



THE
SPIRIT
OF '76

The Newspaper of Local 1776
The Association of Catholic Teachers

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From the
President's Desk

**NEGOTIATIONS 2006:
WHAT OUR TEACHERS NEED**

One of the best parts of my job as President and ACT Staff is to visit the high schools and talk with teachers. I jokingly tell people that I really only go for the lunches, but everyone knows that's totally not true.

Visiting schools and talking with teachers is especially important during a negotiating year. As I travel from table to table in the Faculty Dining Rooms, I am asked: How do I think negotiations will go this year? Will there be another strike? What about the Medical? Will the Pension still be there? Are more schools going to close? I don't have a crystal ball, and, honestly, I prefer it that way.

Each time ACT begins the negotiating process with the System, it is a new experience, even though the issues that will fill the many long hours and months of collective bargaining don't vary much from year to year. The ACT Team is meeting weekly to put together the proposals. They will be presented to the membership on Wednesday, March 15th and I urge all of you to come to that meeting to see the proposal and vote your approval of it.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 2)

FROM THE PRESIDENT. . .

The opening of Negotiations is set for Tuesday, March 28th. The ACT Team will enter the room confident in the knowledge that our Union is strong and that our teachers want to go back to work in September. However, we also know that this return to the classroom will only occur if teachers are given a contract that will provide them with 1) a decent salary increase; 2) medical coverage for themselves and their families that will not cost them much more in premiums and co-pays; 3) a pension package that will provide retirement with dignity; 4) class sizes that don't outnumber the available desks and 5) the solid language contained in the existing job security and due process clauses.

A lot of teachers and administrators want to know if we can get negotiations done by the end of the school year. As I have said before, it is a great idea, but there is little likelihood of it happening. You would need a process like Win-Win which encapsulates 6 months of bargaining into 4 weeks, but, Win-Win is not on the negotiating agenda for 2006. Using Win-Win has to be by mutual agreement, and the System has said no.

The many questions being asked at lunch tables across the System will be on the bargaining table all summer. Hopefully, they will be satisfactorily answered and a package acceptable to the majority of the ACT Membership will be presented for ratification on September 5th. Please know that the ACT Team will do everything we can to make that happen.

Rita

Pay Less for Prescriptions?

If you take a prescription on a daily basis, you may want to do some comparison shopping on drugstore.com. One teacher told us that she was able to receive her prescription (which had been removed from the formulary) for about the same price as Caremark charged when the medication was on the formulary. She was also able to get 100 pills versus the 90 pills that are available through Caremark.

You may also want to check prices with Costco. From what we have been told, you don't need to be a member in order to participate in their prescription plan.

Let the ACT Office if you are able to save any money.

In Memory of Thomas F. McPherson

I consider myself privileged to have worked with Thomas McPherson for over thirty years. As a colleague, a fellow department member and a friend, he was truly inspirational and supportive.

Having been his department head for the last fifteen years, I had many opportunities to visit his classrooms. Each and every time, I was overwhelmed by three striking characteristics: the intense rapport he had with his students; the mutual respect that was so apparent; and the challenging nature of the daily lesson. Tom was a master at involving his students with the material.

One specific memory I have is when I was doing a book order for the fall semester, and when I questioned him about what titles he wanted, immediately he responded, "The students need to read more Ibsen and Kafka and Chekhov." Clearly, he was a man who valued and taught the traditional. He loved Shakespeare and instilled his love of Shakespeare to his students with close textual readings and analysis.

On many occasions Tom could be seen in conference with one or several students after school. He guided and mentored many. It was not unusual to find a student from ten or twenty years past coming back to still seek his counsel.

He was a remarkable individual.



Vincent Cancro
West Catholic

Sometimes you never realize the value of something until you lose it. This is how I feel about Tom's passing. I always got along well with Tom and I sort of took him for granted. Now I realize more than ever the role he filled for others and myself. I try now to reason his passing as simply Tom getting a head start on the rest of us. I think he would like to think of it that way.

Bill McMackin
West Catholic

I had been teaching at St. Thomas More High School for three years when Tom joined our faculty. We were glad to have him because he brought a perspective and a dimension that was lacking in a school that was becoming more ethnically mixed. During the racial tensions of the late 1960's and 1970's, Tom and I worked together with groups of students to diffuse potential problems and to promote harmony in the school. We began the Black Student Union (Organization), but Tom was the one who truly gave it life, substance and direction. Because of his efforts diversity became a positive element in all of the schools in which he taught.

Mike DiBenedetto
West Catholic

Lancer's Local

Issues or contractual items of interest to Holy Cross H. S. (Delran N.J.)

The faculty wishes Theresa Ritter well in her new career and thanks her for all her years of service to Holy Cross.

The faculty welcomes Rick Cameron and Ron Foley to the teaching staff of Holy Cross.

Tax Information: Union Dues for the Year 2005 are \$400.

Archdiocesan High Schools

TAX INFORMATION

2005 DUES

\$400.00

NOTICE

Voluntary Transfer

Applications for voluntary transfers must be submitted no later than April 1st.

(Forms will be posted by March 1st.)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Governor Rendell approved House Bill 894 (P. M. 2133) on February 2, 2006. It amends Section 1205.2(f) of the Public School Code (relating to Continuing Professional Education for certificated educational professionals) and permits professional educators who are employed at nonpublic schools to have access to the free CPE courses offered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Prior to this, only those employed by a "school entity" (a public school term) had a statutory right to have access to the PDE courses.

MEDICAL CARD UPDATE

In the December 2005 newsletter, we asked you to e-mail or call our office if you did not receive a new medical card over the fall bearing the "Caremark" logo. We heard from an overwhelming number of teachers who said they did not receive their new card. Due to Ginny's efforts, Blue Cross has agreed to do a mass re-issue of medical cards for every member covered under our group plans. You will receive a new card for yourself and for each family member covered under the group plan. Blue Cross began mailing the new medical cards to all Personal Choice and Keystone subscribers on February 6th. Your new medical card is to be used for all your health care, including in and out-patient hospital services, lab and radiology, office visits and doctor's fees as well as pharmacy and/or mail order prescription benefits. There is no separate card for your prescriptions.

VOLUNTARY VISION PLAN

The second payment for the Voluntary Vision Plan was due on February 6th. If you have not sent in your check, **payable to the Association of Catholic Teachers**, please do so as soon as possible. The amount due at this time is \$82.32.

MEMBER SERVICES

The following tickets can be purchased through the ACT Office: AMC Movie Tickets (\$5.50), Loews Theaters (\$5.50), Regal/United Artists (\$6.00), National Constitution Center (\$5.50), Franklin Institute (\$11.00). To place an order, send in a check payable to the **Association of Catholic Teachers** with a note indicating what is being purchased and the quantity desired. Coupons for Caesars Pocono Resorts are now available. If interested, please send an email to nacst.nacst@verizon.net for your free coupon.

Educator Spotlight

Educator: Tom McMahon, English teacher at Cardinal O'Hara High School in Springfield, Delaware County.

Achievements: McMahon, 57, of Lansdale, has been named Technology and Learning Leaders of the Year for 2005 by Technology and Learning magazine. He was one of four recipients nationwide. He also offers an online SAT prep course to the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Question: How long have you been teaching?

Answer: I started teaching in 1968. After 15 years, I was tired of being poor, so I left teaching and got a real job. After 15 years in business and industry, I was tired of not being happy, and so six years ago I returned to the classroom and have never looked back.

Q: How do you incorporate technology into your English classes?

A: For me, it isn't really about technology. It's about being a more professional, more effective and more efficient teacher. I have found that technology is one of the best ways of doing that.

Q: Can you give some examples?

A: I e-mail every student and every parent each week with homework assignments, schedules, assignment deadlines and class notes. Students have the option of e-mailing homework assignments to me. In class, I use many forms of technology. One of my favorites is digital storytelling.

Q: Can you explain that?

A: Yes. Students begin by writing an essay. The essay is then proofread and approved by another student. Following that, I proofread and approve the essay, and then the student reads aloud (and records) what has been written. ... The students add video, still pictures and music, creating their own video. The results are amazing. (Examples are available on McMahon's Web site at www.english.com. Click on one of the class periods at left, and then on "projects.")

Q: Why are you so involved in technology?

A: I'm really lucky that I teach in a school where I'm encouraged and affirmed. I have an LCD projector mounted on the ceiling of my classroom with surround sound, a DVD player, VCR, and a laptop that was given to me by the school. I also teach



LINSA JOHNSON/Inquirer Suburban Staff

Tell Us About It

We want to hear about student and educator achievements and school events. Contact us at 71schools@phillynews.com.

with a faculty who are always looking for ways to be better, to offer more, to be more.

Q: What inspired you to offer the online SAT prep course to the victims of Katrina?

A: Following the hurricane while watching TV, I saw two children standing on a roof, holding a sign that said, "Help us." It was as if they were speaking to me. I had to do something. For the past four years, I have offered an SAT prep course to the seniors at O'Hara. I knew I could develop it into an online course. I then contacted every

school district in the affected states that I could find to let them know what I was offering. At this point, more than 1,600 students have taken the course.

Q: What are your hobbies?

A: I'm an accomplished woodworker, but actually I'm a teacher, so I really don't know what free time is.

Q: What advice do you have for your students?

A: I learned a long time ago that God gives each of us the potential to do something incredible with our life. My job, as a teacher, is to help individuals to discover, explore, develop and celebrate this potential. I know this is true when I look at the faces of the students in my class. Each one of us can make a difference, and I have learned that from my students.

This article appeared recently in
The Bucks County Courier Times.

Catholic Schools

Character. Compassion. Values.

January 23, February 4, 2006



Catholic schools celebrate values

By JOHN BELFUS
COURIER TIMES

Conwell-Egan Catholic High School students no doubt have the date etched in their mind: CEC English teacher Mike Culnan will go before the entire school in Bristol Township Friday and have his head shaved to honor a deal he made with the students.

Culnan promised to get the waxesharp trim if the kids collected 250 coats for the school's recent coat drive for the needy. The students rounded up 468 coats during the effort.

The head shaving will culminate the school's Catholic Schools Week activities, according to organizers.

Catholic Schools Week, a nationwide, weeklong celebration, was established in 1974. It's designed to celebrate the role Catholic elementary and secondary schools play in providing a values-based education, organizers said.

"It gives us an opportunity to show people the wonderful things that are going on in our schools," said Florence Viola, principal of St. Bede the Venerable School in Northampton. "It's extremely important because we are church-related. Without the religious background there's no way to distinguish us from any other school."

This year's national theme is character, compassion and values.

■ The weeklong celebration was established in 1974 to celebrate the schools' values-based education.

BEFORE



ALMOST
FINISHED

Keeping a promise



As part of Catholic Schools Week, Conwell-Egan English teacher Mike Culnan promised to shave his head if students collected more than 250 donated coats for the needy. The students gathered more than 468. Culnan honored enough on the promise. *Steve Jurek/Courier Times* (left) *Bill Johnson/Courier Times*



ACT

General Membership Meeting

Wednesday

March 15, 2006

4:00 P. M.

Holiday Inn

City Line Avenue

Contract Proposals

New

Business