001-02, Mary Ann introduced and collaborated on development of Joliet District 86 New Teacher Mentoring Program. The work she and other union members did became the first mentoring program approved in Illinois. Again, she was ahead of her time.

Currently, she volunteers at Lightways Hospice and Serious Illness Care.

Mary Ann said, "I want to thank the AFT for honoring me with the AFT – Living the Legacy Award. It is truly humbling to have my Union acknowledge the efforts and accomplishments of my years as a union leader. But that work was not done by one person alone. For many of my 28 years as President of the Joliet Elementary Teachers Union, Council 86, I had the support and help of my amazing Executive Board – Lucy Hoffman, Pat Nelson, and Kay Donahue – our hard-working Building Reps and the dedicated teachers of Joliet, District 86. So, as you see, this award is not mine alone.

"I became a union member on my first day of teaching in 1970 and remain a member to this day. As a new teacher, I had no interest or aspirations of becoming "active" in the union, but that changed quickly. That year a strike was a very real possibility. As I watched that possibility unfold, I became interested of the inner workings of a union facing such a crisis. I volunteered and began my work with the union as a helper but soon became more involved. The Union was able to avoid that strike through the hard work of our union leadership.

"My first contractual concern was the district dictated dress code for

women in 1970. Female teachers were expected to wear dresses/skirts of an appropriate length, limit the exposure of skin, and slacks were discouraged. This dress code was also my first stance on women's issues. I was not alone, as a few teachers began to wear slacks to test of the district's commitment to the code. But I took it a bit further. I was a child of the 60's. In college, I had protested the war, marched for civil rights, and even tried a little marijuana. No one was going to tell me how to dress.

"One day I came to school wearing bell-bottom jeans, a denim shirt, wooden clogs, and a bandana holding back my long brown hair. I did not do this every day

"After I had worn my denim outfit several times, my principal said we needed to talk. He reminded me of the dress code and the fact that I was non-tenured. I agreed to wear the regular attire but made it clear that it was because of my choice to do so, not because of the districts attempt to dictate what a woman had to wear in order to be considered "in appropriate attire." This is when I realized that it was best to pursue this issue through the union rather than alone.

"As I continued my work with the union, I held several different positions. Then, during my 9th year of teaching (1978-79), I took over the role of president of the Joliet council, a position I held until the end of the 2006-07 school year.

"There were so many challenges during those 28 years, the greatest being a 13-day strike that began on Sep. 19, 1983. Many teachers never experience a strike, a very difficult decision for all involved. But it is what we had to do at that time. For the first few days, everyone was motivated, united, and supportive. Then came the first payday with no check, the threats of losing our jobs, and the threats of losing our insurance. At the end of each day, we held a rally at a local church to keep up morale and assure each other of our solidarity and commitment to seeing the issues through. I was never prouder of the teachers of Joliet 86. We were all anxious by the district's threats, but we stood united, held each other up, and ended up with a successful strike and a very good new contract.

"My scariest day was day #1 when a local attorney sought an injunction to end the strike and force the teachers back to work. The Joliet 86 Executive Board had to appear in court on day #2. We were terrified but strong. Being part of the IFT, they arranged for an attorney for that court appearance. We met with him early that morning, and he seemed calm, competent, and confident that all would be okay. However, there was one brief discussion that concerned us – he thought it was great that our executive board was all females. He thought that if we were arrested for defying the injunction, the publicity would work in the union's favor and bring a great deal of criticism against the district.

"As it turned out, the injunction was thrown out because that attorney was late. Our attorney told us to leave quickly, go to someone's house and stay there all day and not to answer the door or the phone. We did and the next day the district closed school for the duration of the strike. Our strike ended on Oct. 5, 1983. The teachers of Joliet 86 stood strong and united for 13 days; we ended up with an amazing contract with improved language and benefits along with a 7% pay increase. We lost one day pay and made up the other 12 days (getting paid for them) by adjusting the school calendar for that year."



Thank you Mary Ann for all you've done and continue to do!

Herscher, Pembroke school districts receive EPA grant for electric buses

During the average year, school buses carry over 25 million children and cover around 5.7 billion miles. According to some estimates, most buses are diesel and emit over 40 toxic air contaminants, carcinogens, and other fine particle matter.

With the nationwide movement for cleaner air and electric vehicles, two Local 604 councils will be able to witness progress because of a Federal grant.

Herscher District #2 and Pembroke District #259 are sharing, with 400 other districts nationwide, part of \$1 billion of The Environmental Protection Agency's Clean School Bus Program.

Herscher is one of two districts in Illinois and 21 across the country to receive the maximum amount, \$9,875,000, to purchase 25 electric buses and related charging infrastructure. Pembroke will be able to purchase two buses with their \$700,000 grant.

Herscher, which draws students from five different counties and has one of the largest square mile districts in the state, was probably selected because of this, according to Joel Huizenga, U2CT president. Hinting some in the community are a little skeptical about this technology, he said, "It is a big investment for something that only goes 125 miles; however, I think people also recognize that electric vehicles are here to stay."

Katherine Kiger, Pembroke council president, said, "Our school is honored to be the recipient of this funding. It will undoubtedly help our district continue to grow into an environmentally conscious school."

Canada-based Lion Electric Company, which opened a plant in Joliet in 2021, was awarded the contract. The deadline to purchase the buses and install the infrastructure is October of 2024.

Dr. Richard Decman, Herscher superintendent, responded to the following questions.

How has the community responded to the announcement?

"I believe the response from the community has been favorable. If the District had to utilize its own funds, the response may have been different."

What is the target date for the busses to arrive and be put into use?

"We are planning on getting (1-2) busses this summer to utilize for training purposes. We will need to figure out how we will charge these buses. The remaining 23-24 will be delivered the summer of 2024. We are hopeful that we will have the infra-structure ready at that time."

Is there a comparison for charging a bus vs using fuel?

"Yes. According to the reports that have been shared with our district, we can expect to save approximately 80% on energy reduction costs and approximately 60% on maintenance costs."

Will the docking stations be available for other uses by the community?

"We are working with one of our local car dealers to install a couple of electric charging stations at our high school parking lot. In regards to the EPA grant, the chargers will likely not be available to charge cars at this time due to the energy needed for the bus batteries compared to a car. Most of the chargers will be located inside the bus garages. However, we are planning on installing at least one outside charger at each location, Herscher and Limestone, to be used by visiting schools to charge their electric buses, if needed. If possible, I do not see any reason why we would not allow the community to use these chargers."

Is there anything else you would like to add?

"There is an absolute 'ton' of information that we are learning on a daily basis

about electric vehicles, solar power, battery storage, etc. We are cautiously excited about being one of the leaders in the area and, frankly, in the state regarding the use of electric buses."

After responding to these questions, Dr. Decman was asked if the students would be involved in any way. He thought the idea was a good one. He was reaching out to the District's STEM program on the feasibility.

The new fleet will account for about one-half of the total buses operated by Herscher. Normally, a new diesel bus cost in the range of \$140,000 to \$180,000. The range for the electric is \$340,000 to \$380,000.

Nationwide, over 2,000 districts applied; fifteen were selected in Illinois to purchase 123 buses. In addition to Herscher, Bloom Township High School in Chicago Heights was the only other district in the state to receive the maximum grant amounts.

Does Illinois' literacy education law match New Jersey's?

Last month, New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy signed into law the requirement of K-12 instruction on information literacy under the implementation of the New Jersey Student Learning Standards.

The bill requires the Department of Education to develop New Jersey Student Learning Standards in "information literacy," which is defined as a set of skills that enables an individual to recognize when information is needed and to locate, evaluate, and effectively use the needed information, which includes but is not limited to digital, visual, media, textual, and technological literacy.

Gove Murphy said, "It is our responsibility to ensure our nation's future leaders are equipped with the tools necessary to identify fact from fiction. Our democracy remains under sustained attack through the proliferation of disinformation that is eroding the role of truth in our political and civil discourse."

In Illinois, Public Act 1-2-0055 was passed in July 2021. The act states "every public high school shall include in its curriculum a unit of instruction on media literacy." The unit shall include, but is not limited to, "all of the following topics: accessing information, analyzing media messages, and social responsibility and civics."

Amy Lingafelter, librarian at Joliet West, provided information on how her school is responding to the law. "Our standards mandate instruction in four distinct literacies: Information, Digital, Media, and Individual. Think of a research paper in English, an Escape Room activity in Science, Book Talks to Literacy classes, or a Voter Registration lesson for seniors in American Government.

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FYI, just a little information

IFT Scholarships * Two IFT scholarship applications are online at ift-aft.org. Both the Carl J. Megel Special Education Scholarship and the Robert Porter Scholarship are worth \$20,000, \$5,000 a year for four years. The deadline is March 3, 2023. To find the application, go to the website and click Benefits.

Larry Walsh, Sr. honored *A friend to Local 604, Larry Walsh, Sr. is about to be honored by having the Elwood Post Office renamed for him. H.R. 700 has been sent to President Joe Biden for his signature. Larry, who farmed in the Elwood area, was elected to the school board at age 21. Eventually, he served on the Will County Board before being elected to the Illinois senate where he served from 1997 to 2005 before taking over as Will County Executive. Sen. Dick Durbin said, "Larry devoted 50 years of his life to serving the folks back home. He was a bridge-builder with inexhaustible patience." Bill sponsor Rep. Bill Foster said, Larry's passion for public service and dedication to his neighbors was apparent every time I met with him." Walsh died on June 3, 2020.

American Teacher Act *Florida Congresswoman Federica S. Wilson has introduced the American Teacher Act in an effort to bring up the starting salary for teachers. Her proposal would increase the "minimum K-12 teacher salary to \$60,000 and adjust for inflation," according to the *Defender*. The congresswoman said, "Unfortunately, our nation's teachers have been underpaid, overworked and deprived of resources for too long."

The bill would create a four-year federal grant program to increase annual salaries to a minimum of \$60,000 and a grant available to states and local educational agencies to guarantee this minimum wage. *Education Week* has estimated that more than 36,500 vacancies exist in the US and uncertified teachers fill more than 163,500 positions.

Membership Benefits *Mary Wolf from the New Lenox council sent this message. "I just want to give a shout out about membership benefits. My spouse and I wanted to set up a Trust, Will and Healthcare Power of Attorney. It isn't cheap.... but is necessary.

Anyway, I went to the Union Plus webpage and found out that for \$22.95 a month, I can enroll in MetLife Legal Plans.

I did this, and MetLife promptly found an attorney near me. I explained what we wanted, and the attorney drafted the documents. Then, I went online and easily got 'case numbers' for each of the documents the attorney drafted. We will go sign and execute later this month, and it won't cost us a dime. Well, I suppose that technically, \$22.95 is a cost, but it is way cheaper than what we were quoted without MetLife Legal.

I need to stay enrolled in the plan for at least one year, which I will. I don't have any legal troubles personally, but it feels good to know that I have a layer of protection for 23 bucks a month.

So, that's my shout out!"

Pembroke Schools receive \$10,000 grant *Pembroke School District #259 is the recipient of a \$10,000 Nicor African-American Employee Group En-RAPPORT grant. The monies will be used to strengthen the school's greenhouse and media center. Congratulations to council president Katherine Kiger and membership.

We can do this!

By: Bill Briggs

Recently, I came across some information that I would like to share with our members. It also seems appropriate since we just celebrated Martin Luther King Day. In a country where we seem to struggle to get along, these words, I think, could be a guideline.

We will do the work of justice for all; we will open our hearts to an ever-expanding vision of community.

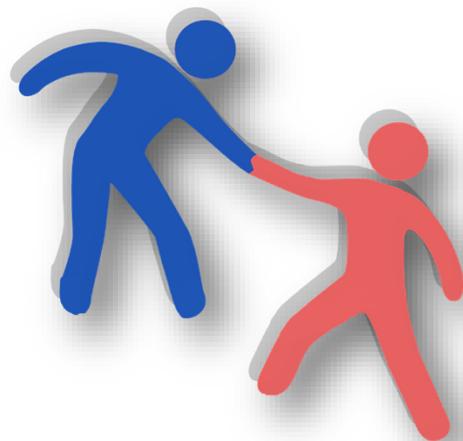
We will work for a country/world where lives are enriched by difference; where people of different genders, races, and sexual orientations work together for the good of the whole.

We will work for a nation where persons will be judged solely upon the content of their characters.

We will listen to the cries of the poor; we will stand in solidarity with those who suffer oppression; we will take as our own the hopes of all who long for full human life.

And finally, we will attempt to create a country with room for all, justice for all, and joy for all.

On the surface, this challenge seems so easy, but reality can be tough. If we all attempt to take this idea one step at a time, I believe the effort will not only help our students, but also our colleagues.



“While high school Librarians have a major role to play, some of the mandates of this Act are shared and require a culture shift towards focusing on evidence and believability in all curricula writing and delivery. Some components of the Act are already being taught in our classrooms. Creating media is often done in most major summative projects for core subjects, with teachers of elective classes like Web Design or Video Animation honing those skills further.”

“Reflecting on media consumption should fall in with the major push for SEL lessons in all content areas; it also fits in distinctly with the work of Health teachers and school Social Workers. The hard work of teaching social responsibility and civics falls on all members’ shoulders, no matter your content area.”

“This legislation is too imprecise in many of its mandates, and as is often the case with education legislation; it is left up to individual teachers and Districts to implement these requirements ad-hoc. The language is vague, but it can’t be denied that these skills are crucial for students to exit our buildings as adults with critical thinking skills.”

“Please familiarize yourself with the Act and advocate for professional time to work with your building’s Librarians. While you’re at it, please also advocate for a full-time licensed Librarian in every school in Illinois. Too many schools in Illinois, often at the elementary and middle school level, do not have a professionally licensed school Librarian to teach our I-SAIL standards. The foundations for the skills presented in the Media Literacy Act are laid in the younger grades, and all Illinois children deserve licensed professional Librarians in their schools.”

Next Senate Meeting
April 19, 2023 @ the Local 604 Office

Richard Manley Scholarship

Kassie Myer, a history teacher for 6-8 graders at Oglesby Elementary has won this years Manley Scholarship.

Kassie has worked for Oglesby District 125 for 9 years.

She will be attending Concordia University in Chicago for her Curriculum & Instruction Masters. The classes that she will be taking will help her in achieving strategies and skills in her own career as well as helping her students achieve excellence.

Congratulations Kassie! Best Wishes from all of us at AFT Local 604.



Scholarship opportunities

Carl J. Megel Special Education Scholarship

In 2023 the IFT will award one \$20,000 Megel scholarship (\$5,000 each year for four years) to a deserving high school senior who is enrolled in a special education school, class, or program for students with disabilities. Applicants must be high school seniors who will graduate in 2023.

Applications must be postmarked by March 3, 2023.

Go to www.ift-aft.org ... go to Benefits and scroll down to scholarships.

Robert G. Porter Scholarship

The IFT will award two \$20,000 awards (\$5,000 each year for four years) to current high school seniors with no less than a cumulative “B” grade average. Applicants must plan to attend full-time at an Illinois public university and maintain at least a “C” cumulative grade average after graduating from high school. The applicant must be the son or daughter of a currently employed, active member in good standing of the Illinois Federation of Teachers, the son or daughter of a member of an IFT retirees chapter, or the son or daughter of a deceased member who was in good standing with the Illinois Federation of Teachers at the time of death.

Applications must be postmarked by March 3, 2023

Go to www.ift-aft.org ... go to Benefits and scroll down to scholarships.

On the IFT website.... www.ift-aft.org.... You will also see 3 more scholarships offered by the AFT when you go to Benefits and scroll down to scholarships.



American Federation of Teachers Local 604
www.aftlocal604.org

Office hours are 8-4:00. Please call ahead if needing to pick up information. If dropping off, please use slot in door if no one is in office.

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