



PORT OF CALL

The newsletter that keeps Port's retirees connected and informed.

**PWTA RETIRED EDUCATORS CHAPTER
PORT WASHINGTON, NEW YORK
Fall 2015 VOL.25 NO.3**

NYSUT NO. 19 080R Visit our website at: www.pwta.us/PWRE AFT NO. 9591-R

IN APPRECIATION FOR JOE COPPOLA

The Port Washington Teachers Association would not be what it is today had it not been for the work of Joseph Coppola, who played a decisive role in making the Association a unified and solidified organization. Although the PWTA was established in 1932, it was not until after the passage of the Taylor Law in 1967 and the events of the early 70s that its role changed and greatly expanded to become a legally recognized bargaining unit.

Joe Coppola was a science teacher at Sousa Junior High School. You could always find Joe's room by the odor of animals and plants. He was passionate about biology and taught ninth grade honors biology to students who were selected to take tenth grade biology in the ninth grade. Joe's class was legendary. It was rigorous and demanding, but students vied to be in the class. Joe was able to convince the district that his class was so significant that he needed an assistant to help set up and take down labs. His assignments would have been worthy of a college class, but his students worked hard and accomplished much. Joe always worked long hours, often far into the evening, especially when he became involved in the Association.

He was an extraordinary teacher who loved science and who passed his enthusiasm on to his students. When Sousa was closed, he continued teaching biology at Schreiber High School until his retirement. Erlyn Madonia remembered that Joe, whether at Sousa or Schreiber, asked his students the same question every day: "What have you done today to make the world a better place?"

In the 1960s when Joe came to Port Washington, many teachers saw themselves as subservient, especially to principals and other administrators. Because they also saw themselves as "professionals," they considered activities such as joining a union, picketing, or even standing up for their rights to be below their dignity. It was not that they were not intelligent, educated, or fine teachers, but that they "knew their places."

Joe saw teachers and their role in a school district in a way very different from that of many of his colleagues. He saw teachers as having a great deal of knowledge about what they taught, their students, and education. As a result, he believed that teachers should have a significant voice in what happened in the schools. He also believed that teachers should have the good salaries and benefits that reflected their value.



At the end of August Joe addressed the meeting of hundreds of teachers who overwhelmingly voted to strike.

PANDORA'S BOX - GET THE FACTS ABOUT A CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

Under Article 19, para. 2 of the NYS Constitution, every twenty years we are asked, "Shall there be a convention to revise the constitution and amend same?" This question will appear at the top of the ballot on Nov. 7, 2017, and will have a tremendous impact on us and on every citizen of our state.

The constitution (a) establishes a basic organizational structure for our state government, (b) sets policy goals for the people of NYS, and (c) establishes our fundamental rights, e.g.

- guarantees the right to a free public education
- *prohibits reductions in public pension benefits (Art. 5, para. 7)*
- assures rights to workers' compensation
- assures rights to be a member of a union and bargain collectively
- requires that the state provide for social welfare needs . . .

In 1957 a scheduled referendum was voted down; in 1967 voters rejected proposed changes (after a very large monetary cost); in 1997 voters rejected a call for a constitutional convention after a coalition of many groups worked very hard to make sure voters understood what could happen if the state constitution were opened up to drastic changes through a convention.

The constitution can be amended without a convention through the passage of individual bills by two separately elected state legislatures. (This was done as recently as last year.) This is an introduction to what lies ahead.

Stay informed. Be ready to work in 2017!



Come to the P.W.R.E. Book Club

All are welcome whether you've read the book or not. If you plan to attend, please RSVP to the host. (check member directory for address & phone number, or email.)

Date: Tues. Oct. 20 after the PWRE Board Meeting
Book: The Nightingale - Kristin Hannah
Hosted by: Norma Ziegel

Date: Tues. Dec. 1 at 11:00 am
Book: This Beautiful Life - Helen Shulman
Hosted by: Tessa Jordan

Date: Wed. Jan. 13 at 11:00 am
Book: The Marriage of Opposites - Alice Hoffman
Hosted by: Joyce Shapiro

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FRIENDSHIP/ REMEMBRANCE COMMITTEE

Norma Ziegel

Get Well Wishes were sent to

Mary Anne Cariello
Joan Gerken
Ruth Haugaard
Linda Jordan
Maria Mitchem
Carol Nesbit
Karen Pehlke
Kay Stewart

Condolences were sent to

Mary Ann Leonard on the loss of her brother
Penny Zangas of the loss of her mother
Family of Naomi Beckley
Family of Joseph Coppola
Family of Shirley Waller Feit
Family of Carmen Licitra
Family of Joy Lupoletti
Family of Irene Sinkinson

A \$100 contribution has been sent to the PWRE Scholarship Fund in memory of each member

Naomi Beckley
Joseph Coppola
Shirley Waller Feit
Carmen Licitra
Joy Lupoletti
Irene Sinkinson

Mimi Olsen Pond and Garden - Ute Johnson



For many years Guggenheim School had a very small pond with a few fish and some water lilies in one of its interior courtyards. It was conceived, installed and maintained by Mimi Olsen, a Guggenheim teacher. After Mimi retired the pond was becoming neglected so I decided to take over its maintenance. With recruited volunteers, the pond was kept in tip-top shape. This involved “mucking” it out now and then, taking care to feed the fish and occasionally replacing the plants.

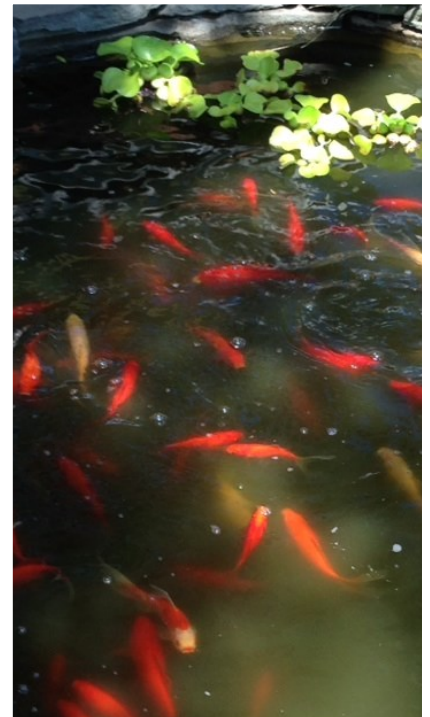
In 2005, in a “eureka” moment, I decided to raise funds for a new and bigger pond. Gardens were also planned throughout the courtyard. It was decided to dedicate the new pond and gardens to Mimi. With generous financial help from many including retired teachers, active teachers and staff, and also a PWEF grant, it became fact. After more than \$6,000 was raised, a local contractor was hired to install the new pond. It was completed in 2006, stocked with several goldfish, nicely landscaped and dedicated that fall.

In the intervening years, I and fifth grade teacher Natalie Miller with our cadre of students and volunteers faithfully kept up the pond and gardens, even after I retired in 2011. Until now,

the new pond had never had a thorough cleaning. So this spring, funding for this project was secured from a local environmental group, PWGreen, and a professional pond cleaning company successfully drained and scrubbed the pond.

The pond, however, needs some updating. It needs a better filtering system and water skimmer. The total cost will be \$2,170. With the new equipment, the water will be more aerated, much cleaner and healthier for the nearly 100 fish. Natalie and other teachers regularly use the pond and gardens as a teaching tool for classroom environmental studies.

We would love to go ahead and hire this company to install the new systems, but need funding. Natalie Miller and her students will be helping with fund raising activities this fall that hopefully will cover part of the expense. Shown here are some pictures of the Mimi Pond and Garden. Our goal is to continue to have this wonderful resource for the school children. Should you want to help us meet our new goal, make your check payable to **Guggenheim HSA**. Send it to Natalie Miller, Guggenheim School, 38 Poplar Place, Port Washington, NY 11050. Your donation is tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.



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Merry-Go-Round by Merry Gilbert

You Never Know

“A Merry Talk” (Move over, TED)

I found myself giving a pep* talk to my nephew who lost his job due to an administrative change. Although he had gotten a new (and better) one, he feared that such a clean sweep could happen again. The short version of the talk--which I embellished with details about those I knew who had triumphed over such job-related adversity and come out on top was: “You never know.”

Based on my talk, I was inspired to create an embroidered hand towel for him, and since I believe Latin sounds classy--with thanks for the translation to Bernadette Dempsey’s daughter and to Dawn of Initial Stop in Port for the embroidery--there came into being a variation on the traditional “his” and “hers” towels: “Non Scis”, which is “You Never Know” in Latin. I told him to use it daily and take the advice to heart.

In this vein, I loved Merl Reagle’s obituary in the New York Times on August 25th. Lauded by the crossword community for his inventive and playful constructions, Will Shortz, the current NYT crossword editor, is quoted in the obituary as saying, “Incredibly, the Times’s editor, Eugene T. Maleska, had written Merl that he had no talent.” This is a great obituary, and worth reading to see the full extent of his enormous influence on the crossword community.

<http://nyti.ms/1KIUINC>

Somehow, that kind of negative opinion seems to linger in one’s memory and triumph over reason. Although this should not really be all about me, I cannot ever forget my high school guidance counselor telling me (52 years ago!!) not to bother to go to college, as in his opinion, I’d never make anything of myself.

Non scis, Mr A., non scis!!

*Too bad I retired, as most of my talks used to be PEP talks.

Enjoy another episode in the *Adventures of Merry*

Parking Request Fulfilled!

For those of us who enjoy an occasional trip for an afternoon in NYC, getting to the Port Washington LIRR train station has been a long-complained-about problem. The four commuter parking lots are full in early morning, and taxi service to the station is more costly than the railroad fare. Thanks to our perseverance and that of our local legislator Dina DiGeorgio, the meters in the parking lot across from the movie theatre on Main Street (behind Carlo’s Pizza) now allow 5 hours of parking; hence one can park at noon, be legitimately parked until 5 p.m. when there is no longer any meter charge, and pay a total of \$1.25 (at .25/hr.) by cash or credit card. This is a welcome solution to a persistent problem, and we thank Dina for her help.

Getting Together - Barbara Blum



Green-Wood Cemetery Trolley excursion -Wednesday, November 4, from 1pm to 3pm. We will meet at the Brooklyn cemetery and take a trolley tour through the grounds, stopping at famous graves and mausoleums and for beautiful views. We will learn a bit of history and stories about famous people. More information will follow for those who are interested. LBBLUM67@gmail.com

25th Anniversary - Ours and OURS!

NYSUT will be celebrating 25 years of the existence of retiree chapters on November 19 at the Watermill in Smithtown.

Some of the highlights will include such topics as the 2017 proposition to authorize a constitutional convention in New York State (see our article "Pandora's Box"), get the Facts About A Constitutional Convention), information about health benefits and long term care, and an overview of Social Security and Medicare. Watch for the invitation.

OUR PWRE 25th anniversary celebration will take place on May 12. Save that date! We promise a beautiful site, meal, and the company of the best we can offer -- ourselves! Stay tuned... and make early travel arrangements if you are coming from afar.

Doing More In Retirement.....



Shortly after I retired I was invited to become a group leader for Books for Dessert, a book club for adults over 21 with intellectual disabilities. The clubs, there are three of them, meet weekly at the Port Washington Library. Two colleagues, Evelyn Schonbrun and Marian Weisman, are also involved. This has been a wonderful reading experience for all the participants, who work together and help one another with affection. Our groups read sophisticated picture books, abridged classics, graphic mysteries, fiction, and nonfiction. The groups discuss the stories, review vocabulary, and make connections between the characters' experiences and their own. Coffee and casual conversations are also part of our meetings. Working with each of the book clubs has been a most satisfying teaching experience for me these past 12 years.

Annamarie Benzinger

Making Strides

As in the past, Sue Mittelstaedt will chair our PWRE drive. Please make your own contribution and those you solicit from neighbors, merchants, family, and friends payable to the American Cancer Society. Please send your contribution(s) to Sue, 39 Shadyside Avenue, Port Washington, NY 11050, so we can count them in our own chapter numbers.

Then come walk with us and the thousands of others on October 18, early a.m., at Jones Beach. Do a good deed, get your exercise, have your picture taken and have breakfast afterwards.



We Asked To Hear From You And We Did



Arlene and Rich Braverman celebrating their anniversary in Spain.



Bonnie and Greg Utzig enjoying Maine!

Pictures From Our Annual After Labor Day Brunch



Top left: Our most recent members left to right: Joan Andors, Rosanne Matty, Trish Wright, Fran Clark, Caryl Fazio, Paul Kosiba and Pat Kosiba.

Below left: Eileen Brotman, Jane Tafarella, Joann McLoughlin, and Terri Dover

Below right: Back row: Joan Andors, Jan Effman, Peggy Higgins, Arlene Braverman, Rosanne Matty.

Front row: Elaine Ajello, Therese Egan, Liz LeSuer, and Camille Corbisiero.

Watch for more pictures from the After Labor Day Brunch in our Winter issue!



Cont'd from page 1

By 1971 Joe had become president of the Association. He set out to raise the consciousness of teachers with the help of other like-minded teachers. This was done through a campaign of keeping teachers informed.

He believed that if teachers were informed, they would make the right decisions. A newsletter called *Council Cites* was planned, written, typed, duplicated, and distributed to teachers' mailboxes in each school. There were 21 issues of *Council Cites* the first year. This newsletter made teachers aware of what was happening from a teacher point of view. In 1972 the PWTA began a newsletter to the community with Dr. George Williams as editor. The *Port Arrow's* mission was "to identify, explore, and explain issues of importance to education in Port Washington." While the target reader was the community, it also served to make teachers aware of their own worth. In addition, Joe made the PWTA more visible in the community. The teacher member of each school's PTA was now a teacher who saw herself as a member of the PWTA and carried its message. Teachers met directly with school board candidates, school board members, and the entire school board to convey the concerns of the Association. Joe was not reticent when it came to writing letters, instituting grievances, and publicly supporting and defending the PWTA's point of view.

Joe believed that the Association should support and defend every member and make sure that individual rights, especially that of due process, were observed. "I have refused ...to accept any hearsay evidence about the performance of a given teacher....What we all too often do not realize is that whenever the administration, board, or community takes action against a teacher without documented evidence, then this action is based on hearsay evidence and every teacher in the school could be similarly 'tried.' "

By the time negotiations for the 1973-78 contract were underway, teachers were more and more knowledgeable about what was happening in the district and less willing to accept what the school board dictated. This was shown in a number of ways. Teachers who said they would never hold a picket sign did, or at least they stood next to people who did. Teachers took part in dramatic actions such as a motorcade on Main Street and leaving school parking lots empty of teacher cars. By August 1973 when a strike vote was taken, only six of 470 teachers voted against it. At 5:45 am on the first day of school, a groundbreaking five-year contract was settled and a strike averted, a result which would not have been possible without all of the preliminary work that had been led by Joe.

Thanks to Joe Coppola's intelligence, creativity, and appreciation of teachers, the PWTA changed. It was more than a social organization or even a legally recognized bargaining unit; it was a force to be considered; it was a solid organization of teachers who recognized their abilities and who had gained an important voice in education in Port Washington. Joe's work made this possible.

What the PWTA is today has much to do with Joe Coppola's vision, determination, and courage. We are indeed grateful to him.



Joe, Executive Vice President Mary Anne Cariello, and Superintendent Hugh McGuigan sign the five-year contract.



Port Washington Retired Educators Chapter

Meetings will be held on Thursdays at the Port Washington Library on the dates and times listed below, unless otherwise notified. Please check your e-mail or the website for any meeting changes.

These meetings aren't just for the PWRE officers. All members are welcome to attend.

2015 Meeting Dates

October 20 at 10:30 in the Hagedorn Room (upstairs)

November 12 at 10:30 upstairs in small History Room (upstairs)

December - TBA—check our website for up-to-date information

<http://www.pwta.info/PWRE/index.shtml>

**PLEASE NOTE: Checks for contributions to the PWRE Scholarship Fund should be made out to the PWTA Scholarship Foundation and mailed to:
Penny D'Antonio
1425 Port Washington Blvd.
Port Washington, New York 11050**

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