

# The Agenda



Volume 25, Issue 2

Over Seventy Years of Excellence in Education

MOUNT VERNON FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

April 2024

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

### Hello MVFT Family:

As we enter the Spring season, I hope all is well with you and those you care about deeply. We are more than two-thirds of the way through the academic year. We are still in the process of negotiating a new Collective Bargaining Agreement with the school district. A few major aspects of the contract where the MVFT and District are at odds about are the percentage increases on the salary schedule as well as the hourly rate of pay. It is critically important that we continue to show up at Board of Education meetings in large numbers to show our collective unity around this issue because this affects each one of us. Negotiations dates with the school district are scheduled for April 11<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>.

The Union continues its **Advocacy and Fundraising** efforts for the Mount Vernon School Community. On Friday, March 1<sup>st</sup>, we along with NYSUT (our state union) arranged a **Foundation Aid Rally** to protest the initial monetary decrease in state budget funding. The reduction of approximately 2.9 million dollars in School Aid to Mount Vernon was presented by Gov. Hochul for next school year. We collaborated with elected officials and the district to demand that school funding be restored to at least the level of the 2022-23 academic year. We will know within the next week if we were successful in this effort when the Governor releases her revised budget. The MVFT has also spoken out publicly against two charter school expansion proposals. These expansions will potentially drain additional monetary resources away from the students who we currently serve.

I'm proud to announce that the MVFT has donated \$2000 to the MVCSD McKinney-Vento department. The McKinney-Vento department serves students in the school district who are in temporary housing arrangements. **Due to your generosity, this donation will assist over 50 high school seniors with the purchase of their graduation caps and gowns.**

We will also sponsor the **Autism Awareness** event which will take place at Traphagen school on Monday, August 29<sup>th</sup>. This sponsorship is courtesy of a grant that was secured last year from the AFT. (American Federation of Teachers: national union affiliate)

As in previous years, the Union will be offering **Scholarships to high school seniors of MVFT members** and students who are **seniors in one of the MVCSD high schools**. **The application deadline is Monday, May 13<sup>th</sup>**. If you need an application, please contact your building representative. These are just a few of the many examples of the MVFT's commitment to our schools and community.

Finally, we have another article written by Dave Bonington, one of the financial advisors at Stacey Braun. I encourage each of you to set up a free one-on-one financial consultation.

I hope you enjoy this issue of The Agenda.

**Keith McCall, MVFT President**



## Letter From the Editors

This issue of The Agenda features articles and photos from around the District highlighting our Members doing what they do best: focusing on the children through unity and caring.

This month, Ian focuses his article on Personal and Bereavement Days. Each issue he has focused on areas that are especially important for Members to understand in the Contract. Make sure to visit the MVFT website for past Newsletters and Ian's articles.

Also, we bring to your attention important information regarding mailings you may have received at home from Freedom Foundation and Mom for Liberty.

Financial advisor, Stacey Braun, provides us with another informative article about our finances. Remember to take advantage of the free five hours of services they offer to MVFT Members. It is never too early or late to plan for a secure financial life.

Thank you to everyone that sent articles and photos for this April issue. We often never get to see the great things that are going on in other schools and the Newsletter is a way we can support and praise each other.

We will have one more issue at the end of the school year. **Please continue to send articles and photos. Let's make our year end issue the best yet!.**

Yours in Unity,  
Laura and Ian

## RCTA BOWLING EVENT

By Laura Marino



MVFT Members, not in order, Tashi Campbell-Tulloch, Monica DeOliveira, Althea Simon, Carleen Rodgers, Derrick Thompson, Nikysha Copeland-Bey and Janeen Clayton, surround NYSUT President Melinda Person at RCTA Bowling Spectacular

The 7<sup>th</sup> Annual RCTA Bowling Event took place on March 14 in Haverstraw to benefit the United Hospice of Rockland County. MVFT team came out in force to show their bowling skills and solidarity with over 40 other bowling teams of local unions from across the region. This event is a hit every year both as a fundraiser and for the fun factor.

NYSUT President Melinda Person joined our team for a photo, she knows winners when she sees them!

## Sneaky Snail Mail

By Laura Marino

In recent months, some Members have received mailings from *Freedom Foundation and Moms for Liberty*. **BE AWARE!** MVFT President Keith McCall reminds you:

Freedom Foundation claims that they fight for workers' rights. This cannot be further from the truth. Unions have strength based upon their ability to organize workers and build capacity around issues that are common to Members. A few of these issues include improving working conditions, protecting pensions and collective bargaining.

Moms for Liberty work to silence and end curriculums that mention LGBTQ and BIPOC and Critical Race Theory among others. This is contrary to the work that we do. One of our vital union values is that we are inclusive of everyone regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.

# BEREAVEMENT & PERSONAL DAYS

*By Ian Smith*

There may be times in which a member needs to conduct business during the regular school day. This article will seek to explain the various rules for different circumstances that may arise.

## **Bereavement**

The contract contains language for a leave of absence with pay in the unfortunate event of the loss of a loved one. However, it is important to note that the member's relation to the deceased can impact the number of days a member is allowed to take a leave of absence for bereavement. A member can take up to 5 consecutive days if the deceased is a parent, sibling, child, spouse, or a member of the family that resides with the member.

If the deceased is another family member such a grandparent or an in-law, the member may only take up to 1 day of bereavement leave. If the deceased lives over 100 miles away from Mount Vernon, the member may take 2 days of bereavement leave. Bereavement days do not count against a member's 3 annual personal days. However, if the member wanted to take additional time off of work, then they should use their personal days.

Bereavement days are available as a drop-down option on AESOP. Make sure you complete a personal day form and indicate that you are taking a bereavement day.

## **Personal Leave**

Every year, members are allowed 3 days of leave for personal reasons. Unused days are converted into accumulated sick days. Personal days should be used for conducting business that cannot be conducted outside of regular school hours. The contract lists some examples of instances for which a personal day could be used.

All requests for personal days should be filed at least 5 days in advance unless it is an emergency. A member who requests 2 or more consecutive working days must specify the reason for the leave. It is also important to note that a member cannot take a personal day the day immediately before or after Thanksgiving break, Christmas break, mid-winter break, or spring break.

If a member takes more than 3 allotted personal days, they can be docked days. Although AESOP/Frontline keeps a record of used personal and sick days it is up to the individual to only use their allotted personal and sick days.

## **Other Excusable Absences Without Loss of Pay**

The contract lists several other instances in which a member would be deemed excuse without loss of pay such as jury duty and the conferring of a degree. Refer to the contract for the full list. In these instances, the member should still complete a personal form and enter the absence on AESOP but should clearly indicate the reason for the absence. These absences should not be counted against the member's sick days or personal days.



# Make Sure Your Money is Working as Hard as You Are!

By David Bonington  
Certified Financial Planner™  
Stacey Braun Associates, Inc.

Hello! I am delighted to return with what I hope will now become a series of articles on financial topics.

By the time you read this, Spring will be here. Many people embrace this season with a fresh-start, “Spring Cleaning” mindset - initiating projects to refresh, renew, or enhance things which have been neglected.

What if one of those things being refreshed and enhanced in 2024 was your savings account?

Stand by – I’ll return after a quick announcement. Stacey Braun Associates provides a financial counseling benefit (covered by the MVFT Welfare Trust) which offers access to Certified Financial Planners™ able to provide information, ideas, and suggestions on a range of financial topics – such as Debt and Credit Management, Investing, Insurance, Saving for College and Retirement, and Estate Planning. Many of you have already taken advantage of this program - but if you have not, a meeting could well be a step towards improved 2024 financial wellness.

Now back to that opportunity! For the twelve years following the end of the Great Recession in 2010, inflation remained low and interest rates on most savings accounts started with a decimal point and a Zero. However, this is no longer the case - for a timeframe about move into its third year! What caused this? The Federal Reserve Bank’s action to raise an underlying interest rate steadily and dramatically since March 2022. Such action is undertaken to combat significant inflation, and although it is painful for borrowers it eventually creates the opportunity savers enjoy today.

Banks and Credit Unions currently offer liquid, high-yield savings account rates of almost 5%, roughly twice the last-40-year average annual rate of return on Cash. For savers willing to “lock up” funds for short periods, measured in months, Certificates of Deposit (“CDs”) generally offer a slight premium. (If you are comfortable with online banking, rates can be better still – without sacrificing important FDIC insurance.) Finally, it is also possible to get the best of two worlds – handsome rates *and* flexibility - by “laddering” several CDs of different maturities.

The message here? Take steps to make sure your savings are working for you, because the environment for account balances (sorry, I can’t resist) is *interesting* once again!

A free, confidential session with a Stacey Braun planner can be arranged by calling 1-888-949-1925.

No financial products are sold and there is no sales pressure.



# STILL NO CONTRACT

# Why attend a board meeting?

As we all know, we are coming upon 2 years of working without a contract. The negotiations team has been working diligently to get what ALL MVFT members deserve. Even though you may not hear or be able to know everything that is discussed at the negotiations table, please know that we all want the same things. We are dealing with many obstacles, however, we still deserve what our colleagues in other districts have received in their recent contract settlements. With this being said, we are asking for ALL members to attend ALL future board meetings until we have a settled contract. To date, we have 1,124 members who show up to our schools EVERY DAY and still do our best. We need more of us attending board meetings to show the district that we are serious and need a settled contract IMMEDIATELY. The sea of blue at the board meetings needs to be much bigger than what it has been. MORE faces and more BLUE SHIRTS need to be present. Please trust our presence is making a difference.



MVFT Coming Out in Force for BOE Meetings

Board Meeting dates for the remainder of the 2023-2024 school year:

**Tuesday, April 16<sup>th</sup> at 6:30pm**

**Tuesday, May 7<sup>th</sup> at 6:30pm**

**Tuesday, May 21<sup>st</sup> at 6:30pm**

**Tuesday, June 4<sup>th</sup> at 6:30pm**

**Tuesday June 18<sup>th</sup> at 6:30pm**

See you there!

Janice Pollard



MVFT Security Officers Lalli Scales, Alison McMillian, Anita Gardner and Lynn Forde relaxing at the County Center after working hard to keep everyone safe.



Pennington Staff Shows Strength in Unity #mvftstrong



Edward Williams MVFT Staff Showing Strength in Blue

# girls are GIFTS

*By Nelda Bazil-LeBlanc*

*Teaching Assistant, Denzel Washington School of the Arts*

In February 2023, I initiated the work to start a Mentoring Program for girls here in Mount Vernon. After almost one year coordinating the many needed pieces and bringing them together it was a joy to launch the “girls are GIFTS” Mentor Program on January 27, 2024.

The Guest Speaker at the Opening Ceremony was a former Lincoln School student, Rev. Elizabeth C. Abel, District Superintendent UMC Long Island West. The children also heard testimonials from Mayor Shawyn Patterson-Howard, a former student of the Mount Vernon School District.

We were honored to have Acting Assistant Superintendent of Pupil Personnel Services, Dr. Marie Gaboton-Swift, who shared her remarkably interesting journey on how she navigated her way, upon arrival in the U.S. We heard also from former Mount Vernon School District Special Education Teacher who now serves as Director of Special Education for the Peekskill School District. Ms. Glenda Sanchez spoke of her journey from South America as a child. And her struggles, on arrival in the United States not speaking any English.

The children also heard from Ms. Jessica Pizzini, Resource Room Teacher at Benjamin Turner Academy. She spoke of the strong will and grit it took for her to go back to school as a GED certificate holder. She simultaneously ran a business, attended college, and managed a family. Ms. Valerie Miles from the Denzel Washington School of the Arts encouraged the children to seek her help, when needed. She has tremendous experience and wealth of knowledge to impart on the Mentees. Before joining the Mount Vernon School District, Ms. Miles worked as an Educator in District 75 within the New York City School District.

The recurring theme from all the speakers was on how mistakes are one’s path to success and that we should not be afraid of making mistakes. The program’s Mentors come from diverse backgrounds: Lawyer, Dentist, Accountant, Author-Public Speaker, Social Worker, and Superintendent John Jay College, NY. They were all happy to meet the children as well as ready to serve.



# KNIGHTS SHINE AT ALL SECTION DINNER

*By Rich Suozzo*

Congratulations to MVHS Basketball players Nathaniel Edwards and Tavien Tyler for being named to the All Section 1 Basketball Team. Nate is a senior who will head to college next year while Tavien returns to MVHS for his senior season. Tavien was also named to the All-Lower Hudson Basketball Coaches Association First Team. Great job to the players, Coach Cimmino and his staff.

Fun Fact: Both players are former Traphagen students.



Coach Cimmino with Nathaniel Edwards and Tavien Tyler at All Section Dinner

# SPOTLIGHT



**L-R: First row Winners:** Keyla Miranda, Cymfiney Grant, Natalie Oyala, Tatiana Burke, Christian Ogbonna, and Neymar Smith. **Second row PBIS Team:** Anthony Plati, Victor Castillo, Saroya Brown, Jennifer Vano, Debora Wong, Danielle Green, Randi Frankel, and Shawn Harper-Tarrant.

The Parker PBIS Team celebrates the winners of the first annual Parker School PBIS Good Behavior Contest. This year's prizes were 2 bikes, 2 scooters, and 2 gift cards. Congratulations to all the winners.



Hamilton Staff Erica Rosita, Charlene Clarke, Thalia Langley, Justine Jacobson, Wendy Lang relive their glory days of the 80s and 90s during Spirit Week.

## Dominican Independence Day Author Visit

By Lenora Harris-Shoulders

In honor of Dominican Independence Day (February 27), MVLA members, Ediris Squitieri and Lenora Harris-Shoulders, hosted a special visit from author/illustrator Alisia Reyes. She read her book, *A Tropical Adventure*, to our dual languages' classes in grades K-2 and ENL students in grades 3-8. Students were excited and eager to hear her story and find out more about becoming an author. Ms. Reyes also autographed three books and gifted them to the students. The children also learned about some Dominican traditions. It was a successful event!

# SPOTLIGHT



Lincoln 1st and 5th graders read together during Read Across America Week while Christina DeLucia, 5th grade teacher, looks on.



1P Read Across America with Lisa Ludwicki, ELL teacher at Lincoln



Lincoln teacher, Christina DeLucia, moderates PBIS Pen Pal meeting between 5th graders and 1st graders.



# SPOTLIGHT



MVLA's Mr. White leads Ice Cold as they perform at the Black History Celebration

# Retiree NEWS

MVFT Retiree Chapter Members,

Well apparently, 39 degrees and three inches of rain is going to be the new norm for the first week of April in NY. However, I think I'm catching a faint glimmer of buds on the trees and some confused flowers popping through the soggy ground. C'mon Spring!

Recently, the Chapter has been investigating questions from our members concerning MVFT Welfare Fund benefits; lagging District payments for retiree health insurance; contractual health insurance coverage.

The Retiree Chapter Executive Committee continues to meet in person or via Zoom and minutes from our April 2 meeting will soon be distributed. I am also scheduled to meet with MVFT President Keith McCall on 4/8 on a lengthy agenda and I will report back to the Exec Committee and membership after that meeting.

I've been discussing with the Exec Committee the possibility of our Chapter organizing an MVFT History Project. Next year will be the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the MVFT and I think it's important to collect some historical pictures/writings/oral recollections from those folks who were around to see the growth of the organization. Please contact me if you're interested.

Additionally, the MVFT Retiree Chapter Facebook page is up and running with over 100 registered members. Please join us and spread the word to other retired teachers, assistants and security <https://www.facebook.com/groups/215762104946875>

As usual, if you have any questions, I can be reached at [pres.mvftc@gmail.com](mailto:pres.mvftc@gmail.com) or 914-715-9573.

*Rick*, President MVFTRC



PEOPLE WHO MOVE CHANGE THE WORLD.®

The **MVFT Retiree Chapter** is once again joining team **“Shake Rattle and Roll”** with Rick Castellitto as captain, to raise funds to battle Parkinson's Disease.

Team **Shake Rattle and Roll** will be participating in **Moving Day, A Walk for Parkinson's** on May 18. At Moving Day, we'll be helping to fight Parkinson's Disease and celebrating movement, which is proven to help manage Parkinson's symptoms.

Your donation will help the Parkinson's Foundation deliver quality care; fund cutting-edge research; provide essential resources to those of us who live with Parkinson's and to those who care for Parkinson's patients.

*“I appreciate all of your support in past years and I look forward to our continued fundraising success. Your donations have helped to make Team Shake a fundraising leader in the Lower Hudson Valley. Together, let's make a difference. ~ Rick Castellitto*

Please visit the link below and donate to help us raise funds and fight Parkinson's disease:

[http://www3.parkinson.org/site/TR?team\\_id=76229&pg=team&fr\\_id=5466&et=gA8--gw7870ntfW0MI3jWceQn-IEWiDs0YzQpOWGcqQZBTfSPBTamw&s\\_tafld=58443](http://www3.parkinson.org/site/TR?team_id=76229&pg=team&fr_id=5466&et=gA8--gw7870ntfW0MI3jWceQn-IEWiDs0YzQpOWGcqQZBTfSPBTamw&s_tafld=58443)

## Winter Scarves for our Mount Vernon Kids HOLIDAY INITIATIVE

Thanks to our talented retirees, this past year the MVFT Retiree Chapter distributed over 400 beautiful handmade scarves to our students in need.

Maz Hogan has accepted the position as chairperson once again for the 2024 Scarf Holiday Project. Thank you, Maz! Also, special thanks to the MVFT Building Reps for their help in delivering and distributing the scarves every year.

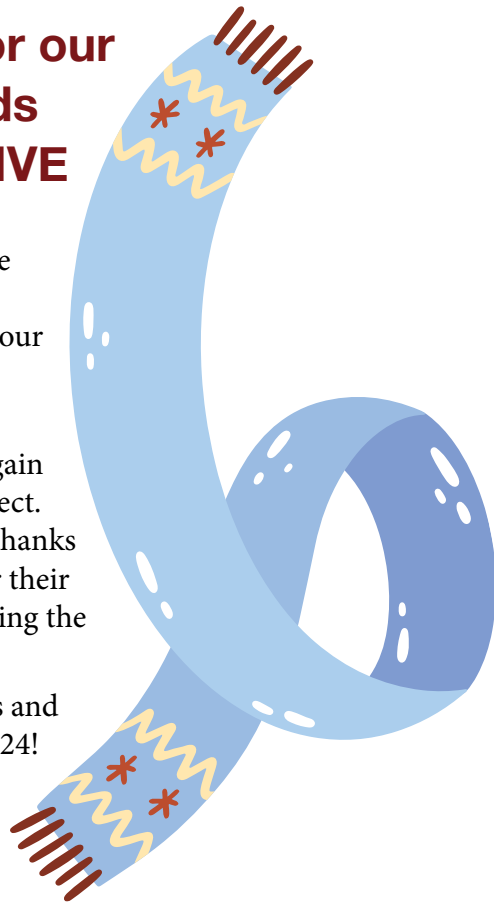
So let's get those needles, hooks and scissors going for December 2024!

Suggested sizes for scarves: knitted, crocheted, fleece cut, or purchased -

PreK to K = 32" x 3"

Grade 1, 2, and 3 = 50" x 4"

Grade 4, 5, and 6 = 68" x 5"



## Ronald McDonald House Meals for Families Join our MVFTRC Cooking Team!

After a winter hiatus, the MVFT Retirees are back in the kitchen preparing meals for the families staying at the residence next to Maria Fareri Children's Hospital in Valhalla. If you would like to join our committee to volunteer, or have any questions, contact me and I will send you the list of available dates and times to cook. No cooking skills necessary - there are always plenty of dishes to wash and meals to pack!

**Karen Wallace, Chairperson; [kkwallace312@gmail.com](mailto:kkwallace312@gmail.com)**



## MVFTRC Executive Board

Rick Castellitto, *President*

Jeff Yonkers, *Vice President*

Karen Wallace, *Secretary*

Pat Duggan, *Treasurer*

Anne Marie Kiernan, *Delegate-at-Large*

## Annual Pull Tab Collection for Ronald McDonald House – May 2024

*Margaret Mahoney, Chairperson*

The MVFT Retiree Chapter will hold their annual Pull Tab Collection to benefit Ronald McDonald House in Valhalla, NY. We will be coordinating the project with President Keith McCall, and distributing materials to the Delegates for each building.

We are so appreciative of President McCall and the Delegate Assembly for their continued help and support of this project!

## MVFTRC Correspondence Report:

### Births

**Shari DiPaola** – Grandson, Calvin Roy DiPaola, March 28, 2024

**Christine Iaffaldano** – Great niece, Lucia Rose Ceglio, April 1, 2024

**Diana O’Sullivan** – Great niece, Lucia Rose Ceglio, April 1, 2024

### Congratulations

**Marielena Ciccimarra** – Daughter, Robin, engagement

**John Larkin** – Daughter, Anna Larkin, will receive her doctorate in NYC on May 29 as a Nurse Practitioner

### Condolences

**Carl Caprio** – loss of father, Richard Caprio, March 2024

**Dianne Santino** – loss of son, Christopher Borelli, January 2024

**Vincent Borelli** – loss of son, Christopher Borelli, January 2024

### Membership Report

652	Retired
8	On Leave
1093	Active Members
1753	TOTAL

## Happenings

**Damali L. Murray** retired from the Mount Vernon City School District in 2015 after 32 years of teaching. Damali is a member of the Mount Vernon based **Got Art? Inc.**, a 501 C3 nonprofit organization. This organization connects artists and the community through exhibits and education. Currently, there is an exhibit at the Bronxville Public Library for the month of April. Mrs. Murray has several mixed media pieces on display. In addition to this exhibit, her works have been exhibited and well received throughout Westchester County.



## EXECUTIVE BOARD

Keith McCall <i>President</i>	Janice Pollard <i>Pre-K-8 VP</i>
Jeanne Casino <i>Vice President</i>	Karl Nifontoff <i>High School VP</i>
David Israel <i>Treasurer</i>	Richard Suozzo <i>High School VP</i>
Frank Claro <i>Secretary</i>	Sabrina Velez-Payne <i>Pupil Personnel VP</i>
Andrea Gelling <i>Pre-K-8 VP</i>	Shondu Young <i>Security Chapter Leader</i>
Denisha Hawkins <i>Pre-K-8 VP</i>	Monique Bell <i>TA Chapter Leader</i>
Thalia Langley <i>Pre-K-8 VP</i>	

## UNION OFFICE

MVFT Rm. 303  
22 West First St.  
Mount Vernon, NY 10550

Phone: (914) 664-3189  
Fax: (914) 664-0860

Online at: [www.mvft.org](http://www.mvft.org)

## BUILDING REPS

- |                              |                             |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Karen Wheeler #1             | Rita Colucci #9             |
| Michelle Atterberry #1       | Ellen Benowitz #10          |
| Laura Marino #2              | Lenora Harris-Shoulders #10 |
| Modesta Curzio-Spies #2      | Ian Smith #12               |
| Michele Battista #3          | Mary Dempsey #12            |
| Shawn Harper Tarrant #4      | Shawnette Odindo #13        |
| Andrea Hyatt-Copeland #4     | Nicole White-Lee #14        |
| Charlene Clarke #5           | Charissa Manigault #14      |
| Yesenia Avenant-DeFreitas #5 | Laurie Kellogg #14          |
| Rebecca Challop #6           | Francina Jubilee #16        |
| Ellen Hanney-Saligumba #6    | Greg McDonnell #16          |
| Tashi Campbell-Tulloch #7    | Isabel Garcia #17           |
| Monica DeOliveira #7         | Nadine Shields-Alcalde #17  |
| Janeen Clayton #8            | Sam Stern #18               |
| Nikysha Copeland-Bey #8      | Jaqueline Simone #18        |
| Caiifa Clark #9              | Tyler White #18             |
|                              | Mike Malosky #18            |

## The Agenda

NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE  
*President:* Keith McCall  
*Editor:* Laura Marino  
*Editor:* Ian Smith

*Contributors:*  
Nelda Bazil-LeBlanc  
David Bonington  
Rick Castellitto  
Lenora Harris-Shoulders  
Margaret Mahoney  
Laura Marino  
Keith McCall  
Janice Pollard  
Ian Smith  
Karen Wallace