



SPECIAL **The Communicator** PEF EDITION

The Year in Review

In 2022, the doors reopened, the meetings returned to conference rooms, and parades and rallies are back.



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The President's Message

By WAYNE SPENCE



PEF Did it in 2022!

Happy holidays to the proud public employees of PEF! I hope you all find a quiet moment in the hustle and bustle of the next couple of weeks to reflect on the power of our union in 2022, [like we did in this year-ending issue](#). From rallies to parades to in-person gatherings across the state, the union worked hard to protect your rights and keep you safe at work this year.

A new year is always a chance for change and I'm hoping that's the case at the Office of Children & Family Services (OCFS) in 2023. OCFS Commissioner Sheila Poole has long had a reputation for not treating PEF members with the respect and dignity they deserve, and [we welcome the announcement of her departure](#). I truly hope whoever takes over at OCFS will hold managers accountable and make the agency a desirable place to work for everyone.

The PEF Executive Board met for the final time this year last week in Albany, and [we have a recap of that meeting in this issue](#). Two things of note: PEF Organizing Director Dan Carpenter exposed the devious marketing of a group calling themselves "Opt Out Today," which many of you have heard from via email and mailings. Please read the summary of Dan's report and [share this document we created to let PEF members know the true value of union membership](#). The Executive Board also heard from Dr. Christina Colclough, who Zoomed in from Europe to talk to PEF leaders about strategies unions need to employ in order to have a voice in the digital transformation of all facets of work. It was a fascinating discussion and I'm committed to making sure PEF has a seat at the table when it comes to how the state uses artificial intelligence to change the public services our members deliver.

Finally, an example of just one way PEF members give back during this season of giving. [Region 3 got in the holiday spirit by donating to Rochester City School District's School 29 "Santa Shop,"](#) providing students the chance to shop for their parents, guardians and loved ones. I wish you all a happy and safe holiday and a very happy New Year.

In Unity,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Wayne Spence". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Wayne Spence
PEF President



New board members were sworn in Dec. 14. Left to right: Scott Harms, Workers Compensation; Kevin Jones, Labor; David Downing, DOCCS; and Kyle Jacobson, Taxation & Finance.

Executive Board discusses anti-union attacks, the impact of technology on the workforce, and the Fund Our Future campaign

By KATE STICKLES



The PEF Executive Board met December 14 and 15 in Albany and welcomed a renowned international expert on technology and its impacts on public-sector workers, heard a panel discussion on the Fund Our Future campaign, and discussed the latest organized attempts to reduce union membership.

An attack on unions

PEF's membership has risen to 49,000, said President Wayne Spence, thanks to the State's lifting of the hiring freeze and PEF's success signing up new members. That's impressive considering a concerted effort by the Freedom Foundation to convince union members to drop out of their union.

"Many of us have gotten some unwanted emails in our state email," said Organizing Director Dan Carpenter. "A group calling themselves 'Opt Out Today' – heavily funded by the Freedom Foundation — is hitting back and they are hitting back hard. They have invested \$20 million in New York."

The organization had been targeting CSEA with messaging, but waited until after the election cycle to pounce on PEF.

"It's not coincidental they targeted PEF this time around," Spence said. "We're now making strides. We are now affecting national issues. AFT and SEIU are highlighting the things we are doing. If we weren't doing anything significant, there would be no reason to target us."

Carpenter said Opt Out Today claims in a blog post that thousands of PEF members have expressed their desire to drop out.

"Let me set the record straight," he said. "We've had six. Six official drops."

PEF is fighting back with information that reveals the true value of being a member of the union. [This document outlines some of the benefits.](#) Of particular note – a PEF member with a salary of \$65,000 in 2014 has seen their salary jump more than \$11,000 in eight years. Over those eight years, that PEF member earned more than \$49,000, thanks to negotiated contractual raises and the effects of compounding.

"The reality of what they are doing now is they want to take away our ability to negotiate that salary increase, take away our ability to negotiate the cost of health care," Carpenter said. "They want to take away our workplace protections and, most importantly, they want to take our pensions away."

"When these attacks come, we do need to be vigilant," he continued. "We are doing great work here at PEF and it needs to continue."

Dangers of technology in the workplace

President Spence invited Dr. Christina Colclough, an expert on the intersection of the workplace and growing technology trends, to address the board on what is coming and what to do about it.

Colclough is a long-time trade unionist based in Europe who has worked all over the world supporting unions as they navigate digitization.

"There is a lot of talk around AI," Colclough said via Zoom. "We all seem to assume that management understands the technology they are using. If there is one thing that is very clear – they don't. We need to hold them accountable, and we need to have union strategies for that."

She said unions urgently need to lead the way on reshaping the current model of digitization and must become stewards of good data governance.

"We must demand and live up to the principles of transparency and inclusion," she said. "As unions, what we have always done is fight to

improve the conditions of workers. So we should fight to improve digitization.”

Colclough emphasized the need for information.

“We don’t know what we don’t know,” she said. “If any of you have spent time with developers, they speak a different language. We will never be able to reshape and come up with new suggestions if we don’t know if the technology can really do what they promise.”

A lot of harm can come from digitization technology. Just look at the COMPAS (Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions) program being used by parole in New York. It has been shown that the algorithm is biased.

“No one can predict the future,” Colclough said. “When did we accept that anybody could predict the future? Now we have AI they claim can predict when someone is likely to commit a crime or whether somebody is likely to commit tax fraud.”

She said there is even AI that can write a student’s thesis and a professor would never know the difference.

[RELATED: Keep an eye on your public sector job: Staying ahead of AI and tech trends](#)

What the digitization of public services boils down to, she said, is de facto privatization of public services through the procurement process. The charge against it must be led by unions.

“What can we do about this?” she asked. “We need negotiators who understand digital strategies. We need a seat at the table. We need much stronger data rights. We need to transform our unions.”

President Spence said PEF is going to be working alongside AFT and PSI on digitization strategies.

“We need to speak with one voice,” he said.

Health and safety at state office

President Spence reported on the health and safety issues at 55 Hanson Place in Brooklyn, where multiple state agencies and legislators have offices. He said there is disorganization among management and a lack of transparency.

“It got to a boiling point when we found a member had been hospitalized and there was a rumor it was legionella pneumonia,” he said.

The union learned that there had been trace amounts of legionella bacteria in the building’s cooling towers back in the summer, and while it was not legally required to be disclosed, it could have been.

“Even if it’s not worthy of reporting it, if you’re sick and not well, you could be susceptible,” he said. When confronted about the issue, Spence said the State Education Department responded callously.

The Attorney General, who also has an office in the building, and the governor, apologized.

“OER (The Office of Employee Relations) went on the offensive,” he said. “I called the AG and asked if she knew. She said no and asked why she was hearing it from PEF and not the state. I got a call from the governor’s people and from elected leaders. They wanted to

apologize. What took place, according to the governor’s folks, will never happen again.

[RELATED: Members come together to demand action on health and safety issues at Brooklyn state office](#)

Union finances

PEF Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue presented his report on the union’s unaudited financial statements from July 1 to September 30.

“There was a lot of market volatility,” he said. “For this quarter we lost almost \$400,000 in investments.”

There were also some lines over budget, such as employee benefits, occupancy and parking, office supplies, and insurance. At this time, he said he wasn’t asking for any budget amendments, hoping the numbers would even out.

Membership counts were up.

“Thanks to our leaders and the organizing department, our numbers are up,” he said. “As of September 20, we have more than 49,000 dues-paying members. Hopefully we are on the way back to our previous numbers.”

There are some obstacles to signing up new members, such as the state hiring temporary and seasonal workers over permanent positions.

Joining together to Fund Our Future

The Executive Board also heard from a panel of community leaders and legislators who are joining forces with PEF in its Fund Our Future coalition.

Rev. Peter Cook, executive director of the New York State Council of Churches; Ron Deutsch, a private consultant on social economic justice issues; Ryan Delgado, chief of staff at the New York State AFL-CIO; and New York State Sen. Robert Jackson spoke on the importance of legislative advocacy and supporting one another.



PEF is asking for support of a number of legislative budget proposals, including reinvigorating the state Civil Service system; a \$45 million budget add for OPWDD to stop current closures and develop a plan to address ongoing housing shortages; \$50 million for OMH/OASAS to address the ongoing mental health/addiction crisis; and to amend the “Less is More” law and “HALT” act and provide real re-entry services and support for the formerly incarcerated.

The first Executive Board meeting of 2023 will be held March 23 and 24 in Syracuse.

RELATED: LINK TO THE FULL STORY I HAVEN’T WRITTEN YET



Panelists from left to right: Robert Jackson, New York State Senator, Ryan Delgado, Chief of Staff, NYS AFL-CIO, Patrick Lyons, PEF Legislative Director, Randi DiAntonio, PEF Vice-President, Reverend Peter Cook, Executive Director of the New York State Council of Churches and Ron Deutsch, Private Consultant on Social and Economic Justice Issues.

PEF brings together panel of Fund Our Future supporters

By KATE STICKLES



Ron Deutsch, a private consultant on social economic justice issues; and Ryan Delgado, chief of staff at the New York State AFL-CIO, spoke on the importance of legislative advocacy and supporting one another.

"We're moving into phase two of our campaign," said PEF Vice President Randi DiAntonio. "Phase one was increasing our internal capacity – storytelling, gathering testimonials – so we can start educating folks. We do a lot of great things, but we talk about them to each other, not our neighbors."

PEF Legislative Director Pat Lyons summarized PEF's budget priorities for the next session, including reinvigorating the state Civil Service system; a \$45 million budget add for OPWDD to stop current closures and develop a plan to address ongoing housing shortages; \$50 million for OMH/OASAS to address the ongoing mental health/addiction crisis; and to amend the "Less is More" law and "HALT" act and provide real re-entry services and support for the formerly incarcerated.

State Sen. Robert Jackson is no stranger to PEF. A former member, who now chairs the Senate's Civil Service and Pensions Committee, he said his "feet are tied to PEF."

The Executive Board welcomed a panel of community leaders and legislators who are joining forces with PEF in its Fund Our Future coalition to address the Executive Board on Dec. 14 in Albany.

New York State Sen. Robert Jackson, Rev. Peter Cook, executive director of the New York State Council of Churches;

"To get anything done, you have to work for it," he said. "The workforce is under capacity, and we need to recruit and retain staff. Tier 6 sucks. I hear it every single day from employees and workers."

Jackson is determined to reform Tier 5 and 6 to better align with the benefits of Tier 4.

"Everyone should be able to live on their retirement," he said.

Jackson is ready to do what it takes to support the public-sector workforce, even if means walking to Albany – something he has done before, walking 150 miles during the Campaign for Fiscal Equity school funding lawsuit in 2003. The result was a court judgment worth \$16 billion for New York City schools.

"If we just sit in our chairs, change is not going to happen," he said.

Ron Deutsch, a private consultant who works on social and economic justice issues, was most recently the Executive Director of the Fiscal Policy Institute, a research and education organization committed to improving public policies and private practices to better economic and social conditions in New York.

"You are the ones that are on the frontlines, making our society safe, helping people who are in desperate need of services," he said. "I ran the Fiscal Policy Institute for a number of years and that's where I really saw how important the work you all do is."

He said the previous governor instituted a 2% spending cap, decimating state services and agencies and hurting staff.

"You were all being asked to do more with less," he said. "It's just not fair to you or the people you serve. The time for mourning is over. Now it's time to organize. We're going to be loud and proud and vocal at the Capitol. Press conferences, rallies, lobby days. We need





[Click here to view the Panelist's Bios.](#)

to make sure that people understand that it's you who a providing service and making a difference in peoples' lives every day."

Among the priorities, he said, are more Civil Service exams, increasing beds at psychiatric facilities, and making sure that any criminal justice reforms provide for the safety and humane treatment of everyone -- from inmates and parolees, to the officers who supervise them, to the wider community.

"We can do this together," he said.

Ryan Delgado, the chief of staff at the New York State AFL-CIO, serves as the organization's political director, responsible for managing the endorsement process of the Federation and the coordinated political action program of the AFL-CIO's state affiliates.

He acknowledged the role of PEF.

"PEF is a very important part of what we do at the state level," Delgado said. "Not a day goes by that we aren't on the phone with PEF. We are unique from other states in how closely we work with our local federations."

Delgado said it is key that all 3,000 locals in the AFL-CIO, comprised of more than 2.5 million members across the state, work together and "go in the same direction."

"We are building power and very focused on looking at where the elections underperformed," he said. "We need to let them know when the legislature is doing right, when it's wrong, and when we need things. It's important to PEF members lives and all working people."

Rev. Peter Cook, executive director of the New York State Council of Churches, which represents 7,000 congregations across New York, has been a strong advocate of affordable housing and community outreach.

"We collaborated with the union movement around the Fight for \$15, safe staffing for nurses, improving wages for home care workers, and resisting union busting in the private sector," he said. "We joined with 32BJ and PEF and supported the HEAL act."

"The Council also has the unique role of certifying and supporting chaplains for OMH, OCFS, DOCCS -- all PEF members," he said. "We would strongly support efforts to increase hiring of state workers and not be downsizing or outsourcing their work."

Cook said prisons and secure facilities need mental health and addiction treatment.

"The need is immense," he said. "We are in the rehabilitation business, and you too are in the rehabilitation business. It takes money, staffing, working with chaplains, correctional officers, mental health programs. You can't just be cutting corners. When you cut corners, it becomes unsafe for everybody."

DiAntonio said the campaign going forward will depend on the coalition being built. I'm

"It's fluid," she said. "It's going to be an ongoing process. But building power takes all of us."

To learn more about the Fund Our Future campaign, [click here](#).

The Year in Review

From rallies, to parades, to meaningful change, PEF was on the move in 2022

By KATE STICKLES

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, much of our interaction with each other was through a screen. When we did venture out, we stood in lines six feet apart. So in 2022, standing in solidarity took on a different look. Doors reopened, meetings returned to conference rooms, and parades and rallies were back.

Here are some of the highlights of the past year as they appeared in the pages of *The Communicator*:

December/January

[PEF rallied with parole officers to denounce the “Less is More” parole reform law](#), calling out its serious repercussions for community safety, parole supervision, and crime victims. The union held rallies in Albany and outside Riker’s Island, drawing crowds and media attention to the cause.

February

[PEF negotiated](#) geographic raises for SUNY Downstate, worked hard to close the salary gap between private and public-sector nursing positions; secured extensions of 2.5 overtime agreements for certain titles; and negotiated HSCA and DCAA balance carryovers. The union is always busy protecting you on the job, advocating for you, and securing your benefits.

March

[Nurse Lobby Day](#) brought to light the many challenges facing PEF nurses and the nursing profession in general. Nurses came together to talk about hazard pay bonuses, improving recruitment and retention, revamping the Tier 6 pension plan, and addressing toxic workplaces. Their sentiments were bolstered by [testimonials from the 2021 Convention](#), highlighting these challenges.

April

PEF took a deep dive into Gov. Kathy Hochul’s 2023 budget, closely examining the proposals and how they would impact PEF’s ranks. The budget is the first in President Wayne Spence’s tenure as president that begins to take into consideration – and reward – the critical work of public employees and [delivered big wins for PEF](#).

May

Legislators joined PEF in support of nurses during the [Nurses Day of Action](#) in Albany. The challenges of short staffing, mandatory overtime, and pay gaps took center stage at the State Capitol. PEF also partnered with one of our parent unions, AFT, to conduct a [“Membership Blitz,”](#) knocking on doors and visiting worksites across the Capital Region. Joined by out-of-state volunteers from other AFT locals, PEF members and leaders shared the news of the union and signed up new members during the weeklong event.

June

[PEF notched significant legislative wins](#), including penalties for mandating nurse overtime; requiring agencies to conduct cost-benefit analysis to determine if projects would be equal or less expensive to keep in-house; and legislation requiring OPWDD to publicly report the number and nature of state-operated facilities for the developmentally disabled. PEF officers embarked on a [“Statewide Officers Tour,”](#) visiting worksites, attending open houses, answering questions, and listening to the needs and wants of members across the state.



July/August

Members in New York City [testified about the strained state of mental health services](#) at a hearing held by Attorney General Leticia James, continuing to push legislators and elected leaders to learn about and address the needs of New Yorkers. PEF also [secured geo pay](#) for additional nursing titles statewide, continued negotiations to extend 2.5 times overtime rates, and Membership Benefits hosted its annual [Family Fun Days](#).

September

PEF members made a strong showing at [Labor Day rallies, picnics and parades](#) across New York in 2022. Hundreds marched in the annual Albany Parade ([watch a video here](#)), calling for respect and a fair contract, and letting the public know PEF members are there for them when they need them most. The union also selected the recipients of its [annual Joseph Scacalossi Scholarships](#).

October

After decades of advocacy, PEF's calls for restructuring nursing titles were recognized. In response to a pay equity study, the state upgraded select nursing titles, increasing hiring rates and updating shift pay. [PEF is continuing the advocate for restructuring and/or reallocation of titles](#) at other agencies across New York. The fight isn't over.

November

Convention topped the table of contents in November, with news from the 44th Annual Convention in Niagara Falls. More than 460 delegates focused on the theme, Reclaim Our Future, and conducted all the business of the union planned for that year. President Wayne Spence recounted the vital strides the union made in 2022, earning statewide and national respect in the labor movement. Speakers pledged their support and praised members for all their hard work. The Contract Team was introduced and began preliminary meetings with the state ahead of the expiration of the 2019-2023 PS&T Contract on April 1, 2023.

Onward and upward in 2023!





PEF secures salary reallocation for Roswell nurses

By **ROB MERRILL**

The PEF Roswell Park Contract Team and management from Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center (RPCCC) have agreed to reallocate the salaries of the more than 680 PEF nurses employed by the facility in Buffalo.

Since Roswell is not part of the State's Civil Service system, nurses who work there were not eligible for the broad title restructuring announced by New York earlier this year after decades of lobbying by PEF. Recognizing that unfairness – and knowing that nurses have historically been undervalued and that compensation is a key factor for retaining and attracting skilled professional nurses – PEF-represented nurses immediately went to work, creating a petition and gathering more than 750 signatures demanding Roswell increase nursing pay grades and base salaries to better match the education and skills required for their jobs. The petition was given to the Chief Nursing Officer at Roswell and a campaign to go public with the unfair treatment of Roswell nurses was created in case management refused to listen.

Those actions led to a series of conference calls between PEF staff and leaders and Roswell management, culminating in a face-to-face meeting on Dec. 13 in Albany. At that meeting, details were ironed out for a salary reallocation for titles in the Roswell nursing community.

"PEF had every intention to do whatever it took to ensure nurses at Roswell received the compensation and upgrade that they deserve," said Nurse 2 Jordan Blatz, who is a member of the Roswell Contract Team. "It was great to see both sides negotiate efficiently to reach a positive outcome that recognizes the continued hard work of the nurses at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center."

"PEF refused to accept anything less than what our nurses deserve," added fellow Nurse 2 Theresa Burke, who is also part of the team negotiating a new contract for PEF members at Roswell.

"I would just like to thank the three nurses (Michele, Jordan and Theresa) who make up the Roswell Park Contract Team for the countless hours spent away from their personal and family lives to work on securing better salaries for Roswell nurses," said Yatram 'Bruce' Jagroop, an occupational and environmental safety specialist at Roswell.

A joint letter was sent to Roswell's Classification & Compensation Office from PEF President Wayne Spence and RPCCC President and CEO Dr. Candace S. Johnson requesting the reallocation. The letter recommended a three-salary grade increase for each applicable employee, which according to the terms of the PEF contract will amount to a six percent increase in base salary or the increased hiring rate of Step 2 of the salary grade members move up to, whichever is greater. For employees already receiving longevity payments, the amount of the longevity (performance award) will be added into their new promotional base pay in accordance with the PEF contract.

PEF received word on Dec. 20 that the recommendations were approved by Roswell's C&C Office and will go into effect on April 6, 2023.

"I am so glad that the hardworking nurses at Roswell are being rewarded," said PEF Region 1 Coordinator Michele Silsby, a senior nurse case manager at Roswell. "We work with some of the most



challenging and complex patients and this recognition of the world-class skills and training Roswell nurses bring to their jobs is long overdue."

The salary upgrade pertains to the following titles:

Nurse I
Clinical Research Nurse
Nurse II (Employee Health Clinic)
Nurse II (Per Diem)
Nurse II
Nurse II (Endoscopy Team Lead)
Nurse II (Operating Room Team Lead)
Case Manager
Microsurgical Nursing Specialist
Nurse II (Operating Room Multi-Specialty)
Nurse II (Perioperative Multi-Specialty)
Oncology Nurse Coordinator
Enterostomal Therapy Nurse
Nursing Staff Development Instructor
Senior Case Manager
Transplant Nurse Coordinator
Community Liaison Nurse
Nurse II (First Assistant)
Nursing Supervisor
Oncology Clinical Nurse Educator
Perioperative Nursing Supervisor
Senior Clinical Pathway Coordinator
Clinical Nurse Manager
Clinical Research Center Administrator
Transplant and Cellular Therapy Compliance Administrator

"We believe this upgrade recognizes the education, skills, experience, dedication, and hard work of nurses at Roswell," said President Spence. "It is our hope that it will improve Roswell's ability to recruit and retain nursing professionals."



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PEF members from Albany Co. Probation at the Labor Day parade on Sept. 9, 2022.

Albany County Probation reaches tentative agreement with county; no givebacks and a 16% raise over six years

By KATE STICKLES

An impressive turnout at the Albany Labor Day parade, with signs and shirts demanding a fair contract, got the ball rolling again towards a collective bargaining agreement for PEF members at the Albany County Probation department, who have been in negotiations with the county for nearly a year.

Albany County Probation at the 2022 Albany Labor Day Parade They reached a strong tentative six-year agreement, retroactive to Jan. 1, 2022, containing no givebacks. For the first time since Albany County Executive Dan McCoy took office, members would be getting more than 2 percent raises across the board – with this contract locking in two years with 2 percent raises and four years with 3 percent.

“The PEF Local 502 leadership, committee members and the negotiating team, alongside our field representative, worked hard and tirelessly for over a year to get a fair contract that would benefit all its members,” said Council Leader Tricia Drautz. “Not only do we feel we have done that but we have also begun to address retention of our members by fixing and adjusting the salary chart for Senior Probation Officers and Supervisors.”

The top step of the longevity chart for the most senior employees would increase under this contract to a \$5,000 per year longevity bonus, up from \$1,400.

There would also be a 20th step on the salary charts to allow very senior officers to be compensated for their dedication and service to the people of Albany County.

The contract also includes wins for dental and vision insurance improvements.

“This deal was reached through member mobilization when contract negotiations were stalling,” said PEF President Wayne Spence. “The members rallied and turned out a huge contingent in the Albany Labor Day Parade, marching to demand a fair contract.

“McCoy was there that day and believe me, he noticed,” said Spence. “Immediately following those efforts, contract negotiations restarted, and we were able to work out a strong deal.”

PEF negotiated a \$3,000 ratification bonus and if members vote to approve the tentative agreement, it goes to the PEF Executive Board for approval. The county must also get the terms of the agreement approved by the Albany County Legislature.

Work on these efforts will begin immediately.



PEF Contract Team meets for second time with State

By **ROB MERRILL**

The PEF PS&T Contract Team held its second meeting with the Office of Employee Relations on Dec. 13. It was the first face-to-face (i.e., non-virtual) meeting and every member of the team was present: Scarlett Ahmed, Department of Labor; Vincent Cicatello, Office of Mental Health; Ricardo Cruz, Downstate Director of PEF Field Services; Conrad Davis, Taxation & Finance; Chris Ford, Office of Information Technology Services; Deb Greenberg, PEF Contract Administration Director; Ed Aluck, Contract Administration Associate Counsel William Holthausen, Region 12 Coordinator; Maureen Kozakiewicz, Department of Motor Vehicles; Jeanette Santos, Department of Health; and Cynthia Walker, SUNY Downstate. Also present at the meeting were Chief Negotiator Mark Richard and PEF Contract Administration staff Erika Frasier, Ben Translavina, Sean Shields and Marci Chadwick.

Each member introduced themselves and spoke about particular issues in their workplaces and the needs members have told them they would like addressed in the next PS&T contract. The main issues noted were:

- Compensation, including across-the-board raises, location pay and longevities;
- The inadequate dental plan and its lack of network providers;
- Improving work-life balance, by making things like telecommuting and alternative work schedules more flexible;
- Equity and fair treatment for long-term hourly employees;
- Eliminating sunset provisions in the contract that historically have expired at the end of the contract term, such as the tuition reimbursement benefit;
- Recruitment and retention issues and how to improve them, by offering things like loan assistance, better child care, etc.;
- Onboarding and orientation of union members; and
- Alternative uses of leave accruals, such as cashing them in or using them to a greater extent to offset health insurance costs.

The team also discussed title restructuring, even though that is not something that can be negotiated as part of the CBA. PEF felt it was important to note recent achievements in that regard and to encourage the State to keep that momentum going as the union pushes to reallocate/restructure additional historically underpaid titles.

The tone of the meeting was cordial throughout. PEF stressed that while compensation is always top-of-mind in negotiations, there are plenty of additional stresses members face at work that we'd like our next contract to help alleviate. Paychecks are always important, but so are respect and working conditions. Our members, especially in hospital and facility/institution settings, need to be able to use their vacation time, take lunch and other breaks and receive sufficient training to perform their jobs. PEF recognized the issues New York is facing statewide when it comes to recruiting and retaining professionals and pledged to work together in this contract and outside of it to address that critical fact.

The two sides agreed to meet again on January 10 and 11, and February 7 and 8.



Office of Children and Family Services

Long overdue leadership change coming to OCFS

By WAYNE SPENCE, PEF PRESIDENT

It's time to shut the door on toxic workplaces at Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) facilities across New York – and the upcoming announced departure of Commissioner Sheila Poole by the end of the year is a welcome first step.

What do I mean by toxic workplaces?

As a union representing more than 1,500 employees at OCFS facilities across the state, we have heard numerous stories of bullying and intimidation from our members.

Top management has been known to degrade and humiliate staff at meetings, sometimes so badly that those staff members are brought to tears. At other locations, we have heard managers are clocking when staff enter the building, and they are disciplined for every minor infraction. Staff say they are constantly watched. Some facilities are so understaffed that everyone is working out of title and barely able to provide minimum coverage for their clients.

Managers are allowed to continue these despicable behaviors with no consequences. Our members are forced to report to offices and

work under these conditions, something that no person should have to endure. Understandably, stress is high, and morale is very low. These members took positions at OCFS facilities to help their fellow New Yorkers and with staffing so low, partially due to the treatment they are subjected to by management, they are not always able to effectively do their jobs. No one should be subjected to these conditions.

PEF welcomes Commissioner Poole's departure and, with it, hopes for an end to these toxic practices at OCFS. As a leader, you are only as good as those you appoint below you to manage the day-to-day operations of your agency. In this case, leadership sorely needs a shake-up. We hope the next commissioner quickly addresses the toxic work environment.

Public service is a calling. PEF members at OCFS are professionals who dedicate their lives to serving children and families in New York. They deserve to be treated with respect and dignity in the workplace.





Region 3 recognized for outstanding political action

By KATE STICKLES

The Rochester Labor Council recognized Region 3 and Coordinator Leisa Abraham for outstanding advocacy in political action at their annual awards dinner this month, highlighting PEF's participation in Labor Day parades and labor walks.

"It's really the members who turned out that deserve the recognition," said Abraham. "Our members are becoming educated and realize we have to show up because the more participation we have the more power we have."

More than 50 members and their families marched in regional parades, participated in three labor walks and knocked on doors to get out the vote for PEF-endorsed candidates. Being out and vocal in the community shows local legislators that PEF is part of the reason they are getting elected.

"We give them the information they need to do their jobs," Abraham said. "We have a good relationship with both our Democrat and our Republican legislators."

The union's involvement in political and legislative action is critical to enact laws and implement policies that impact the terms and conditions of PEF members' employment, health benefits, and retirement benefits, as well as support the services PEF members provide New Yorkers.



From left to right (starting with the woman looking at the camera): Simone Mack, Daryle Mack Sr., and Dary Mack Jr., who are family of PEF member Myra Mack; Diann Jones; Region 3 Coordinator Leisa Abraham; Denise Young, a retired PEF organizer from Rochester; Dee Maddie; Lisa Durkin and Nicole Tarson.

To get involved in PEF's political action wherever you work in the State, click [here](#).



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PEF staff gather at headquarters for the Town Hall with Nurse 3s on Dec. 15, 2022. Clockwise, left to right: Assistant Director of Organizing Dr. Christine Pluviose, Nurse Coordinator Nora Higgins, President Wayne Spence, Civil Service Enforcement Research Associate Jean-Rene Shekerjian, Organizing Director Dan Carpenter, and MIS Director Joe Cocci.

PEF is fighting for Nurse 3 titles

By **ROB MERRILL**

When Gov. Hochul and the New York State Department of Civil Service (DCS) announced title restructuring for nurses across the State in October, one PEF title was noticeably absent – Registered Nurse 3. The restructuring kept them at a salary grade of 20 and changed their title to Nurse 2.

So PEF went to work on behalf of those impacted members, creating a survey to assess their concerns. All 255 members with the Nurse 3 title across the State were invited to participate. One-hundred-and-fifteen (115) members (45%) responded and took the survey. PEF does not have contact information for about 60 members with the title of Nurse 3, so is encouraging colleagues to share this story with them in the hopes that their concerns can be heard as well.

A number of Nurse 3s reported performing activities that seem to be outside the scope of their official duties. This might be grounds for advocating that DCS take another look at the Nurse 3 title. It could also be grounds for out-of-title work grievances.

PEF held a telephone town hall for all Nurse 3s last week to update them on the advocacy being done on their behalf. PEF President Wayne Spence urged impacted members to contact Nurse Coordinator Nora Higgins at Nora.Higgins@pef.org to discuss their situation.

“We heard the concerns of members who felt they were left out of the recent nurse title restructuring,” said Spence, “and are committed to doing everything we can to address those concerns.”

He encouraged members on the call to share the information with colleagues so PEF can better represent everyone’s concerns.



Photos courtesy of Red Cross.

PEF retirees support the American Red Cross

By KATE STICKLES

When there is a house fire, a natural disaster, a mass casualty incident, a critical need for blood donation, support for military families, and so much more – the American Red Cross is there.

And many times, so are PEF retirees and members.

On the frontlines in times of need

Red Cross ImageRetiree Peggy McGee-Smith, a longtime PEF member who worked as a community mental health nurse at Buffalo Psychiatric Center, volunteers with the Red Cross Disaster Mental Health team, deploying to disasters and mass casualty locations across the country.

"My main focus is on mental health and disaster survivors," McGee-Smith said. "The Disaster Mental Health team is often the lead on mass casualty incidents. Pulse (a mass nightclub shooting in June 2016) had a big impact on me."

But sometimes the most memorable experiences aren't big at all, she said.

"I had to go through back woods in Arkansas to meet a woman and her husband," McGee-Smith recounted. "She said, 'You're not from around here.' I said, 'I'm from Buffalo, New York,' and she was surprised and said, 'You came all the way out here to help me?'"

"That was so powerful for her, that people from another part of the country would come," she said. "That's what keeps me going. That's what's important to me. We talk about compassionate presence. We don't always have to do something, we just have to be present, so people know they are not lost or forgotten."

McGee-Smith finds working with new people rewarding.

"When you work in mental health, you often work with the same clients, sometimes for years," she said. "With the Red Cross, we help people for a couple of weeks, and then I come back home. There is a beginning and an end to the work."

You can stay close to home

Roberta Roma, who lives near Buffalo, worked as a nurse at the Western New York Developmental Disabilities Services Office from PEF's founding in the late 70s, until her retirement five years ago. With grandchildren keeping her busy, Roma stays close to home while volunteering, but she can still make a difference in so many ways.

"I started out slow," she said. "I did office work at our local chapter. The one thing I really like about the Red Cross is that you can do as much or as little as you want to do. You can set your own pace."

One of Roma's favorite assignments is working with the Services to Armed Forces program, where the Red Cross "helps members of the military, veterans and their families prepare for, cope with, and respond to, the challenges of military service," according to [the Red Cross website](#).

With case files on military families in their service area, Red Cross volunteers reach out to families and educate them on what services are available. Some of the services you wouldn't immediately connect with the Red Cross, since it's most well-known for disasters and blood donation.

"Anytime there is an emergency at home, like a death or critical illness, and the military member needs to come home, we can connect the military with hospitals and/or funeral homes to facilitate that for them," Roma said. The service can also go the other way,



with the Red Cross working with families if something happens to a deployed loved one.

The Red Cross has been serving the military for more than 140 years and has deployed alongside the military in every U.S. conflict since the Spanish-American War. On the home front, volunteer social workers and psychologists can assist with mental health; other volunteers can work with discharged, post-service or retired service members who are homeless.

"It's a great line of service to get involved with if you are a nurse, social worker, or psychologist," Roma said. "It doesn't require you to leave your area and go to disasters, but it provides a lot of help."

The work is rewarding but can also be heart-breaking.

"Some volunteers go to VA hospitals," Roma said. "The Red Cross has people who go to the hospital to provide a hand to be held at the end for a vet who has nobody. No vet dies alone.

"People don't realize it, they see Red Cross as blood donation or going to a hurricane response, but behind the scenes are so many different things you can support," she said.

Not just fire response, also fire prevention

Almost everyone knows the Red Cross deploys volunteers after house fires, providing information, care kits, and financial support through a special card or temporary housing assistance.

But the Red Cross does even more, before the fire.

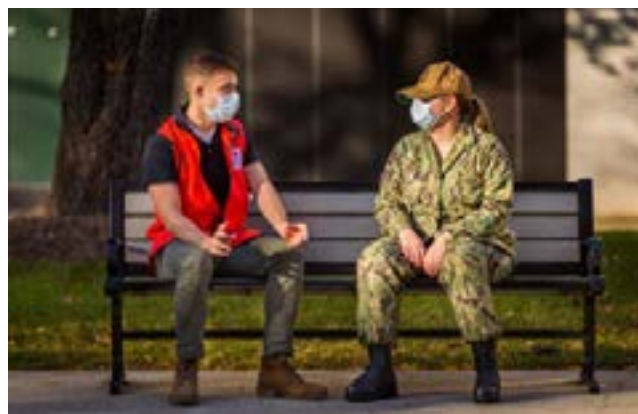
"Our smoke detector program is a direct link to preventing fire," Roma said. "It's another way we can save lives." She shared a story of a multi-family home her husband installed smoke detectors in that burnt down a few short weeks later. "They credited Red Cross for saving their lives."

Through the [Sound the Alarm Campaign](#), local volunteers and partners can inspect a home and if needed install smoke alarms in homes that don't have them.

A way to keep serving your community

Red Cross After a few years or 30 years of public service, some people want to do more. The Red Cross can help you find your volunteer niche, so you can keep helping communities.

"People who don't know about the Red Cross wonder where their dollars go when they donate," Roma said. "They're helping with



living arrangements after fires and disasters, they are helping nurses work with insurance companies to get medications that were lost. Not everybody is responding in the field, some may be more comfortable making calls."

"I think it's a great way for PEF members and retirees to volunteer," McGee-Smith said. "There are a wide variety of things we can do. The Red Cross will train you in any area of interest you have."

The Red Cross is mobilizing to increase participation in two services where PEF members and retirees can really make a difference.

"We have a great need for our Disaster Mental Health Team and Disaster Health Services team, both of which support the physical and mental health support component of our disaster relief efforts within shelters and local responses," said Grace Wach, a volunteer recruitment specialist with the Red Cross who attended the PEF Convention as a guest speaker.

"We are also looking to increase participation in our Volunteer Medical Screener role that assists with health histories when blood donors come into blood drives," she said. "We have Disaster Recovery Caseworkers who help to find mental health support systems for our clients who experience housefires and flooding, so that role may also be of interest to current PEF members in the health-related fields."

To explore volunteer opportunities with the Red Cross, [click here](#).



Understanding the Taylor Law and what could be considered punishable strike action for public employees

By KATE STICKLES

Picket lines are popping up as both new and long-time unions fight stalled or soured contract negotiations by striking. When working conditions leave much to be desired, many union members may think it's time to show they're serious.

"Let's all call in sick tomorrow."

"We should all come in five minutes late."

"Today I'm only going to do what's in my job description, not the other things I normally do. You should, too."

While these actions might seem innocuous, they can have serious repercussions if you are a member of a public-sector union like PEF.

New York public-sector unions are subject to the provisions of the Public Employees Fair Employment Act, more commonly known as the Taylor Law, which

grants public employees the right to form, join and participate in any employee organizations of their own choosing; requires public employers to negotiate and enter into agreements with public employee organizations regarding their employees' terms and conditions of employment; establishes impasse procedures to resolve collective bargaining disputes; defines and prohibits improper practices by both public employers and public employee organizations; prohibits strikes by public employees; and establishes a state agency to administer the Law — The Public Employment Relations Board (PERB).

The Taylor Law, enacted in 1967, followed in the wake of costly transit strikes in 1966, and was named for George W. Taylor, a professor of industrial research who advised five presidents and New York Gov. Nelson Rockefeller on labor relations before his death in 1972.

A case study

PERB logoA New York Supreme Court case this July involving the Buffalo Teachers Federation and PERB outlines just how easy it can be to unknowingly violate the provisions of the law.

Based on the facts adduced at hearing, a PERB administrative law judge (ALJ) found that, after a threat of violence at a Buffalo school and concerns management wasn't taking it seriously enough, school staff held a meeting where someone said they would be calling in sick the next day and suggested everyone else should do the same.

The ALJ further found that there were subsequently 16 calls into the substitute service and those staff members did not report to work the next day.

"Once management concluded that a concerted job action had taken place, management was obligated to submit a report," said PEF General Counsel Ed Greene at the September 2022 PEF Executive Board meeting. PERB ultimately "determined that certain employees engaged in strike action and the local union didn't discourage the action."

Under the Taylor Law, it is important to remember that unions are not only prohibited from engaging in strikes, but are also required to affirmatively discourage strikes among their members.

"The ALJ concluded that the local and a field representative were aware and failed to take sufficient steps to discourage the strike," he said.

After the ALJ found that the staff participated in a strike action and the union failed to discourage it, the case was appealed to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, which confirmed PERB's finding against the staff and the local.



Real repercussions

It is important to understand and remember that the consequences are significant for both the individual and the union. For unions, a decision against them can result in suspension of dues check-off, a significant injury to a union's ability to collect dues. For members who are found to have engaged in an unlawful strike, they may be subject to a "two for one" penalty, which means they can be required to pay a penalty of two days wages for each day, or part of the day, in which they are found to have engaged in a strike.

Any collective action by members to modify the usual procedures of an employer can potentially be considered a strike and carry significant consequences.

Despite the repercussions of the law, public employees have illegally struck since its passage.

In 1968, the United Federation of Teachers struck New York City schools. Then President Albert Shanker and other union leaders were jailed for two weeks as a result. In the wake of a 2005 transit strike, the New York Supreme Court declared TWU Local 100 in violation of the law and issued a fine of \$1 million per day.

There are a variety of lawful ways that members may express their displeasure with the terms and conditions of their employment, including picketing or engaging in other protected activity on their free time, such as lunch breaks.

For PEF members, to the extent that you, your co-workers, or your local leaders have questions about whether any proposed actions might be considered an unlawful strike, reach out to your field representatives for guidance. For union leaders, keep in mind that PEF is obligated to affirmatively discourage strike activity, so it is recommended that you immediately notify and confer with a field representative in your region if you should hear rumblings about potential unlawful job actions.



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NEW + EXISTING PEF MEMBERS

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PEF members unload gifts for the Santa Shop at School 29 in Rochester. From left to right: Crystal Briggs, Charlene, Dee Maddie, Meaghan Dwyer and Greg Salamida.

PEF members donate to local school's Santa Shop

By KATE STICKLES

Elementary students at the Adlai E. Stevenson School No. 29 in Rochester can shop for their parents, guardians, and loved ones at the school's Santa Shop thanks to the generous donations of PEF members and their community.

"It means everything to the students to get gifts for family members that are new and in great condition," said school parent liaison Char Cleveland. "It's great just to see the joy in their faces to take things home to their families."

This is the first year PEF has participated in the Santa Shop, said PEF member Charlene Delallo, a developmental disabilities program specialist at Finger Lakes DDSO.

"The school representatives were very awestruck," she said. "They didn't realize how many items we were bringing, and they were very appreciative. They asked what union we were from and if we would be interested in assisting in a volunteer capacity and if we would continue to help collect some items for Mother's Day and Father's Day."

Cleveland said the Mother's Day collection sends every student home with something special.

"We make sure every mom has a gift," she said. "We appreciate all the donations and look forward to a continued partnership with PEF."

Delallo said PEF donated hundreds of items for the kids to choose from, setting up donation boxes at several day habilitation sites in counties in Region 3.

Region 3 Coordinator Leisa Abraham said Finger Lakes DDSO has a long history of outreach to the local community, such as collecting socks and blankets for the hospital. This year, they collaborated with other Divisions and agencies in the area.

"We are hoping to inspire everyone to do something like it," Abraham said. "I think it's important for kids to feel that kind of empowerment, of choosing and purchasing these gifts on their own."



Parent Liaison Char Cleveland and PEF members Cierra Wagner and Charlene Delallo at the Santa Shop collection at School 29 in Rochester.



Leaders from PEF Regions 6 and 7 gather for annual conference

"Know your contract," "Ask your field rep," "Don't be scared of the process" — those are just a few of the lessons leaders from PEF regions 6 and 7 heard on Dec. 2-4 at their Leadership Conference at Turning Stone Resort in Verona, N.Y.

The two-day meeting was held in person for the first time since April 2019. Thirty-two leaders gathered for a series of presentations and workshops aimed at making them effective union leaders. The members were joined by three statewide officers — PEF Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue, Vice President Sharon DeSilva and Vice President Randi DiAntonio — and staff from PEF departments.

"I just want to thank the Statewide Officers, Regional Coordinators, and PEF staff who attended and assisted with making the conference a huge success," said Region 7 Coordinator Barbara Stransky. "A special thank you to PEF Special Events, who assisted with the planning of the leadership conference for almost a year."

At the conference, leaders were trained and educated on topics including worker's compensation, division checkbooks, Civil Service hiring processes, COPE, grievance procedures, and building a powerful membership. Representatives from PEF Membership Benefits, Liberty Mutual and Aflac were also on hand to answer questions and hand out valuable information.

The conference concluded on Dec. 4 with a presentation by Vice President DiAntonio about the "Fund Our Future" coalition PEF leads that works to safeguard public services across the state.

"I hope everyone who attended was able to take away from this experience beneficial training and knowledge about the rights, protections, and benefits PEF provides for its members," said Region 6 Coordinator Christopher Dunham. "Most importantly I want to thank our leaders who spent a weekend away from their families and homes."

Additional PEF Regions will hold leadership conferences next year, including Regions 1 through 5, which is planning their annual event on Feb. 24-25, 2023, in Ithaca.





Your union is making membership, COPE strides in 2022

By KATE STICKLES

PEF is on the move, signing up new members and building federal political power through voluntary COPE contributions.

Among public-sector locals across the country that are participating in SEIU's "Together We Rise" initiative, PEF tops the list for new member sign-ups, far surpassing its goal for 2022.

By November 25, PEF had signed up 3,818 new members - 213% of the goal of 1,980 set by PEF based on a review of past membership trends.

"We were able to achieve this impressive increase because of the hard work and dedication of our organizing team in collaboration with local and statewide officers," said PEF Organizing Director Dan Carpenter.

In the wake of the Supreme Court decision in Janus, which negatively impacted union membership across the nation, SEIU and its public-sector locals like PEF have prioritized growing membership.

COPE contributions are up

PEF's political power at the federal level is on the rise, with COPE contributions up 10.5% from Oct. 31, 2021, to early October 2022.

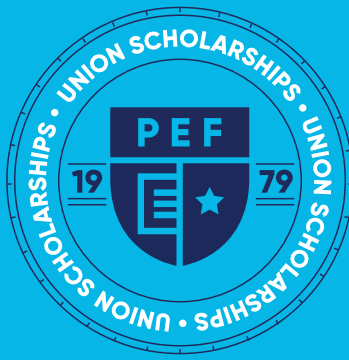
Those figures don't include anyone who signed up for the first time or increased their contribution at the recent PEF Convention.

Total contributions from PEF members and retirees hit \$162,399 during that period, reports COPE Coordinator Don Morgenstern. That's an increase of 40% for retirees and almost 5% for current members.

PEF Division 407 at the Metro Developmental Disabilities Services Office is the highest contributing division, with 52% of its members contributing to COPE and Region 11 has the highest contributions for a Region, with 6.5% participation.

COPE contributions are made by PEF members and retirees on a voluntary basis from their paychecks or pension checks. By law, member dues cannot be used for political action at the federal level, so COPE funds help the union lobby for federal legislation that supports public employees and protects the rights of workers. To learn more visit <https://www.pef.org/take-action/cope/>.





Union membership can open doors to financial aid for higher education

By KATE STICKLES

You can't escape news of the student loan debt incurred by millions of people across the country. The numbers are sobering, as the debt stands in the way of many facets of the American Dream, such as homebuying, financial stability, and saving for the future.

In 2022-23, the average tuition and fees for full-time undergraduate students is \$10,940 for public four-year in-state schools; \$28,240 for public four-year out-of-state schools; and \$39,400 for private nonprofit four-year schools, according to College Board's "Trends in College Pricing and Student Aid 2022" report.

Through your PEF membership, your family may be eligible for scholarships to ease the financial burden of higher education.

PEF scholarships

PEF's statewide **Joseph Scacalossi Scholarship** has helped students since 1988, when it was founded as a tribute to a state Department of Labor member who helped form PEF and fought for the rights of his members in Manhattan.

The program is merit-based and open only to dependents of PEF members, PEF retirees and deceased members. Applicants must be high school seniors or college freshmen. Each year, 10 students are awarded \$1,000 annually for up to four years.

The preliminary application is due March 17, 2023. It can be accessed [online here](#). Upon verification, a final application will be mailed to students. The final application is due April 28, 2023.

The **Jean DeBow Women in PEF Scholarship** was created to honor the memory of former PEF Vice President Jean DeBow. There will be one scholarship award of \$1,000, given annually at the PEF Convention, to an active female PEF member, who is pursuing an accredited post-secondary education in any field.

Applications are due by May 1 of each year at PEF headquarters, addressed to the attention of the PEF Scholarship Committee. [Click here for instructions and details](#).

Scholarships are also sometimes offered by individual PEF regions and divisions.

Contact your regional office or your council leader for information about divisional and/or regional scholarships and deadlines for applying. [Click here for PEF regional office contact information](#).

Union Plus scholarship

Since 1991, the Union Plus Scholarship Program has awarded more than \$5.2 million to students, assisting more than 3,600 families with higher education costs.

Current and retired members of participating unions, their spouses and their dependent children are eligible for the scholarship. The union member must complete at least one year of continuous union membership by May 31 of the scholarship year.

Scholarship awards range from \$500 to \$4,000 and are one-time cash awards. In 2022, 189 union members and union family members were awarded \$200,000 in Union Plus Scholarships, ranging from \$500 to \$4,000.

Emily Wenke, the daughter of PEF member Joanne Wenke, received a \$550 Union Plus scholarship for 2022.

The Union Plus scholarship is competitive, and applicants are evaluated according to academic ability, social awareness, financial need and appreciation of labor. A GPA of 3.0 or higher is recommended. Applications must be received on or before noon Eastern Standard Time on January 31, 2023.

[Apply here](#). PEF is SEIU Local 4053.



Luella Kenny standing in front of the house she left behind almost 40 years ago. Photo source: Nick Lipka/WBFO

Robbed of her child, her home and her trust, this PEF retiree soldiers on

By **SHERRY HALBROOK**

Thieves broke into Luella Kenny's house six times in the late 1970s to steal whatever they could find and nothing, including a full-size pool table, was too big for them to take. "They cleaned us out," Kenny recalls. Her home in the now notorious Love Canal neighborhood of Niagara Falls was unsafe to live in after it came to light that it was contaminated by buried hazardous waste that had been dumped into a nearby unused canal.

Kenny is 85 now, and it's been 44 years since the environmental disaster known as "Love Canal." A PEF retiree, Kenny worked as a research scientist at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center in Buffalo. The nightmare is never far from her thoughts. Some people were crushed by it. Not Kenny. She is driven to help and save others from the horror of deadly pollution that flows through their water, blows through their air and contaminates their gardens and homes.

Her tragedy and that of more than a thousand of her neighbors is detailed painstakingly in a new book, "Paradise Falls," by Keith O'Brien. The book follows the women who stepped forward to confront the environmental catastrophe -- Kenny, Lois Gibbs, and many others. They spoke truth to power and in return received false promises and outright lies.

"They tried to give us lollipops all along the way," Kenny said. "Sometimes when I am speaking at a group, someone will come up to me afterward and say, 'I always hated having to lie to you.'"

Not every politician brushed them off. Congressman John LaFalce and his aide Bonnie Casper were among the first to take the situation seriously and work to help the residents. U.S. Senator Al Gore called the women and the polluters to Washington to testify. Gore took action despite his father's membership on the Occidental Petroleum Board of Directors, when Occidental owned the company that polluted Love Canal, Hooker Chemical. And President Jimmy Carter was the one who ultimately made it possible for Kenny and the remaining residents to get out of harm's way.

In May 1980, Kenny traveled to San Francisco to confront billionaire Armand Hammer, Occidental's CEO, at its annual shareholder's meeting and make them understand what Hooker Chemical had done. Not only had its dumping of industrial waste in the dry canal created the environmental nightmare, Hooker then sold the contaminated land to the local school district in 1952 for \$1. The district built an elementary school and playground right over the dump. Sometimes children playing there were burned when they disturbed rocks that burst into flames.

Kenny still travels the country speaking to groups who want to learn about America's first large-scale environmental nightmare and how ordinary people can fight back. Not everyone agreed with her position at the time. She recalls walking with a government official when one of her neighbors ran up to them shouting, "Nothing is wrong here! There is no problem!" The woman who said that later "died of cancer, and so did her 19-year-old son," Kenny remembers.



Gibbs and Kenny kept forcing the issue into the news and demanding that the state or federal government help them escape their homes that no one would buy. Hooker Chemical had dumped 20,000 tons of toxic waste, which included massive amounts of deadly carcinogens such as dioxin, toluene and benzene, from 1941 to 1952. But it wasn't just the miscarriages, still births, birth defects, cancer, renal and neurological disorders that plagued residents of Love Canal. Their minds and spirits suffered too.

"The suicide rate was enormous," Kenny recalls, "even one whole family." Families and marriages fractured under the intense strain that went on for several years.

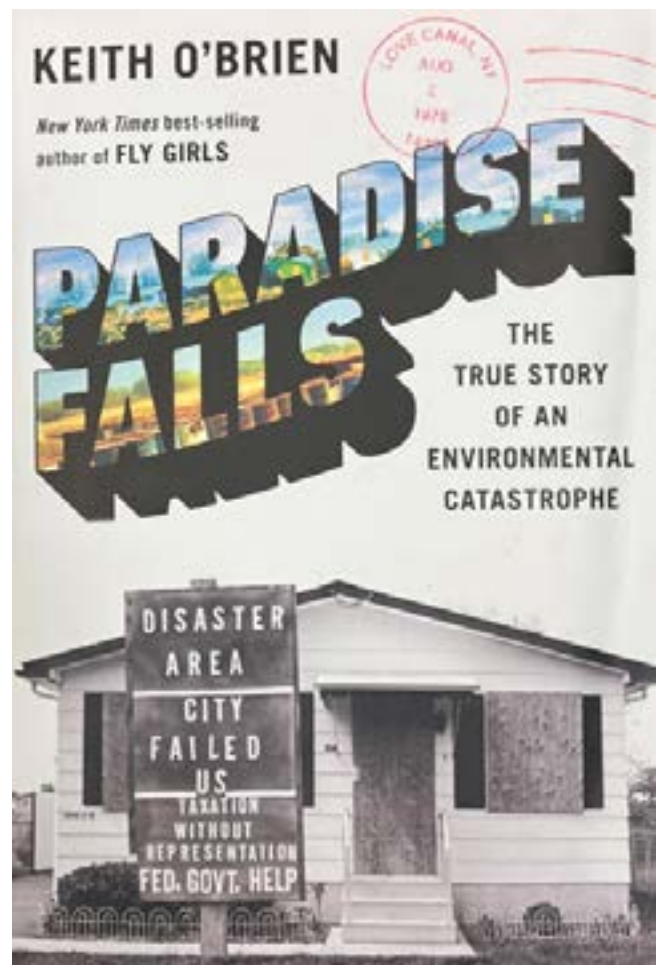
Kenny's marriage survived, but the youngest of her three boys, Jon Allen, died in October 1978 after being repeatedly hospitalized, sometimes for months, and without a diagnosis. He had just celebrated his seventh birthday.

Kenny, who began her state service (Roswell was operated by the state Health Department back then) in 1958 and officially retired in 1998 to care for her husband when his congenital heart problem worsened, returned to work part-time after his death, and finally stopped working in 2009. She was a PEF steward and a member of the joint health and safety committees at both the state Health Department and at Roswell Park. The Love Canal crisis peaked in 1978-1980, at the same time PEF was being organized and founded statewide.

"I never mentioned that I worked for the state Health Department when I talked about Love Canal," Kenny said. It was a strategy that helped her avoid the retaliation that another Roswell scientist, Beverly Paigen, experienced when she became interested in Love Canal and started researching how the chemicals were leaching and flowing through old streambeds or "swales" that existed before the neighborhood was built.

One of the streams, Black Creek, flowed right behind Kenny's house and her children often played in it, until the stench and obvious pollution forced them indoors. Kenny started collecting water samples on a regular basis and one day she saw a little bird alight next to the stream. She watched it hop into the water and take a drink. It dropped over dead.

Paigen and her husband, who was a manager at Roswell Park, did not live in the Love Canal neighborhood, but her research was neither welcomed nor accepted by Dr. David Axelrod, who was the state health commissioner at that time. And New York Governor Hugh Carey didn't like anything or anyone who focused on the disaster. The hostility that Paigen's research engendered finally convinced her and her family to leave and build new careers in California.



When the federal government finally stepped in and bought Kenny's home so they could leave, they moved to Grand Island in the Niagara River and she lives there still. Kenny's efforts resulted in Niagara University inducting her into its "Justice House" in May 2022.

"I overheard one woman say she thought I was getting rich off of it. That's not true. Can you imagine living with your kids for two months in a hotel? It's not conducive to family living. Or moving in with your mother-in-law in a four-room house? Everything I did and I do now is to prevent another child from losing its life to chemical or radioactive contamination," Kenny said. "People need to know what they are up against."



PEF keeps you you safe around heavy equipment

By KATE STICKLES

You've seen them, driven behind them, or maybe even tried to pass them.

State Department of Transportation (DOT) plow trucks are massive. Some have one or two wings, and some are called a tow-plow, with one truck towing a plow behind. They can be 35 or more feet long, 12 or more feet wide, and weigh more than 22 tons.

It's vitally important that the drivers behind the wheels of those trucks know them inside and out. From a couple inches of snow and ice to a whiteout blizzard, there is no room for error on the roads.

PEF members at DOT make sure those drivers are competent and qualified.

Gerald Stuart, David Faulkner, Leland Bockus, Gerald Vantreese, Brian Hudson, and Wheeler Koch in PEF Region 2 are responsible for that training as DOT equipment operator instructors.

"When a person starts with DOT, off the street without a commercial driver's license (CDL), we train them to obtain their CDL," said Stuart, a supervising equipment operator instructor and PEF member since 2015. "We train on a lot of pieces of equipment, including plows, excavators, bulldozers, street sweepers, anything the state uses to get the job done. We teach them how to run that piece of equipment and then sign off when they have competency in it."

Covering Alleghany, Steuben, Yates, Chemung, and Schuyler counties, these PEF members provide the rigorous and extensive training for state employees in their DOT region, but also offer guidance to local municipalities and counties.

Their goal? Simple -- keep everyone safe.

"It's important for us to teach them how to do the correct things to be safe, not just for themselves, but also the traveling public," said Faulkner, who joined PEF in 2019.

"When we certify these drivers, we are saying that they are good for you, and your family, and my family," Stuart added. "We want them to be out there safe. With snow fighting, for example, we don't do our job just for us and our operators, we do our job for your family."

You can do your part

With training on more than 40 pieces of equipment, these PEF members play a vital role in keeping their communities and their coworkers safe.

But the public needs to play their part, too.

"There are a lot of unsafe drivers who don't pay attention," said Stuart. "There are a lot of distractions, including people on cell phones and texting."

The team shared one story where a plow was turning left at a traffic light and was passed on the right by a car also making a left that didn't want to get stuck behind the truck.

"Everybody is in such a hurry," said Hudson, a PEF member since 2017.



Stuart said while snow fighting, trucks can't exceed 35 miles per hour.

"Everybody complains, why do we go so slow?" Faulkner said. "We can't spread salt going 55 miles per hour down the road. The plows are not just scraping the road, we are also trying to put the abrasive where you want it -- in the lanes, not thrown just anywhere."

Hudson said giving operators room to work is important.

"They have certain things they have to do to get things done safely," he said. "Pay attention to what they are doing and what their signals are."

Following behind the truck is the safest place to be, Stuart said. Just realize that it's going to be slow.

"If we're out there and we're plowing the road, the road behind us is in better condition," Stuart said. Trying to pass the trucks not only puts you at risk because of the road surface, it also means you are traveling faster -- perhaps faster than safe for the conditions.

Outreach and education

PEF members visit schools to educate children on safety and operation of plows and other heavy equipment.

"We do a lot of outreach with the schools," Stuart said.

"Kids can get inside, we show them all the controls and levers," Faulkner said.

By educating kids, DOT staff hope they pass on what they learn to their parents and maybe even influence them to drive safely around plows and other heavy equipment.

So next time you encounter heavy vehicles on the roads during good weather, before you get impatient and try to get around them, remember they are training operators to keep you and your family safe when conditions are more dangerous.

"We're trying to train them on dry roads well before they have to do it in a blizzard," Stuart said.



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The gift of reading: PEF donates books to children at secure OMH facility

By KATE STICKLES

The holidays came early for youth at the Sagamore Children's Psychiatric Center in Dix Hills on Long Island when "PEF Operation: First Book" paid a visit.

Each child had their pick of books donated by PEF and could take with them three titles of their choosing.

On November 28, PEF President Wayne Spence and local PEF leaders were joined by AFT Vice President Evelyn DeJesus, Office of Mental Health Commissioner Ann Marie T. Sullivan, and Justice Center Executive Director Denise Miranda to distribute new books to children at the center.

"We targeted a secure facility like Sagamore because every kid deserves to dream inside the pages of a book," Spence said.

The event was jointly sanctioned by the union and management at Sagamore, with members allowed to attend and assist with book distribution, then have lunch and chat with PEF leaders about what the union is doing for them.

"It really is just proof that when labor and management come together, we can accomplish great things," said Spence.

PEF's parent union, AFT, partners across the country with First Book, a nonprofit social enterprise that provides new books, learning materials, and other essentials to children in need. AFT and First Book celebrated 10 years of partnership in 2021 and over that decade distributed 7.5 million books nationwide. Since its founding in 1992, First Book has distributed more than 225 million books and educational resources to programs and schools serving children from low-income families.

PEF held a couple First Book events before the pandemic and President Spence has recommitted the union to the venture now that it is safer to hold in-person events. AFT awarded PEF a \$5,000 grant from its Solidarity Fund so PEF could purchase the books. Some of that money was used to purchase books for the event at Sagamore, where about 100 books were given away to kids, but the rest will be used to buy more books for similar events across the state in 2023.

PEF Operation: First Book will make its next stops at the New York City Children's Center on January 6, delivering books to kids on the Bronx and Queens campuses.





Ailing members need your leave donations

The following PEF members have reported a need for leave donations due to the need for medical treatment or recuperation from illness or injury.

Donations are made from annual leave and donors must retain at least 10 days of annual leave after donating. To donate leave, obtain a leave-donation form from your personnel or human resources office and submit it to that office. You may donate leave to employees at both the agency where you work and to those working at other state agencies.

To help facilitate donations, we list an HR contact number for each person needing donations on the list below.

- Linda Agyemang (formerly Akuamoah-Sarfo) is a nurse 2 (psychiatric) working at Fishkill Correctional Facility in Beacon. Her position is at Central NY Psychiatric Center.
 - LaShon Boyd is an habilitation specialist 1 at the Metro Developmental Disabilities Services Office in Manhattan.
 - Brian Cellery is an information technology specialist 3 at the Office of Information Technology Services in Albany.
 - Kimberly Ernst-Harris is a supervising offender rehabilitation coordinator at the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision central office in Albany.
 - Sally Fontana is social work supervisor 1, LCSW at Mohawk Valley Psychiatric Center in Utica.
 - Cherie Griffin is a taxpayer services specialist 2 at the state Department of Taxation and Finance in Albany.
 - Drina Holden is a senior certification analyst at the state Department of Economic Development in Manhattan.
 - Jason McDonald is an information technology specialist 3, systems programming at the state Office of Information Technology Services in Albany.
 - Roxeen Mundy is an information technology specialist 2 at the state Office of Information Technology Services in Albany.
 - Melissa Pine is an underwriter 1 at the state Insurance Fund in White Plains.
 - John Reed is licensed master social worker 2 at Rockland Children's Psychiatric Center in Saugerties.
 - Darlene (Gemma) Rose is an employment counselor for the state Labor Department in Amsterdam.
 - Laquita White is a real estate specialist 1 at the state Transportation Department in Buffalo.
- Caitlin Wilkens is a research scientist 2 at the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision main office in Albany.

The rules for making and receiving leave donations (such as leave recipients may not have had any disciplinary actions or unsatisfactory performance evaluations within their last three years of state employment) are set forth on pages 189 and 190 of the 2019-23 PS&T Contract. If you, or a PEF member you know, need leave donations because of a medical issue, you may contact The Communicator to request publication of that need. Send requests to thecomunicator@pef.org, or call 518 396-8201. Be sure to provide your contact information.



November 16, 2022

PEF nurses met with AFT - American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten at the AFT Nurses and Health Professionals 2022 Professional Issues Conference over the weekend in Chicago. The two-day gathering focused on cultivating power to stand together so nursing professions are a place where talented, committed people want to work; and so that workplaces are safe and equitable.

December 3, 2022

The Region 6/7 Leadership Conference this year took place at Turning Stone Resort, with members being trained on a variety of topics - from Civil Service rules and regs to Division Finance to Health & Safety.



December 2, 2022

Happy Holidays to PEF Division 281 at the Department of Labor in Region 5, who hosted a holiday party for members in Endwell, N.Y.!



December 10, 2022

Happy holidays to PEF Division 256 at the Dept. of Transportation in Syracuse, who recently got together to hear the latest from PEF leaders and celebrate their solidarity!

December 9, 2022

Happy Holidays to PEF Division 283 at Rochester Psychiatric Center, where members recently got together with union leadership to hear the latest from PEF and celebrate the season!



December 8, 2022

PEF Division 179 members from the Office of General Services in Region 8 came together this afternoon in Troy to have a well-deserved celebration and bask in some holiday joy!



December 14, 2022

The PEF Contract Team is back at it this month, meeting with reps from the NYS Office of Employee Relations. The team listened to members to guide their negotiations – almost 10,000 responded to the Contract Survey, PEF leaders attended membership meetings statewide this year, and any member can still email suggestions to contract2022suggestions@pef.org. The team is advocating for what members said are the top priorities: Across-the-board raises, longevity improvements, a new dental plan, and work-life balance issues, including telecommuting and alternative work schedules. PEF will keep members up to date in The Communicator as negotiations continue into next year.



December 12, 2022

Congratulations to Region 3 Coordinator Leisa Abraham and all the members and staff in Region 3, which recently won an award from the Rochester Labor Council for "Outstanding Achievement in Political Action." PEF members really stepped up this election cycle -- consistently turning out the largest contingent at Labor Walks and making hundreds of phone calls supporting union-endorsed candidates.



December 15, 2022

The Region 8 Political Action Committee celebrated the holidays Tuesday night with special guest Senator Neil D. Breslin.

