

THE SPIRIT OF '76

The Newspaper of Local 1776
The Association of Catholic Teachers

HONORING
Irene Tori

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END OF AN ERA



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END OF AN ERA

When I started working at ACT back in 1983, John Reilly was the President, and Rita Schwartz was the Executive Secretary of ACT and full-time Staff. Irene was also on staff at that time, helping with the Elementary Schools' Organizing Campaign. I remember it being a very busy time.

A year later, Rita took over the Presidency, when John Reilly's duties with the National Association of Catholic School Teachers, of which he was also President, became more demanding.

Once the Elementary Campaign was over, Irene went back to Abp. Ryan High School and resumed her role as a math teacher and, eventually, became Department Head. She completed twenty-five years at Abp. Ryan, before returning to the ACT Office as full-time Staff in 2003. For the next Seventeen years, Rita and Irene were the Leadership of the Union. They worked very well together, and I had the privilege of working with two very strong women whom I admired and respected. Rita retired in December of 2020, and Irene, who was elected to the Presidency in November 2020, took over the duties of President in January of 2021.

After spending the last 22 years as ACT Staff and the last four years as your President, Irene has officially retired as of January 31, 2025. **This truly is the end of an era!**

While I look forward to working with James Vernon, the newly elected President of ACT, *your presence, Irene, will be missed.*

Your positive attitude was always noticeable, and I rarely, if ever, heard you complain about anything over the years. Even when busy, you always encourage and support others, including me. You are selfless with your time and energy, both at work and outside of work.

I had the privilege of meeting you back in 1983 and working with you all these years, and I am grateful and blessed. I consider it an honor to call you, my friend. *While it is truly the end of an era, it is not the end of a beautiful friendship!*

I wish you a happy and healthy retirement with Carl, enjoying all that life has to offer. You have earned your reward!

With respect, admiration, and love,



Ginny Crowther
ACT Office Manager

“Partners in Crime”

What words do you use to recognize a job extremely well done for over forty years? THANK YOU, IRENE.

Irene Tori has been an integral part of my life for almost five decades. She is an incredible friend and “partner in crime”. She is a tireless worker with an encyclopedic memory of all things ACT. She is an essential part of all that is best about Catholic School Unionism. I have always known that Irene would be there whenever and wherever she was needed.

I truly value our friendship. Over the years, we have often finished each other’s sentences. More important are the myriad times she has talked me off the ledge and I have returned the favor. Both Irene and I are the caretakers of institutional memory, something that consistently rankled our counterparts on the other side of the negotiating table.



I often thought that a plaque should be hung on Irene’s Toyota Highlander. Countless plans and schemes were hatched in that car. There were also more than a few adventures associated with it. There was the night I sat on the car floor out of sight of TV reporters as we drove through center city. And, who could forget Irene’s intrepid driving as we somehow got onto the off ramp of I-76 at the end of a late-night negotiating session.

As you retire, my dear friend, I hope it is with the knowledge of how very much you will be missed.

I know you will embrace the next era of your life with the same incredible enthusiasm that you exhibited every day in the ACT Office.

I will always hold you in my heart.

Rita Schwartz
President Emeritus
Association of Catholic Teachers

Notes of Gratitude

Irene:



Best of Luck with your pending retirement. It is so well deserved. The St Pius X Community (now PJP) truly appreciates all of your work and dedication for so many years. All of us would not have the many benefits we have without your hard work and dedication!

Your hard work and Love of Catholic education has benefitted so many students and Teachers, it's immeasurable!

Thank You again and Enjoy your "stress free" retirement.

God Bless,
Dave Psota '63
Lifelong Pius Alum and Teacher, Retired

**Retirement is when you stop living at work
and start working at living!**

I cannot thank Irene enough for the assistance she provided me with several personal issues and for the assistance she provided when I served as Senior Delegate at Little Flower. I wish her a very happy retirement.

Arnold Ronzoni, Retired
Little Flower Catholic High School for Girls

Notes of Gratitude



I was fortunate to have been Irene's Department Chair and see firsthand her talent in the classroom. I also was a member of the ACT Executive Board, ACT Staff and numerous ACT Negotiating Teams and saw firsthand Irene's exceptional talent in every facet of the Union.

On behalf of the students, I would like to thank Irene for her 25 years of dedication. As a colleague, I wish to thank Irene for her tireless service to the "lay" teachers of the System (especially in her capacity as President of ACT).

SINCERE CONGRATULATIONS AND BEST WISHES IN RETIREMENT!!!!

With love and appreciation,
Joe Schuler, Retired
Conwell-Egan Catholic High School

True leaders understand that leadership is not about them, but about those they serve. It is not about exalting themselves, but about lifting others up.

Irene,

It was obvious how deeply you cared for the teachers entrusted to your care. This was evident by your robust knowledge of the contracts, your willingness to have hard conversations in a professional manner, and your perseverance and kindness in the face of animosity.

Truly, I have a deep respect for you that stands in a class of its own. You will leave behind a pair of shoes that will undoubtedly be impossible to fill, but I have hope that the union will continue to strive for goodness in your absence.

I wish you the best in your retirement, and, more importantly, I will hold you in my sincerest of prayers.

From the bottom of my heart, Irene, thank you. For everything.

Most sincerely,
Nick Tonnesen
West Catholic High School

Notes of Gratitude

IRENE,

Happy retirement!

Thank you for your years of dedication to Catholic Education and the Union.

May your retirement be filled with all the things you love.

Enjoy every moment of your new journey!

Katie Toenniessen-Innes

ACT Vice-President



I wish to congratulate Irene Tori on her retirement and extend sincere appreciation for her years of service as ACT Union President.

Irene served Catholic teachers with diligence, integrity, and honor, always upholding Christian values. May she be proud of the work she has done, the person that she is, and the difference she has made!

Best wishes,
Joseph Muto
Retired ARHS

LUCKY STRIKES



Contrary to popular belief, lightning can strike twice in the same location. The ACT president's office was struck twice, both brilliantly and providentially. The Association of Catholic Teachers had two presidents, two strong, principled union leaders, who advocated tirelessly and effectively for the rights of the Catholic teachers.

For many years, Irene showed constant flashes of brilliance in all capacities and positions of union leadership. When it became time to take on the role of president of ACT, she became a separate force of Nature. Lucky Strike, Lucky Us.

I served for many years on the Executive Board with Irene and worked on many negotiating teams with her on successful contracts. My unbounded confidence in her abilities, witnessed during those many years, was confirmed during her tenure as president. No one who knows Irene ever wavered in the certainty that the union was always strong in her vibrant leadership.

During negotiation sessions, fellow team members would marvel at her photographic knowledge of the contract and her ability to cite passages of contract language, as well as proposals, counter-proposals, and creative solutions to problems arising.

Irene not only had this extraordinary skill at contract language, but had the strength of character to make the language a living document by her strong representation of teachers and her steadfast enforcing of the language for the benefit of all our teachers.

All members of the Association of Catholic Teachers thank her for her service and wish her a well-deserved and happy retirement. Thank you, Irene, for the good fight well-fought. Thank you for the lightning.

John Zoccola, Retired
Archbishop Wood High School



WORDS THAT COME TO MIND WHEN I THINK OF IRENE

(From A to Z)

by: Ginny Crowther

- A..... Active, Attentive, *Alpine AI (there's a story)*
- B..... Balanced, *Bereft (see A, G, W)*
- C..... Calm, Caring, Compassionate, Considerate
- D..... Dedicated, Detailed
- E..... Efficient, Empathetic, Energetic
- F..... Fair, Faithful, Friend
- G.... Generous, "*Good Grief*", Grounded, *Groundhog (Alpine AI)*
- H.... Hallahan, Hard-working, Helpful, Honest
- I..... Informed, Integrity, Intelligent, Ireland
- J..... Joyful, Judicious
- K..... Keen, Kind
- L..... Leader, Loving, Loyal
- M.... Math, Meticulous, Mother
- N..... Noble, Nurturing
- O..... Optimistic, Organized
- P..... Poised, Polished, Productive, Professional
- Q..... Quality
- R..... Reliable, Resilient, *Retired*
- S..... Seasoned, Selfless, Service, Successful
- T..... Tactful, Teacher, Tested, Thoughtful, Trustworthy
- U..... Unbiased, Unwavering
- V..... Values
- W.... Wise, *Wipe-out (Alpine AI, the groundhog, RIP)*
- X..... "Xcellent" "Xceptional" "xtraordinary"
- Y..... Yes (no matter how busy she is the answer is Yes)
- Z..... Zeal, Zest

Notes of Gratitude

Dear Irene,

Thank you for all that you have done for all of us over the years. Your leadership has been invaluable and inspiring.

Words cannot sufficiently express how grateful I have been for all the help and encouragement you have given to me.

You will surely be missed as you embark on this new chapter of your life. Have a wonderful retirement!

Joanna Catanzaro, Retired
Bishop Shanahan High School

Irene,

My best to you in retirement. You have worked so hard for all the teachers of the Archdiocese over the years. You worked tirelessly day and night to ensure that all of us were treated fairly.

I personally witnessed your resolve on so many occasions. When assistance was needed, you were always there to help.

Enjoy your retirement and God bless you and your family.

Mike Wetzel, Retired
Monsignor Bonner-Archbishop Prendergast High School

Irene,

All the best as you start your retirement! You have done well, and we certainly appreciate all you did!!

Barbara Bibby, Retired
Archbishop Carroll High School

Notes of Gratitude

Irene was a competent and helpful rep for us. I did not know her well enough to write a testimonial but ALL of my interactions with her over the years were positive. I pray for a long and healthy retirement phase.

Patrick Shanahan, Retired
Roman Catholic High School

Retirement is not the end of the road; it's the beginning of an open highway!



Knowing Irene has always been a pleasure for me. Her help with specific issues has and always will be appreciated.

I am so glad that Irene is now retiring, while still young and healthy enough to enjoy it. Good for you, Irene.

Thanks for all the hard work you have done for many years as a union leader and teacher.

Alison Lewis, Retired
Saint Hubert High School

To Lead is To Serve

Irene is an intelligent, resourceful, energetic, and naturally empathetic leader.

During her years as staff, Irene collaborated with Rita and the Executive Board to develop policies and contract proposals to improve working conditions and resolve critical issues facing ACT that impacted the teachers.

Whenever a teacher or delegate called the office, Irene was quick to answer questions or suggest ways to resolve the issues. Any grievances she handled were carefully prepared and professionally presented to the Administration.

As President of ACT, Irene successfully negotiated a three-year contract while doing the work of president and staff.

I had many opportunities to witness Irene's dedication to improving the lives of all the ACT members.

I wish her well as she retires.

Chris DeNuccio, Retired
Saint Hubert High School



Pictured above is the 2023 ACT Negotiating Team. Pictured left to right is Christine Hanley Maldonado, James Vernon, Katie Toenniessen-Innes, and Chief Negotiator, Irene Tori.

Notes of Gratitude



Irene,

Have a wonderful retirement! It's the best!

Love,
Nan

Fernanda Sulik, Retired
Saint Hubert High School

Thank you, Irene, for your dedicated love and gift of yourself to all of us. Prayers and blessings and best wishes as you retire. You will be missed.

Gratefully,
Carol Dauerbach
Little Flower Catholic High School for Girls

Irene,

Thank you so much for all you have done for our teachers.

I hope you have a great retirement.

Linus McGinty, Retired
Cardinal O'Hara High School

Irene,

Thank you for your hard work and dedication in making the Association work for all its members for decades. You were always available and supportive to all of us. Enjoy your well-deserved retirement.

Justine & Dave Smith, Retired
Bonner/Prendie

Notes of Gratitude

Irene,

Thanks for your years of service to ACT. Best of luck. Enjoy your retirement!

Glen Galeone

Archbishop Ryan High School

Retirement is saying goodbye to tension and hello pension!

Irene,

Thank you so much for the many, many, many things that you have done for me!!!
And for going way, way, way beyond the call of duty!!!

See you in retirement!

John Miller

Roman Catholic High School

Retirement is when life gives you the greatest reward there is—peace of mind.

“Just, Thank You!”

Louise Ciabarra, Retired

Archbishop Wood High School

“YES”

“When at some future date the high court of history sits in judgement on each of us...our success or failure... will be measured by answers to four questions:

- ...was she truly a woman of courage?
- ...was she truly a woman of judgement?
- ...was she truly a woman of integrity?
- ...was she truly a woman of dedication?”

Irene – The answer to each of these questions is most assuredly **YES** – and for that you have Our Love, Our Friendship and Our Respect.

May God Bless you in the years to come.

Your Friend – Charlie Dougherty
(former member of Congress)

(from the words of John F. Kennedy as amended)

Happy Retirement to my friend, a wonderful Irish lass and a proud fellow forever Hallahan girl! I’m so grateful that God made our paths cross during my years at ACT! I gained some amazing role models and lifelong friends while there! May God bless you in a very special way for all of the good that you’ve done for others. Slainte!

With Love,
Christine Robertson Roxberry
(Hallahan Class of 1993)

Notes of Gratitude

Congratulations, Irene!

I am wishing you the very best for happiness and good health in your retirement—an exciting new chapter in your life!

Thank you very much for your assistance over the last 30 years in helping me, by providing timely information regarding the teachers' AOP plans and coordinating it with their individual 403b retirement plans.

As a former teacher in the Secondary School System, I admired your devotion and energy in looking out for the teachers' best interests, with contract years always being an exhausting and challenging time. Many of the benefits and assurances in the teachers' contracts can be attributed to you and your staff's untiring efforts.

You have left your mark and will be missed.

Sincerely,
Joseph Saskiewicz
Lincoln 403b Representative
Father Judge (1967-1972)
Bishop Egan (1972-1975)

*May good luck be with you
wherever you go,
And your blessings outnumber
the shamrocks you grow.*

Notes of Gratitude

Dear Irene,

I want to express my utmost gratitude and thanks for your unwavering dedication, hard work, and commitment to our union. A testament to your grit is how you stand strong in the face of challenges while uplifting those around you.

As a woman in power, you have been an inspiration. It should be to no one's surprise that you accomplished so much, Hallahan girls often do.

You exemplify leadership, generosity, and tenacity. Your willingness to give your time and energy to help others speaks volumes about the kind of leader you are--you genuinely care for each member.

Thank you for continuing to provide aid and counsel to those you have served. Your passion and commitment do not go unnoticed. I am truly grateful for all you have done.

With deep appreciation,
Bridget McLaughlin
Archbishop Wood High School
(Hallahan, Class of 2002)

Irene,

Thanks for all you've done and for who you are.
Many blessings for your future.

Sincerely,
Ken Chrusch
Monsignor Bonner – Archbishop Prendergast High School

Notes of Gratitude

Congratulations, Irene, on your much deserved retirement! Thank you for always helping any time I called the office. You always made yourself available (even on your days off!) and did so with kindness and grace. May God bless you with many years to enjoy the next chapter of your life!

Gratefully,
Kathy DiDonato, Retired
Saint Hubert High School

Irene has stalwartly been there to assist any and all of us who ask her for professional support. She has been an advocate for many of us in both good and tough times and has been a champion for our school community. We thank you for guiding our entire union and keeping it united, strong, and relevant for many years to come.

On behalf of the teachers at Roman Catholic High School, we wish you a happy and restful retirement.

Submitted by:
James Flannery
Senior Delegate

Irene,

Thank you for all you have done for us. You have represented us faithfully over the years through many contract negotiations. Thank you for always being at the ready to help a teacher navigate contract language to achieve the best possible solution.

I hope you are blessed with a long, happy, and healthy retirement. All the best.

Rose Tecce, Retired
Archbishop Wood High School

Notes of Gratitude



Dear Irene,

Congratulations on your retirement. I wish you all the best for years to come.

ACT has been blessed with great leadership all the way back to John Reilly.

I am sure it was not easy following in the footsteps of the iconic Rita Schwartz, but you proved up to the task.

I appreciate all you have done for me over the many years and the friend you have been. You will be missed.

Tom McKeever, Retired
Roman Catholic High School

Congratulations Irene! Welcome to the land of retirement! You certainly earned the time to relax! Good Luck!

Dave McQuiston, Retired
Bishop Shanahan High School

Thank you, Irene, for all your hard work as our Union leader. May your retirement years be happy and healthy!

Linda McBride
Archbishop Ryan High School

Notes of Gratitude

Irene,

You cannot be Thanked enough for ALL the Great work you did at Archbishop Ryan High School and ALL the years, time, effort, and energy you gave to the ACT 1776 Teachers Union.

You are a very Special Person.

Best wishes Always in your retirement, and God Bless you and Carl and Family.

Joe Ryan, Retired
Archbishop Ryan High School (1973-2014)

*Retirement is when you return home from work one day and say,
"Hi, Honey, I am home forever."*



I did not get to know Irene personally, but any time she would visit Wood, she always knew my name and treated me like an old friend, like I mattered to her! It takes someone truly special to make that type of impression on people!

Congratulations on your retirement, Irene. May God grant you much happiness and peace after all your years of dedication to Catholic education!

Sharon Hartranft
Archbishop Wood High School



*Never forget
that you were
the piece that
made a
difference.*

HANDING OVER THE REINS ACCEPTING THE CHALLENGE



Irene,

Thank you for all that you have done for the Association over the years.

It only seems like a few years ago I spoke with you about taking over the Senior Delegate position at Bonner-Prendie. During that time, you were always there for any questions I had and provided guidance as I got used to the position.

As I step into the position of President this year, I know you have set the bar high in terms of our teachers' expectations of what ACT can do for them.

Whether my time in this position is long or short, I look forward to building on the legacy that you and our other past presidents have left behind.

Thank you for your past and continuing guidance.

James

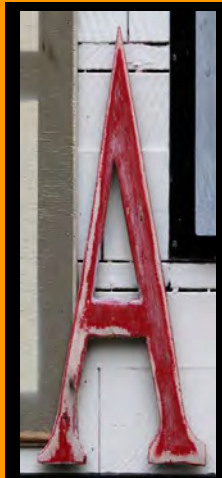
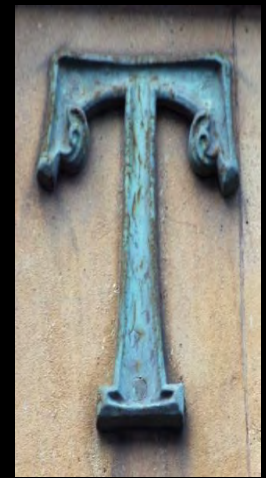
PAST AND PRESENT ACT STAFF



Pictured Top Row: Rita C. Schwartz and John J. Reilly
Joseph P. Punchello, Rita C. Schwartz & Edward V. Stehle.

Pictured Ctr. Row: John C. Zoccola and Rita C. Schwartz
Irene M. Tori, Rita C. Schwartz, and Joseph F. Schuler
Rita C. Schwartz and Irene M. Tori

Pictured Bottom Left: ACT Vice President and Assistant Staff, Katie Toenniessen-Innes and ACT President and ACT Staff, James R. Vernon.



Dear Irene,

Congratulation on your well-earned and well-deserved retirement.

Over the past years, you have been integrally connected to the strides and struggles, the successes and setbacks and the formation and foundation of our union. Your dedication, commitment, reliability and perseverance will also serve as your legacy.

Thank you for all that you have done for me over the years. It was always a treat to sit with you and Rita over lunch during your annual visit throughout the years, chatting, hashing out and solving issues.

Gratefully,

Jim Gildea (retired)

Saints John Neumann and Maria Goretti Catholic High School