

Victory for New Yorkers:

The 2023 State
Budget Brings
Legislative Wins!



The
Communicator PEF

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The Communicator Staff

Rob Merrill Managing Editor
Curtis Canham Graphic Artist
Kate Stickle Reporter/Editor
Najee Walker Reporter/Writer
Lauryn Schrom Junior Graphic Artist
Kristina Willbrant Communications
Coordinator

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Joe Donahue Secretary-Treasurer
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Randi DiAntonio Vice President
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PEF Regional Field Offices

Region 1 Buffalo 1-800-462-1462
Region 2 Elmira/Hornell 1-800-724-5001
Region 3 Rochester 1-800-724-5003
Region 4 Syracuse 1-800-724-5004
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The President's Message By WAYNE SPENCE



Fund Our Future for a Thriving New York

You've heard me talk a lot about "Fund Our Future." But I probably don't talk often enough about the second part of our multi-year campaign tag line. It's "Fund Our Future for a Thriving New York."

Two recent events drove that word "thriving" home for me. First, the [PEF Wellness Fair & AFT Book Giveaway](#) held the last Saturday in April at the Armory in downtown Albany. It was a resounding success, with 50 vendors from across the capital region and the state sharing their services with members of the community, who could also select up to 10 free books per family and 40 per teacher. I saw so many smiles that day on the faces of kids and received thanks from so many folks who were able to visit. From what was originally conceived as a small gathering in the parking lot of PEF headquarters, we created an inspiring event that I hope helped many area families access the community resources they need to thrive.

"Thrive" is also the motivation behind the priorities PEF pushed for in the [State budget](#). From civil service reform to SUNY hospital funding, the governor and legislators heard this union when we talked about funding our future so New Yorkers can thrive. The Legislative Department is doing a deep dive into the \$220 billion budget and will release a final analysis soon, but the cover of this issue is on point – this is another big win for PEF. As always, there remains more to be done and we'll be hard at work pushing for additional legislation to meet those needs. An end-of-session letter-writing campaign will ramp up soon, so keep an eye on your email for how you can help push PEF's priorities.

May is also Nurses Month and Mental Health Awareness month. PEF nurses are gearing up for their annual lobby day on May 16 and we'll provide coverage of that in the next issue. As for mental health, [PEF social workers](#) play a key role in helping New Yorkers in that regard, and we have an update in this issue about what's being done to get them the pay equity they deserve. PEF social workers have been very engaged on the issue and we're making progress.

Finally, a tip of my PEF hat to [Charles Roland](#), who serves as the treasurer of Region 11. Retired since 2021 from South Beach Psychiatric Center, Charles never retired from PEF. And that's just one reason why New York City Mayor Eric Adams recently named April 23, 2023, "Charles Roland Day." I was there, and to say Charles was surprised is an understatement! To work alongside committed activists like Charles is what makes my job as PEF president so rewarding.

In Unity,

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

Wayne Spence
PEF President

PEF donates free books and educates community at first Wellness Fair

By NAJEE WALKER

Hundreds of PEF members and members of the community came out to the first annual PEF Wellness Fair and AFT Book Giveaway on April 29, 2023, at the Albany Armory. The fair was put together in collaboration with AFT, who secured 20,000 books for readers of all ages to give away, and PEF Membership Benefits, who helped organize more than 40 informational booths to educate the community about services offered in New York. The free event was geared toward helping the community find the support they need to maintain their physical and mental health.

The fair was the brainchild of the PEF Black Caucus, which sought to put together a health and wellness event for PEF members exclusively. But during the course of its development, the fair evolved into much more.

"What turned out to be a health fair just for PEF members became a health and wellness fair for the entire Capital Region," said PEF President Wayne Spence, who made brief remarks at the beginning of the fair, along with Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan, Albany County Executive Dan McCoy, AFT Executive Vice President Evelyn DeJesus, Executive Deputy Commissioner of State Education Sharon Cates-Williams and President of the PEF Black Caucus Carrie Saunders.

Families, teachers and librarians browsed the book selection, sorted by reading level. Families could take away up to 10 books and area educators up to 40. It wasn't unusual for some families and teachers to pull wagons and carts behind them, hoping to fit as many books as possible.

Many of the books featured Disney and Marvel characters and caught the attention of the children.

"My favorite Disney character is Ariel," one 5-year-old said while her mother held a stack of Little Mermaid books.

By the event's end at 3 p.m., all of the 20,000 donated books were gone.

State offices like the Office of Cannabis Management, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, and the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) came out to the event, while area merchants like Retro Fitness and Hannaford Supermarkets also set up tables on the floor where the Albany Patrons play their home basketball games. The state agencies and companies showcased at the event offered not only information, but also opportunities.

DOCCS, for example, offered information on how to join their ranks, and even handed out paperwork to help the application process along.

A few vendors and invited guests also presented informational workshops. The workshops covered things like What to Do When Stopped by the Police, How to Manage Mental Health, Why Buy Legal Marijuana, and Debt Counseling.

Albany Mayor Sheehan expressed gratitude to PEF for creating the event for the public.

"We get caught up in our jobs and all of the things we're advocating for, and PEF does an incredible job advocating for the workforce," Sheehan said. "But to take a step back and see 'how do we take all the talent and the amazing abilities we have at PEF to pull people together and do something for the community?'"

McCoy picked up where Sheehan left off, expressing gratitude to PEF members for showing up, but also recognizing that the power of the union has helped him get things done for the workforce, like negotiations for free hearing aids and other healthcare benefits.

"There are benefits these days that we take for granted today," McCoy said.

"Your healthcare, your vacation, your sick days, your work hours, are all because unions organized and got things done."

AFT Executive Vice President Evelyn DeJesus also gave remarks. AFT, in partnership with the non-profit organization First Book, has created "Reading Opens the World" events across the country, with the goal of distributing one million books.

"When a child reads, it opens their minds, it opens their imagination," DeJesus said. "They become great readers and great citizens."

Spence thanked Cates-Williams for her help in making sure that schools and teachers were given access to the event.

"I hope this is not the only time we're going to do this event," Cates-Williams said.

As the event wrapped up, there were already whispers about a bigger and better fair in 2024. Stay tuned!





State budget reflects PEF priorities

PEF's lobbying efforts this session paid off, with many of the union's Fund Our Future initiatives and budget asks reflected in the final budget bills.

Among the victories are Civil Service reforms that are a step in the right direction toward recruiting new talent to the state workforce and hopefully alleviating chronic understaffing across state agencies.

The reforms include continuous recruitment for open competitive positions; \$2.2 million to study the state pay grade system; funding for 12 regional Civil Service centers; and \$2.5 million to support a waiver of open competitive and promotional exam fees until 2025.

"Our members have been saying it for years – we need staff," said PEF President Wayne Spence. "PEF advocated for these reforms and is pleased the legislature has enacted them. We eagerly await the results of the pay study and expect they will show what we already know – New York State is not competitive with the private sector, and change is needed. That is why we are asking the state to adjust every title upward at least two pay grades to recruit and retain top talent."

According to statistics from the governor's office, the state is down 12,500 workers, with thousands more planning to retire in the next five years.

The budget also provides \$2.3 million to fund a public outreach campaign to reach the next generation of state government leaders. The State promises to create and air the campaign in multiple languages to reach a broader, more diverse audience and to strengthen outreach for difficult-to-fill and high-need state titles.

Thanks to the governor and legislative leaders, the enacted budget provides SUNY hospitals with additional support of approximately \$68 million in debt relief, an increase in the Medicaid reimbursement rate payable to these institutions, and approximately \$72 million in additional resources from the disproportionate share program (DSH).



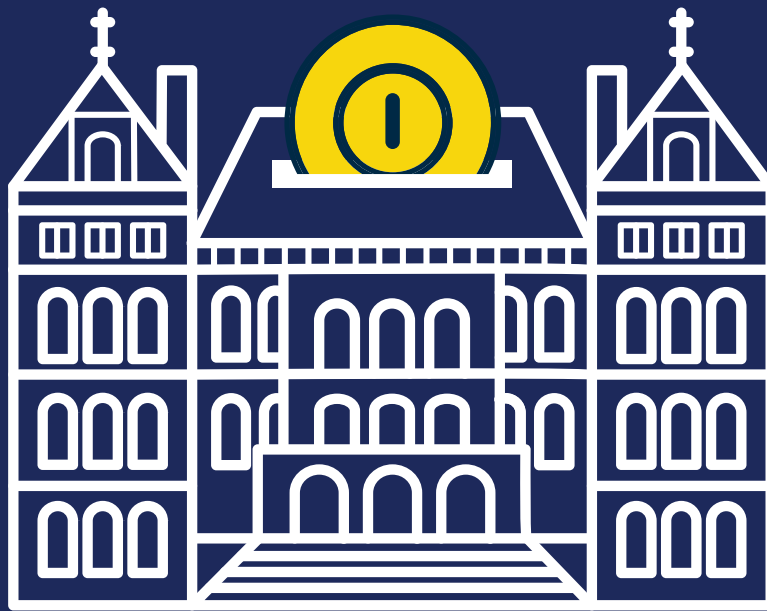
"PEF will continue to work with the governor and the legislature to develop a longer-term vision for the state's teaching hospitals that enables them to continue to deliver quality public health care services in their communities," Spence said.

The PEF Legislative Department's initial analysis of the more than \$220 billion budget included policy initiatives in education, labor, family assistance, public protection, general government, health, mental hygiene, transportation, and economic development. In the coming weeks, the department will continue to take a deeper dive into the budget and provide updates as they become available.

"This budget proves the Fund Our Future campaign is making a difference for our members and the people of New York," Spence said.

PEF will initiate an end-of-session letter-writing campaign this month to focus on additional priorities the union wants addressed by lawmakers outside of the budget process. Stay tuned to your personal emails for how to participate.







Telephone Town Hall: PEF continues push for social worker pay equity

By NAJEE WALKER

During a telephone town hall on April 27, 2023, PEF President Wayne Spence and Vice President Randi DiAntonio delivered updates on PEF's strategy to obtain pay equity and improve the working conditions of PEF social workers.

The member-driven advocacy stems from conversations that PEF leaders had last year with social workers during the Statewide Officers Tour. Many detailed their frustration with the pay equity scale, as well as chronic understaffing, especially after the past few years during the pandemic. These issues are not new, but have escalated since the field has become unattractive over the years as mental health issues magnify, and as workers leave their positions or take up more lucrative telehealth jobs in the private sector.

[PEF conducted a survey of all social workers](#) earlier this year and is now discussing the resulting analysis, "High stress, low pay impact State-employed social workers," with stakeholders.

Vice President DiAntonio told members who dialed in to the Town Hall that PEF met with the Office of Mental Health (OMH) to discuss the survey findings on February 1, 2023. OMH shared that there are currently 230 vacant social worker jobs at the agency.

"There seemed to be consensus at that time that there was a sense of urgency that required them to act," DiAntonio said. "They indicated a willingness to review our survey results."

After sharing the findings with partners like the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), PEF members also attended a Lobby Day on February 14, 2023, to make sure legislators knew exactly what social workers do for the state. Likewise, during National Social Work Month, there was a robust social media and letter writing campaign, with 750 social workers sending letters urging legislators to act.

OMH and PEF also discussed the findings at a scheduled labor management meeting on April 12, and Spence, DiAntonio, and PEF staff met with the Division of Budget on March 20.

"The Division of Budget is often the final determinator if these things go through," DiAntonio said. "We wanted to meet with them first to give them advance notice that this is something that was critically important to us."

In March, OMH presented a social worker reallocation proposal. PEF members were concerned about certain aspects of the proposal. OMH met with social worker directors and detailed an increase for "some positions" but not others. PEF leaders were caught off guard.

"Many of us in leadership positions reached out to the agency to ask for clarification," DiAntonio said. "To ask them to send whatever was put forward, to confirm that they sent a plan, and provide us with specifics."



The request fell on deaf ears and no proposal was received.

PEF immediately reached out to OMH, the Commissioner of Civil Service and staff at the Governor's Office to discuss the plan, but it now appears the proposal has been withdrawn.

"When we called and the Governor's Office decided to take a look at the plan, apparently it did not meet whatever criteria the governor had in mind," said Spence.

Despite the issues with the proposal being sent forward without PEF's involvement, the April 12 labor management meeting continued. PEF attended the meeting with the following objectives in mind:

- To discuss and reiterate PEF's salary objectives;
- Determine whether there was an OMH proposal;
- Discuss why it was withdrawn;
- Produce the now withdrawn proposal;
- And find consensus between PEF and OMH.

PEF's Civil Service and Research Department was involved in the meeting and PEF Research Associate Nicole Richmond detailed the proposals PEF received after the meeting on April 18.

"We did see a lot of positives in their initial proposal," Richmond said at the Town Hall. "However, we also found that certain recommendations may be divisive."

Many of OMH's proposals did not consider the survey and data presented by PEF. Instead, the proposal looked at geographic pay data and compared pay rates to other job titles within state service. It did not properly take into account salaries offered in the private sector for reallocation.

Additionally, the proposal sought to raise Licensed Social Workers with Clinical designations (LSW-C) to a higher pay grade while keeping Licensed Master Social Workers (LMSW) at the same grade.

The separation between LMSW and LMSW-C pits PEF members against one another. Clinical licensing was also never required as part of the minimum requirement for social work in New York.

"Our analysis is that the licensed social workers in New York state service have never been required to have clinical designation, they have never been given incentive or encouragement to get it," DiAntonio said. "And our most senior social workers, in many instances, started before it even existed.

"The other thing we have heard is that LMSW and LMSW-C are doing the same job," she said. "If OMH wants to do something different with those with the clinical designation, they would have to change their function."

Going forward, PEF plans some next steps to move this process along.

PEF is reviewing and analyzing the withdrawn OMH proposal before setting any future meetings. OMH agreed with PEF that the salary discrepancies are too large and agreed to partner with PEF going forward. PEF is researching and providing OMH with more data on salary and comparable titles.

On the Telephone Town Hall, PEF Director of Organizing Dan Carpenter praised PEF members for their help in pushing to secure these pay upgrades.

"We advocate for all," Carpenter said. "We do not put forth plans that work to divide us, our membership or pit one against another."

He called on social workers to send one more round of letters in support of their needs, but this time, instead of legislators, the targets are the governor, and the commissioners of OMH, the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), the Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS), the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) and the Department of Civil Service.

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[Click here to send a letter to agency commissioners and the governor. These letters require some personalization – follow the instructions.](#)

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"These five agencies have the most concentration of social workers," Carpenter said. "Additionally, we ask that you work with your local leaders and field reps to advocate at the local LM (labor management) table for the geographic increases."

Carpenter urged that anyone who is unsure of who to reach out to on the local level reach out to him via email at dcarpenter@pef.org

"A lot of the work we've done, we should be really proud of," DiAntonio said. "We have been working earnestly for the last seven months and we have the attention of many state agencies, many policymakers and the Governor's Office."

She asked that everyone involved stay optimistic and stay union strong. PEF is making gains and moving in the right direction.

"We will continue to fight; we will continue to work together to advance this," she said.

Respect us, Protect us, Pay us!



PEF commemorates Workers Memorial Day

PEF staff and union members gathered at PEF headquarters on Workers Memorial Day to remember workers who were killed or injured on the job, and to recommit to the fight for safe workplaces.

“Employers always say these are tragic, but unavoidable accidents,” PEF President Wayne Spence said outdoors at the union’s memorial to members lost on Sept. 11, 2001. “But there is no such thing as a workplace accident. Nearly all, if not all, of these fatalities could and should have been prevented.”

Nationally, worker fatalities have been on the rise, with a 9% increase since last year, accounting for 5,190 fatal work injuries. As worker fatalities and injuries rise across the nation, President Spence pointed out that it seems some states are moving in the wrong direction.

“Some states are even rolling back child protections,” President Spence said.

In New York, short staffing and recruitment and retention issues are contributing to more workplace injuries as workers are forced to work harder and faster to meet job demands. New York State employees reported 13,000 incidents of workplace injury or illness in fiscal year 2021-2022, costing the state \$70 million in workers compensation.

President Spence highlighted the words of historic union organizer, Mary “Mother Jones” Harris: “Mourn for the dead, and fight like hell for the living.”

PEF Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue followed President Spence’s remarks with a few words about the importance of unions in the fight for protecting the health and safety of employees.

“We know that union workplaces are safer workplaces,” Donahue said.

He spoke about the role PEF played in making sure personal protective equipment was available for members at the height of the pandemic.

PEF Director of Health and Safety, Geraldine Stella closed the ceremony by saying that the fight for workplace safety is never-ending.

“PEF has always been actively involved in the fight for worker safety and health in New York state and nationally,” Stella said. She stressed the need for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to do more to shore up protections for workers. Inaction on the federal level leaves state workers in dire situations.

“There’s a lot more to do and OSHA has not been pushing for protections against workplace illnesses or the next pandemic,” Stella said. “Without stronger federal guidance, PESH—which is the public employee arm of OSHA in New York State—is too often unable or unwilling to issue violations.”

Even with all the work to be done, Stella stressed that it’s important for unions to celebrate their wins.

For PEF that means not only the lasting protections put in place during the COVID pandemic, but also the trauma support offered to workplace violence victims.

“We fought for and won safety measures for assaulted members returning to work,” Stella added.

PEF regularly inspects worksites, files PESH complaints when issues are identified, and trains leaders and members of the union’s health and safety committees on everything from workers compensation to how to identify hazardous materials in a work environment. If you want to get more involved in your local health and safety committee to make your workplace safer, contact HealthandSafety@pef.org.





Freedom
of
Information
Law

A win for transparency: PEF prevails in FOIL case

By KATE STICKLES

PEF's Civil Service Enforcement/Research Department is on a mission to identify and address barriers to the promotion of minority members across the state workforce. To do that, PEF needs access to hard facts.

A recent court victory brings the union closer to that goal.

In February 2022, PEF submitted a Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) request to the state Department of Civil Service (DCS), requesting the ethnic/racial breakdown of the state workforce from 2010 to 2022, sorted by agency and jurisdictional class (competitive, non-competitive, exempt, and labor).

In response, the state provided a spreadsheet of the ethnic/racial breakdown of employees, sorted by agency, but declined to provide information sorted by jurisdictional class, citing their belief the data, when combined with other publicly available information, could result in identification of individual employees and invasion of their personal privacy.

PEF appealed and was denied again on the same grounds. The union commenced an Article 78 proceeding Oct. 7, 2022, and ultimately the Albany County Supreme Court found that the possible impingement of personal privacy was outweighed by the benefit of disclosure to the public. PEF was represented in this litigation by PEF Associate Counsel Jenifer Wharton.

"[I]n balancing the competing interests between governmental transparency and personal privacy protection, petitioners (PEF) have established that the need to maximize transparency in order to expose discriminatory practices regarding the filling of various

jurisdictional classes tips the scales in their favor," the judge wrote in her opinion. "The right of the public to know of governmental operations and to inspect public records is fundamental to the workings of a democratic society."

The ruling requires the state to furnish the information within 30 days, although the state can file an appeal.

"Identifying concerning racial or ethnic discrimination trends should come before the potential of identifying individual employees," said President Wayne Spence. "The Freedom of Information Law is rooted in the need for people to be able to obtain information concerning the day-to-day functioning of state and local governments to protect our right to make informed decisions and expose waste, negligence, abuse, and discrimination."

"We are pleased the judge agreed with our position and we look forward to continuing in our efforts to combat racial injustice and discrimination," Spence said.

The court also found the DCS's actions "arbitrary and capricious," paving the way for PEF to seek an award for attorneys' fees and litigation costs.

Charles Roland Honored

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Region 11's annual Spring Fling on April 13 was a little more special this year thanks to an appearance by New York City Mayor Eric Adams. Adams showed up at the request of PEF President Wayne Spence to honor Charles Roland, who retired from state service in 2021 but remains extremely active in PEF, both as the Region 11 treasurer and chair of the Political Action Committee (PAC).

Adams thanked PEF for being the first union to endorse him and then read a proclamation naming April 13, 2023, as "Charles Roland Day."

"Whereas New York rises on the foundation of our vital public servants who power the five boroughs and support our diverse residents," the proclamation reads. "Having served 45 years as a psychiatric social worker with the New York state Office of Mental Health, and several decades as a member of the New York state Public Employees Federation, Charles stands out as one of these dedicated individuals."

Roland said the proclamation and Mayor Adams' appearance came as a complete shock.

"I was very surprised," Roland said. "It was a very humbling and overwhelming feeling."

Roland was born and raised in Staten Island and attended Staten Island Community College in 1973. He then obtained his bachelor's degree in psychology from Hunter College in 1975, and a master's degree in social work in 1977.

He started as a therapy aide at South Beach Psychiatric Center in 1976, and later became a social worker after obtaining his degree. Roland enjoyed the work, but briefly left South Beach to work at the Manhattan Development Center. Due to layoffs, he found himself employed for a while with the Board of Education before finally returning to South Beach.

He became active at PEF in 2000, joining the Region 11 planning committee and eventually becoming Co-PAC chair and Treasurer. During his tenure, Roland has overseen many legislative events, conferences, and political actions in Region 11, and always helps organize the Spring Fling.

In addition to his duties at PEF, Roland is also very involved with his community and is an Executive Committee member for the Staten Island Democratic Association, an active member of the Asian-American Labor Council, a Board member for the Family Support Organization of Union City New Jersey and is the Clinical Director of the Bethel Community Church's overnight men's shelter in Staten Island. He is also the church's treasure and a member of the Trustee Board.

Despite retiring from South Beach in 2021, Roland remains committed to his community work and PEF.



From left to right: Wayne Spence, PEF President; Charles Roland, PEF Retiree; New York City Mayor Eric Adams; and Bernadette O'Connor, PEF Region 11 Coordinator.

"It's something I enjoy doing, so it doesn't feel like a lot," Roland said.

Roland decided to stick with PEF especially, because he feels that PEF has helped him so much, and he values the work of the union. He loves working with and helping the members in his region. Roland continues to help with Division 253 at South Beach Psychiatric Center and supports the new leadership.

"It's family," Roland said. "PEF has become family."

Roland encourages others in his region and throughout PEF's membership to stay committed in any way they can. Despite thinking of himself as just a foot soldier, he realizes he's been able to help many members in Region 11. He also recognizes that staying committed can be difficult.

"I always tell people, it's never personal," Roland said. "People will always be stressed about work and will want to vent to you and through you."

Despite that, Roland said, being a union activist is worth it even if you help only one person.



Nursing: A (very) brief history in New York

By NAJEE WALKER

The history of nursing is often traced back to Florence Nightingale. She is credited with starting the world's first nursing school in 1860 in London, and the techniques she originated there would go on to influence several generations of nurses.

However, before Nightingale got all the headlines, here in New York, physicians and nurses were already building a foundation for the future of healthcare.

New York physician Valentine Seaman created a course of lectures for nurses who worked specifically with maternity patients in 1798. These early lectures focused on caring for mothers during childbirth and provided instruction for care during the postpartum period.

During the late 1800s, nurses were in even greater need. While there were instructional programs set up thanks in part to physicians like Seaman, there would be a gap in professional nurse schooling in America until 1873. Following the formation of the Nightingale School in 1860, American professional nursing education would finally arrive at three schools: the Boston Training School at Massachusetts General Hospital, the Connecticut Training School at the State Hospital in New Haven, and the New York Training School at Bellevue Hospital in New York City. These three schools all patterned themselves after Nightingale's example and would later be known as "Nightingale Schools."

Bellevue Hospital was the first to formally introduce a program aimed at training men to be in the nursing workforce in 1888. Although men have historically been nurses, the career was for a long time viewed as a "female occupation," especially in the U.S. But with New York leading the charge, the Bellevue program paved the way for other hospitals to train male nurses across the country.

For many years following the formation of these schools, nursing professionals from all over the state would go on to teach and pioneer techniques and institutions now considered important parts of the healthcare delivery system, like school nurses and home visits.

Today, the tradition of nursing education continues proudly in New York, with all three SUNY hospitals – Downstate, Stony Brook and Upstate -- recognized as leaders in their fields. But for the quality of care delivered at these hospitals to remain world-class, New York State must fully fund the services they deliver while training



Portrait of Valentine Seaman by Lewis T. Ives

the next generation of nurses. PEF has worked tirelessly to secure wins for its nurses in recent years – from geographic pay raises to long-sought title restructuring in 2022 to passing legislation that limits mandatory overtime. As a union, we will always fight for our healthcare heroes.

Editor's Note: Members can stay up-to-date on the actions of the PEF Statewide Nurses Committee by checking out [this page](#). For PEF nurses, there is also valuable information there about benefits, such as tuition and license reimbursement.



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Article 15 Leadership Development Programs now available

The Office of Employee Relations (OER), in accordance with Article 15 in the PEF Collective Bargaining Agreement, is offering a Leadership Development Program (LDP) for employees in the Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (PS&T) Unit at Grade 23 and above. The program provides employees with the skills to lead in the New York State government.

The LDP will have two separate sessions for employees to choose from. Session one is made up of seven full-day classroom trainings. Session one is in-person in Albany. Session two is 14 half-day virtual trainings, about three and a half hours each. Proper equipment, like a webcam and microphone, is required to attend the online training. Additionally, each session will have an orientation and graduation date. Both sessions will also see participants complete a job-related project, targeted at improving performance for the employee and the unit. Projects will vary per applicant.

Session one runs from August 15-18 and September 19-22, with December 1 as graduation day. Session two runs from August 18-30, October 23-31 and November 2-7, with graduation on January 9, 2024.

The goal of the LDP is for those PS&T employees at grade 23 or above who supervise or manage in their work, to develop skills in goal setting, team building, employee development and more.

The sessions will cover:

- The Mindset of a Professional Manager and Leader
- Project Management: A Framework for Today's Environment
- Creative Problem Solving and Innovation
- Non-technical Skills for Leaders
- Practical Applications of Leadership Perspectives

Participants are expected to complete all assignments and attend all training days, including the orientation and graduation. Likewise, completion of the job-related project and evaluation surveys are required. OER commits to allowing participants to attend these training days without having to use their personal time or leave accruals.

Those interested will need to [complete and sign this application](#) as well as obtain signatures from a supervisor and the head of the agency. Applicants may also seek the recommendation of a PEF representative. The deadline for applications is May 19, 2023, and should be sent to the LDP Selection Committee at ljackson@albany.edu

Selections for the program will be made by June 23, 2023, and selected participants will be notified soon after.



PEF fighting for you at the contract table

CONTRACT UPDATE

With a majority of PEF and the state's proposals now on the table, contract negotiations on a successor PS&T agreement are moving forward and PEF is urging the state to pick up the pace even more.

"Our team is ready and willing to pick up the pace of negotiations and we hope the state will begin to engage in talks with more intensity," she said. "We look forward to earnest discussions on economic and non-economic proposals, including across-the-board wage increases and telecommuting, during the next round of negotiations. We are committed to continuing to work with the state at a steady pace, so we get the contract that the members deserve in a timely manner."

On April 13 and 14, the team had productive discussions on continuing various programs after expiration of the contract, such as Article 15 tuition reimbursement, Paid Parental Leave, and improvements to the Productivity Enhancement Program.

"We wanted to address Article 15 so that members don't have to stop their educational programs due to uncertainty about whether the program will be retroactive," said PEF Vice President and Contract Team Chair Darlene. "We also had positive conversations about Paid Parental Leave and improvements to the Productivity Enhancement Program (PEP), which allows members to exchange certain accruals for a reduction in health insurance premiums."

While these conversations have been good, the state has not gone so far as to accept these proposals, Williams said.

The next negotiating sessions are set for May 16 and 17.



FPS member recognized by state agency for helping rescue driver from submerged vehicle

By KATE STICKLES

Body camera footage of New York State Trooper Frank Rush pulling a driver from a pond in Fishkill on Aug. 17 last year circulated widely online. PEF member and fire protection specialist James Galu was recently honored by the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Services' Office of Fire Prevention and Control for his role in assisting with the rescue.

"It definitely was an honor to receive the recognition, especially with all of the work fire protection specialists do every day - from responding to emergencies across the state, as well as training other responders on how to be safe and effective," Galu said. "On the day of the rescue, I happened to be in the right place at the right time and was able to effect the rescue with Trooper Frank Rush and a good samaritan who entered the water before either of us arrived on scene."

On that day, Galu heard an emergency call dispatched by 911 in the town of Fishkill and went to offer his assistance. Upon arriving at the scene, he observed an occupied vehicle in a body of water, which was quickly becoming submerged.

"James dove into the water and began to swim to the vehicle, completely putting others' needs before his own safety," the agency wrote when recognizing Galu's efforts. "As the vehicle was sinking, James and a NYS Trooper, who had also entered the water, were able to extricate and surface a man who was unconscious and trapped in the vehicle. James and the Trooper were able to bring the man to shore to receive medical attention. Once on the shore, the driver expelled water from his lungs and he was transported to a local hospital in a conscious state."

The agency praised Galu for his selflessness.

"James never hesitates to help when it is needed and is usually the first to step up and answer the call for help," the agency wrote. "He is the guy who always puts others first and one we are proud to have on our team. The driver of this vehicle was extraordinarily lucky to have James in the area on this day and we are extraordinarily lucky that James is on the DHSSES team."

That Galu works as a fire protection specialist comes as no surprise. Fire service is in his blood.

"I grew up in the fire service, both of my parents and grandfathers were firefighters, and I knew I wanted to be involved in emergency

services in one way or another," he said. "Working for the Office of Fire Protection and Control (OFPC) is a continuation of that but has also allowed me to expand on my formal education with excellent real-world experiences and fantastic mentors both inside the agency and out."

His work with the state has taken him to Kentucky, to assist with tornado response; to Puerto Rico, to do damage assessments after a hurricane; and to various large wildfires and snowstorms as a first responder.

"The experiences with OFPC have given me a greater appreciation for the entire emergency services community that exists outside of fire," he said.



Galu has worked for OFPC since 2012. For most of his tenure, he has been assigned to the Fire and Life Safety Branch (FLSB), promoting fire prevention and public education, until he recently transferred to the Fire Training and Education Branch (FTEB). He is also a volunteer firefighter for the Village of Fishkill Fire Department.

OFPC also recognizes 3 members for firefighter training

PEF members Mark Warfle, Frank Balys and Bryan Monacelli were recognized for their work with the Recruit Firefighter Training Program (RFFT) at the New York State Fire Academy.

"Even on a good day, working with the RFFT program and the NYS Fire Academy is undoubtedly one of the most demanding positions in our agency," said a release from OFPC. "It's a high stress job. The team must pay attention to and balance the needs of approximately 100 subordinate instructors, classes of 40 recruit firefighters, and the needs of the dozens of agencies that rely on our services with each program offering."

The team was tasked with updating and refocusing the decades old RFFT curriculum, which they accomplished without any stand down, delay, or cancelation of recruit academy offerings. Through their leadership, the program expanded from 11 weeks to 15 weeks, providing a far better "product" for recruits and fire department customers.



Make a difference, run for an Executive Board seat

Petitioning for the April Special Election is under way – now's your chance to take part in the business of the union and help shape PEF's future by seeking election to the Executive Board.

There are 11 Executive Board seats up for election:

- Seat 1, Agriculture & Markets
- Seat 15, Civil Service
- Seat 90, Higher Education Services Corporation
- Seat 101, SUNY Stonybrook
- Seat 104, SUNY Stonybrook
- Seat 172, ITS
- Seat 173, ITS
- Seat 290, OPWDD
- Seat 295, OMH
- Seat 395, OMH/OPWDD
- Seat 545, Political Subdivisions of NYS

Petitioning began April 10 and ends May 2.

"If you've ever wanted to have more of a voice in your union, Executive Board is a great opportunity to shape the policies and agenda of PEF," said President Wayne Spence. "By giving members from all our agencies a seat at the table, we ensure that the needs of all members are met."

After the petitions are collected and eligible candidates are determined, ballots will be mailed May 23 and must be returned by June 14. Petitions are available at www.pef.org/elections.





Empire and Ellis Medicine come to agreement

Empire BlueCross Blue Shield and Ellis Medicine have reached an agreement ahead of the May 1, 2023 deadline, and Ellis facilities and services will remain in network for PEF members in the Empire Plan.

Those facilities include:

- Ellis Hospital in Schenectady
- Ellis Hospital Skilled Nursing Facility Unit
- Bellevue Woman's Center in Niskayuna
- Medical Center of Clifton Park (Urgent Care)

Stay up to date on benefits [here](#) under Health Benefits News.



Sign up **TODAY** for the Communicator

Keeping PEF members current on PEF news, emailed to your mobile device or home computer monthly.

<https://www.pef.org/emailme/>



Division 243 announces 2023 Public Service Scholarship

Division 243 is soliciting applications for its 2023 Public Service Scholarship, awarded for dedication to public service, education, worker's rights, justice and equality, and progressive causes.

The selected applicant will receive \$500.

The recipient must be a child, stepchild, or grandchild of an active member of PEF Division 243; must be enrolled in higher education for the upcoming academic year (2023-2024); and must have a record of community service as a volunteer in a community, school, or civic organization.

The applicant must include two reference letters from people familiar with the candidate's community service and a brief essay

(one page, double-spaced, about 250 words) discussing ways in which they would like to improve their community.

The award will be given without regard to political party affiliation, gender, race, creed or national origin. Completed applications are due to the PEF Division 243 Scholarship Committee no later than May 5, 2023.

Submit applications via email to pef243scholarship@gmail.com. Please attach the contact information sheet, [available here](#), with your application.

Judith Scanlon Scholarship available for Region 1 members

PEF Region 1 is offering four (4) \$500 scholarships for dependents of active PEF members in Region 1 who will be attending college in the fall of 2023. The scholarship is named after Judith Scanlon, a PEF member and nurse from the Buffalo area who was killed by a patient while conducting a home visit in November 1998. Applications must be postmarked by June 5, 2023. You can download the application and submission instructions [here](#).

Additional PEF Regions or Divisions who are sponsoring scholarships are encouraged to send application eligibility and information to Communicator@PEF.org. All scholarships we know about will be publicly listed at <https://www.pef.org/about/scholarships/>.



We must support Social Security, Medicare programs and stand in unity with our seniors

Happy spring to all my readers! I hope this season finds you healthy, happy, and energized! This month's article focuses on the constant messaging from the far right that Social Security is going broke. Below, I have provided you information from the Alliance for Retired Americans with some information about how Social Security should be fully funded rather than cut!

In April, the trustees of the Social Security and Medicare Trust Funds released their 2023 reports. Below is Alliance for Retired Americans Executive Director Richard Fiesta's statement on the reports:

"Today's reports show once again that Social Security's Old-Age and Survivors Insurance (OASI) Trust Fund is strong and solvent, with enough money to cover full benefits and expenses until 2033, one year earlier than reported last year. If no changes are made, the Trust Fund can pay 77% of scheduled benefits.

"Further, the Medicare Part A Trust Fund for hospital care has sufficient funds to cover its obligations until 2031, three years later than reported last year.

"The Trust Funds are strong because most Americans contribute to them with every paycheck. They could be even stronger if the wealthiest Americans paid their fair share.

"We must strengthen Social Security by lifting the cap on earnings — currently \$160,200 — subject to the 6.2% payroll tax.

"President Biden's budget extends Medicare's solvency by decades by further lowering prescription drug prices and asking the wealthiest to pay a little more and should be passed by Congress.

"Eighty-eight percent of Americans oppose cuts to Social Security and Medicare. They do not want the government to lower benefits, change the retirement age, or let Wall Street gamble with their guaranteed benefits.

"Older Americans have earned these benefits after a lifetime of hard work and will not allow the rug to be needlessly pulled out from under them, their children, or their grandchildren."

From my perspective as the PEF Retirees President, Director Fiesta is 100% right. Congress needs to expand, not cut Social Security. Social Security is an earned benefit we paid for with FICA taxes. It's not an "entitlement!" Social Security is often referred to as the third rail in politics, because it's so charged that "touching" it is considered dangerous to political careers. Traditionally, some politicians have suggested cutting benefits or increasing the age to receive benefits to fix the insolvency issue, while others have looked to expand



funding of the program. During his State of the Union speech in January, President Joe Biden elicited a strong reaction to his remarks about the need to fix the program, with legislators on both sides of the aisle responding to his call to "stand up for seniors ... Because Social Security works."

Wall Street politicians are attacking the Social Security system, claiming that it's unaffordable because of a projected shortfall a decade from now. Here's the thing: A big reason that shortfall exists is that Social Security contributions are only made on the first \$160,200 of wages — so any earnings growth above that cap doesn't go toward Social Security.

The runaway inequality of the last 40 years is what allows Wall Street politicians to attack Social Security and the best way to fight inequality is with UNIONS. Unions raise the wages of working people, meaning less for the millionaires and billionaires, and more for everyday people. This, in turn, strengthens the Social Security trust fund.

Tell your congressional representatives to scrap the cap!



Leave donations:

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.

- LaShon Boyd is an habilitation specialist 1 at the Metro Developmental Disabilities Services Office in Manhattan
- Gloria Broadbent is an instructor at the School for the Deaf in Rome.
- Brian Cellery is an information technology specialist 3 at the Office of Information Technology Services in Albany.
- Megan Dolan is a vulnerable persons protection specialist 2 at the Justice Center in Delmar.
- 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.
- Tammi Holtslander-Camp Sr. Is an occupational therapist at Greater Binghamton Health Center in Binghamton.
- Cassandra Mascaro is a gender violence prevention specialist 1 at the state Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence 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.
- Kevin Valazza is a teacher 4 at Wende Correctional Facility in Alden.
- 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.



April 20, 2023

Suzette Moore, left, an ORC at Midstate Correctional, won a Yeti Tundra Haul cooler for participating in the Region 6 event survey administered by Region 6 Coordinator Christopher Dunham, right. Moore is also a U.S. veteran. Thank you for your service to our country and our community!



April 20, 2023

PEF Contract Team was in Buffalo, NY yesterday talking to members about ongoing contract negotiations with the Roswell Park Comprehensive Care Center.



April 19, 2023

PEF members at the Hauppauge State Office Building in Region 12 are getting the latest union updates today from Regional Coordinator Bill Holthausen and Nancy Stuart from the Division of Tax & Finance.



April 18, 2023

The very first in-person membership meeting since COVID for Creedmoor PC #PEF Division 241 members! Region 11 Coordinator Bernadette O'Connor welcomed over 100 attendees, who showed up for very informative presentations by PEF Health & Safety, PEF Organizing, COPE, PEF Membership Benefits Program, and Workers' Comp attorneys Aronova & Associates.



April 12, 2023

PEF members at SUNY Stony Brook showing union solidarity today at the “fair parking” Rally. Great turn out and speakers sending management a clear message - we do not want to see a price hike in the parking fees. PEF members deserve better!



April 18, 2023

PEF delivered bottled water to members who work at the Shirley Chisholm State Office Building in Brooklyn so they could safely drink as the DOH and OGS conducted tests of the water supply following concerns about bacteria. Thank you to all leaders who helped make it happen!



April 20, 2023

PEF Contract Team in Buffalo after talking to members about ongoing contract negotiations with the Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center. Left to right: Region 1 Coordinator Michele Iorfida, Bruce Jagroop, Theresa Burke and Jordan Blatz.



May 1, 2023

PEF field representatives from around the state gathered in Albany May 1 and 2 for two days of intensive training on the Taylor Law, the labor relations statute that governs public employment in New York State.

