



Vol. 42

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State
of the 
Union

The 46th Annual PEF Convention

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The President's Message By WAYNE SPENCE



'Moving Together' at Convention and in the year ahead

Welcome to our annual Convention issue, packed with information about all the speakers, workshops, and union business that was accomplished in Syracuse September 15-18! Nearly 600 delegates attended, and I heard from many of them how pleased they were with this year's event. I'd like to thank Convention Committee Chair and Vice President Darlene Williams, as well as the entire Convention Committee and all the PEF staff who worked very hard to make sure delegates could accomplish their work and have a good time.

[Keynote speaker Mark Richard](#), who has been in the room with me for all four PEF contracts I've negotiated as president, was a big hit, as was [New York State Department of Civil Service Commissioner Timothy Hogues](#), who was gracious enough to spend an extra half hour answering delegate questions following his remarks.

The delegation considered [16 resolutions](#) during the two-and-a-half-day Convention. The most pertinent for all members was a rejection of a proposed dues increase. PEF dues will remain at just 0.9% of your paycheck.

I attended every breakfast, workshop, and luncheon I could, including the annual [Health & Safety Breakfast, Veterans'](#) and [Nurses' Luncheons](#), and this year, a [Multi-Cultural Showcase](#) put on by our Jewish, Indo-American, and Caribbean Committees, as well as the PEF Black Caucus. It is an honor to lead such a diverse and talented group of professionals.

I'd be remiss if I didn't add that our Convention rules leave room for hundreds more delegates, so if you're curious and want to get involved, pay attention to your personal email in the spring of 2025 for all the information about how to petition to become a delegate. It really is quite easy to get involved and make a difference in the future of your union. The 2025 Convention will be held in Lake Placid, N.Y., from Oct. 19-22, 2025. I'd love to see you there!

In Unity,

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

Wayne Spence
PEF President

State *of the* ↑ Union

‘When we fight ... we win!’
PEF is stronger than ever by
‘Moving Together’

By **KATE STICKLES**

By embodying this year’s theme, “Moving Together,” the union is growing, unified, and stronger than ever, said President Wayne Spence in his historic tenth State of the Union address at the 46th annual PEF Convention in Syracuse on Sept. 16, 2024.

“I thank each and every one of you for granting me another opportunity to serve as your president,” he said. “It’s an honor I don’t take lightly. While my most important job in life is being a husband and father, serving as president of this incredible union is the next thing that is most important. This marks the tenth time I’ve had the privilege to address you, and I am honored and humbled to be the first president to do so.”

President Spence looked back at the union’s successes since his first term in 2015, highlighting contractual gains, membership growth, legislative wins, and the importance of continued solidarity, and renewed his commitment to pursuing workplace safety initiatives, anti-bullying campaigns, criminal justice reform, and more.

Growing the ranks

“Our union is stronger now than ever before, not only because of the leadership at the top but because of the collective efforts of every single one of you,” President Spence said. “Today, we proudly count almost 56,000 dues-paying members, up from 51,000 in 2022. After the challenges of COVID in 2021, when we saw our numbers dip, we have rebounded and grown stronger. This growth speaks to the resilience, unity, and commitment of each of you.”

Since January 2024, PEF has welcomed more than 5,000 new members and is on track to surpass its annual goal. The membership growth comes at a time when anti-union forces, such as Opt Out New York, are slamming members with mailing and email campaigns urging them to drop their union.

“Membership growth is not just about numbers,” he said. “It’s about building strength in every corner of the state. This growth is crucial as we continue to push for more significant legislative and contractual victories. Together, we are a force to be reckoned with.”

Contractual gains

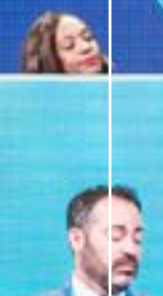
President Spence highlighted gains in the last PS&T contract, including the \$600, first-of-its-kind Higher Educational Differential for qualified members, the \$3,000 signing bonus, and the \$400 dental stipend, and shared the significant gains in salary over the last 10 years. A chart showing the salary and compensation growth for a Grade 18 PEF member from 2015 until today noted a 60% increase from just over \$52,000 to just under \$84,000 in that timeframe.

“These victories are a testament to what we can achieve when we move together in unity,” he said. “Our contract negotiation team worked tirelessly, and it’s thanks to their dedication that we saw many of these benefits realized this past April. That contract was not easy. We were getting ready to have a rally in Albany and we made it known to the Governor.”



State of the U

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"The Governor herself called me to get to the finish line because she knew," he said. "I want you to know, it wasn't just me, it was the fact that you hear the call when it's time to turn out. When we fight, we win!"

Legislative victories

Not only did PEF's fight at the contract table bring results, so did the fight in the halls of the Legislature. The Fund Our Future campaign has been highly successful advocating for PEF members and the New Yorkers they serve.

"We gathered more than 10,000 signatures to advocate for salary upgrades, civil service reforms, and better staffing at mental health facilities," President Spence said. "This level of activism is proof that our collective voice carries weight, and when we move together, we have created real change."

Moving together also helped PEF weather the storm of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the union ensuring members had access to critical personal protective equipment, emergency lodging, and telecommuting agreements.

"We didn't stand idly by," he said. "We advocated tirelessly for safety. We remained united. That unity has only made us stronger. We went to work when there was no test for a virus that was killing people. I lost family. We lost coworkers who went to work and didn't come home.

"I want you to understand that we are here; we are not going to let them forget who we are, what we did back then," he said. "We are strong when we move together. In case nobody has told you lately, I want to say, 'Thank you.'"

Renewing the call

President Spence urged the more than 500 delegates at Convention to pledge to renew their commitment to the work of the union.

"Our union is not just built on the accomplishments of the past, but on the actions we take every single day moving forward," he said. "We must not only advocate for our rights, but also for each other. Now, more than ever, we need every delegate, every member, to take an active role in the work ahead. We need to ensure that our union remains a powerful voice for our members in every workplace and every community across the state."





46th Annual PEF Convention

Syracuse, New York

‘Moving Together,’ delegates take on top union priorities and policies at 46th annual PEF Convention

By KATE STICKLES

The 46th annual PEF Convention kicked off September 15 in Syracuse with the President’s Reception, followed by three days of plenary sessions, workshops, and luncheon meetings where the more than 550 delegates discussed union finances, legislative agendas, and several proposed resolutions.

This year, the Convention theme was “Moving Together,” and that’s what delegates did over the course of the three days.

“What does ‘moving together’ mean in the union?” asked Convention Committee Chair and PEF Vice President Darlene Williams. “It means uniting in the pursuit of better working conditions, social justice, and having the ability to advance the rights and wellbeing of every member.

“When we move together, we are powerful,” she said. “To negotiate, to advocate, and to bring about meaningful change. It reminds us that every step forward is a step taken by all. No one is left behind. In unity, we find the courage to face our challenges because I have someone who is standing with me.”

Speakers take the podium

Several elected leaders addressed the delegates, either in person or through video messages, including Assemblymember Pamela J. Hunter, Sen. John Mannion, Sen. Rachel May, Sen. Chuck Schumer, Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, and Attorney General Letitia James; AFT President Randi Weingarten and SEIU President April Verrett also spoke remotely.



[READ MORE: Political allies address delegates](#) following a solemn remembrance to those who passed since the last Convention, President Wayne Spence took to the podium to give his State of the Union address and update delegates on what PEF has accomplished in the past year, and in the years since COVID-19 ripped through the world.

[READ MORE: President Spence delivers historic 10th State of the Union address](#)



"This marks the tenth time I've had the privilege to address you," Spence said. "I'm honored and I'm humbled to be the first president to do so. As we gather under the theme, 'Moving Together,' I want to take a moment to reflect on how far we've come as a union. We're stronger now than we have ever been before."

This year's keynote address came from Mark Richard, who has served as the chief negotiator on the PEF Contract Team for many years. A 45-year American Federation of Teachers (AFT) member, he is an attorney who has dedicated his legal career to representing solely labor unions.

[READ MORE: Mark Richard inspires in Keynote address](#)

Finances of the union

Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue said the union's finances are steady and in great shape.



"PEF is in the best financial position in the history of this union," he said. "The union is in an extremely strong financial situation with \$40.8 million in dues revenue from April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024. Total revenue is up \$3.34 million, to \$43 million. Total expenditures were \$42.7 million."

Post-retirement liabilities noticeably increased due to changes in the post-retirement benefits provided in the staff union contract and management/confidential synopsis, but the loss was offset by gains in PEF's investments.

"Costs are increasing, but so are our efforts to recruit and retain membership," Donahue said. "Our membership numbers reflect that. I am proud of the work we have put in to make this union larger and stronger. We have shown that we continue to hear our members."

"I can report to you that PEF is in very good financial shape, and I intend to keep it there," he said.

Trustees report out

Trustees Muriel Hardy-Lee, Kelly Nadeau, and Radhakrishna Moran reported that the audit for fiscal year ending March 31, 2024, completed by the Bonadio Group (CPA), was clean.

"They determined that the consolidated financial statements are presented fairly and reasonably free from material misstatements, and issued an unmodified opinion," Trustee Kelly Nadeau said. "The

Bonadio Group did not detect any internal controls that identified material weakness."



She said that the most sensitive estimates reported were the fair market value of investments and the calculation of post-retirement health care costs.

Working with PEF's internal auditor, the trustees also reviewed Divisions, Regions, and statewide officer expenses to ensure compliance with PEF policies and observance of good business practices.

Trustee Muriel Hardy-Lee informed delegates that the audit reported no findings of fraud, waste, or abuse within the 112 Divisions audited in the past 12 months, as well as the 12 Regions audited for fiscal year 2022-23. Additionally, Hardy-Lee noted that there was a decrease in Divisions whose status was Not in Good Standing, with 19.5% in the August 2024 report, down from 34% in September 2023.

The improvement highlights the work of the PEF Divisions Finance Department's efforts to get Divisions back on track. Work continues to fill more top leadership positions within Divisions.

Trustee Radhakrishna Mohan concluded the report by updating delegates about progress the union has made to implement the Convention resolutions adopted in 2023.

Legislative agendas

Vice President Randi DiAntonio, chair of PEF's Statewide Political Action Committee (SWPAC), presented the federal and state legislative agendas on the second day of plenary action.

"Political action allows us to build power and visibility to advance legislation to improve our lives," she said. "We want New York to be a more attractive employer so we are not doing the jobs of four or five people."

"PEF has engaged in a coordinated campaign called 'Fund Our Future for a Thriving New York' where we've brought together our parent unions, membership, the community, and elected officials with the goal of reinvesting in the public workforce," she said. "Since last Convention, we have made progress on several fronts."

Among those fronts was fixing Tier 6, where political action was successful in getting the five-year final average salary calculation

down to three years – which will result in higher annual pensions for Tier 6 members – and removing overtime from the contributions calculation.



“We know there is a lot more to do to fix Tier 6 and Tier 5,” DiAntonio said.

PEF also advocated successfully for ending the lag payroll program, securing \$55 million to restore more than 200 inpatient psychiatric beds, and getting millions of dollars allocated for improvements at the New York State Museum, among many others.

“It’s not just what we get, it’s also what we stop,” DiAntonio said. “PEF stopped cuts to retiree healthcare reimbursements, prevented the state from entering the interstate nursing compact, and we saved SUNY Downstate, again.

“None of these wins could have happened without all of you,” she said. “When we fight, we win!”

In the next legislative session, PEF will continue to advocate for ensuring quality services, protecting employee rights, maintaining a stable public workforce, reforming New York labor law, improving working conditions and benefits, and providing for well-deserved retirements.

Project 2025 discussion

PEF invited Joe Radosevich, vice president for campaigns and outreach at the Center for American Progress, to talk about Project 2025, a 900-page document published by the Heritage Foundation meant to serve as a road map for a future presidential administration.

Radosevich’s presentation highlighted the policy recommendations in the document and focused on the founders and funders of the project, such as the Freedom Foundation, which employs anti-union tactics in attempts to reduce union membership.

[READ MORE: Project 2025 discussion highlights potential impact on PEF](#)

Resolutions

Sixteen resolutions were considered by the Convention, out of a total of [26 submitted](#). Of the sixteen considered by the delegates, one was adopted as printed, four were adopted with amendments, eight were defeated, two were ruled out of order as unconstitutional, and one was withdrawn.

RESOLUTION ADOPTED AS PRINTED

Resolution No. 26 – PEF Union Political Action Committee (PAC) Money Donations Recaptured from Convicted Legislative Representatives

This resolution resolves that upon learning that a PEF endorsed political candidate or elected official committed a crime, and was later convicted of same, that PEF shall send a written letter to the political candidate or elected official, demanding the return of those monies. The resolution further provides that the PEF Legislative Department should draft a proposed letter for approval by the PEF Executive Board by the last meeting of 2024. The last meeting of 2024 is scheduled for December 5 and 6, 2024.

RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED WITH AMENDMENTS

Resolution No. 1 – Fighting Antisemitism

This resolution, as amended, provides that PEF will encourage our 50,000 members to tell New York’s leaders of the need to strongly and repeatedly condemn the surge in antisemitic and Islamophobic attacks.

Resolution No. 8 – Agencies Responsibility When They Outsource to the Business Service Center

This resolution, as amended, provides that PEF develop a policy and a communication that clarifies the expectation that agencies remain responsible and involved when outsourcing administrative duties to the BSC. These communications shall be made available to divisions and members so they can use them to communicate with agency management through the labor management process and other available means, ensuring that agencies continue to be responsible and involved in these administrative duties.

Resolution No. 10 – Enhancing Professional Examination Transparency, Occurrence, and Relevance

This resolution, as amended, provides that PEF should recommend the formation of a broader collaborative committee involving various agency representatives, the Department of Civil Service, and other relevant stakeholders to regularly review and dynamically update the schedule, skill inventory and examination content to ensure they remain aligned with current industry standards and technological advancements and better assess candidates’ professional, scientific, and technical competencies.

Resolution No. 11 – Article 33

This resolution, as amended, recommends that the PEF contract committee attempt to negotiate a 90-day time frame for employers to conclude an investigation.



RESOLUTIONS DEFEATED

Resolution No. 4 – Quarterly EOL Report

Resolution No. 5 – Providing Lists of Attendees Where PEF Resources are Expended

Resolution No. 6 – Convention and Executive Board Transcripts Available to PEF Members - Update to Existing Policy

Resolution No. 9 – PEF Dues Policy

Resolution No. 13 – Lawsuit Disclosures

Resolution No. 16 – Recording of Executive Board Meetings

Resolution No. 17 – Accurate and Explicit Financial Reporting

Resolution No. 19 – Convention Charity

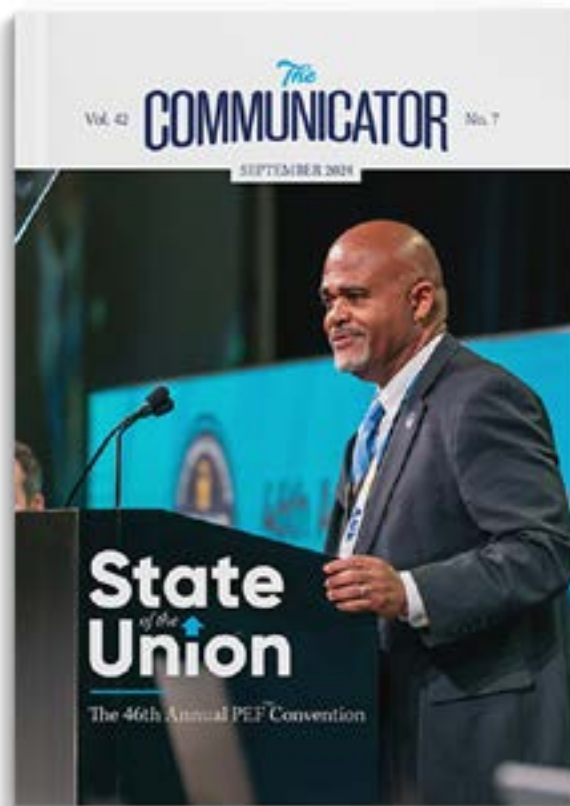
RESOLUTIONS RULED OUT OF ORDER AS UNCONSTITUTIONAL

Resolution No. 3 – Term Limits for PEF Presidents

Resolution No. 14 – Term Limits

RESOLUTION WITHDRAWN

Resolution No. 18 – Unused Convention Seats



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Keynote Speaker Mark Richard inspires

By **NAJEE WALKER**

This year's Convention keynote speaker helped PEF negotiate some of the strongest contracts in its history.

Mark Richard practices labor law with Philips, Richard & Rind, P.A. He is a long-time leader in the labor movement beginning as an Organizing Director for Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers of America and has served as the chief advisor to PEF during contract negotiations. He has been an AFT member for over 45 years and has helped negotiate contracts for other unions across the country.

When he took the stage the morning of Sept. 16, Richard greeted the delegates by reminding them that they are leaders, activists, and that the work they do on behalf of the state and on behalf of 56,000 PEF members is remarkable and special.

"I represent a lot of unions. I don't know of a lot of unions that have as many job titles as you do in PEF. And each one of you is a subject matter expert," Richard said. "One of the reasons why PEF does so well at contract negotiations is how smart you are. You sit at the table and when they ask about how your job works, you are there to articulate it."

Richard highlighted not only the success of PEF's contract team, but what it takes to create a path toward a good contract. He stressed that no contract is "perfect," but that members should continue to strive toward perfection and bring back the best possible outcome for members.

In his address, Richard focused on five parts of building on contract success. Key parts of these steps, Richard said, are already being practiced by members of PEF.

"One is to never stop being member driven," said Richard. "In my incredible honor of working with you, I have never seen a day where the center of this union does not begin and end with your members. You are a member driven union."

Richard also discussed strategy. Not only at the bargaining table, but at work as well, stressing that although members go to work every day for the people of New York, whether they know it or not, they go in with a plan on how to get the job done, recalling back to his earlier point about state workers knowing their jobs well.

A good strategy, Richard said, is stronger when members organize and are united. Differences of opinion are fine, but to Richard this is no different than one of his favorite sports: football.

"Do you have a team that's going to win a Super Bowl? If you have a disrupter like Terrell Owens in the locker room, it's not going to happen," said Richard. "So, while we can debate through our resolutions, have differences in our opinion — even very strong differences of opinion — once the play is called by the leadership or a head coach, that's the play we run!"



Those who wish to see unions break apart pay attention to any amount of disunity, based on generation and even job classification, Richard said.

Finally, Richard spoke on his fifth pillar: the strength and leadership of members to make tough decisions or what he calls “the art of what is possible.”

“Do you know how brutal it is to be in bargaining and have 40 top issues and every one of them is fair, and every one of them is deserved, but you know at the end you’re not getting it all? No one ever does. And how do you deal with it?” he asked.

Richard said the best way to keep momentum and use these pillars of success is to apply them to everything. Not just contract negotiations or grievances, but to every aspect of work and union life. He also told delegates to remember that there are forces at work who want to take away their jobs, their benefits and their livelihoods.

“They want to take your work away,” he said. “They want to privatize it off. Hedge funds, investors, donors.”

To close his address, Richard not only praised and thanked the delegates for the work they were about to embark on at this year’s convention, but also told them to take pride in their work and the path they took to get to this moment.

“Can you imagine what priest or rabbi or schoolteacher or grandpa came into your life and put a little ounce into your DNA that you should care about someone else?” he asked the delegates.

“So many people get jaded about fighting and caring. But you know who fights? PEF fights. Who cares? You care! Which leaders believe in the mission? You all! And that speaks volumes about unions, and it speaks volumes about power, and you are moving together!”



Recommit Today!

New + Existing PEF Members

SIGN NOW!

Convention speakers, proud of PEF's unity, share message of togetherness

By **NAJEE WALKER**

President's Reception kicks off the week

The President's Reception is a chance for delegates to take a pause, mingle, and share ideas before assembling on the main Convention floor the next day. It is also a chance to hear words of encouragement and unity from PEF President Wayne Spence and a special guest. In recent years, that special guest has been New York State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli.



DiNapoli praised President Spence for being elected to an historic fourth term.

"I have no doubt, and I don't think any of the delegates in here have any doubt, that you are going to continue to deliver for our public employees in New York State," he said.

DiNapoli pointed to PEF's role in continuing to reform the retirement system, specifically Tier 6. This year, Tier 6 saw two major improvements including a change to the Final Average Earnings and the exclusion of Overtime Pay to contribution rates.

"Wayne Spence worked with his colleagues across the board and across New York State and said: We have to be united and we have to be reasonable, that's how we're going to get victory," DiNapoli said.

The comptroller also praised the delegates and PEF members across the state, for their work during the COVID crisis. He recalled that, even during the worst of times, PEF and President Spence focused on keeping the state working and keeping members safe.

"Wayne, I remember you followed up with me the first couple of days to get personal protective equipment, and you all got the job done," he said.

The comptroller ended his remarks by answering a question on the minds of a lot of delegates: Is the pension fund doing well?

DiNapoli assured that not only is the fund doing well, but at 93% publicly funded, New York State's pension system is the best-funded system in the United States.

"We ended our fiscal year with an 11.5 percent positive return, so we had a good year, a strong year," said DiNapoli.

A Special Invocation

Before the convention formally gaveled in, President Spence invited Bishop Orlando Findlayter to the stage for the Invocation. The bishop was a leading voice in helping PEF, other unions, clergy, and the local community combat efforts by the state to close the SUNY Downstate hospital.



The bishop recalled when he first met PEF, during the first fight for the future of SUNY Downstate 12 years ago.

"We came together then as clergy, unions and community, and we said no to the state 12 years ago and we beat the state and kept SUNY Downstate Medical Center open," said Findlayter.

When the SUNY Chancellor threatened to close Downstate again this year, PEF and other unions rallied with him and other clergy to say no for a second time, demanding that SUNY Downstate remain a public hospital for the people and not—according to the Chancellor's plans—an outpatient or Urgent Care center.

"I am here today to let you know, as state workers, that you matter. That we appreciate you. That what you do counts and that your community supports you," said Findlayter.

"And I am pledging on behalf of the Flatbush Community, the Central Brooklyn Community and the clergy, that we're going to fight with PEF, we're going to stand with PEF, we're going to support PEF."



Commissioner Hogues conducts Q&A session

The New York State Civil Service Commissioner Timothy Hogues also made an appearance at this year's convention. He has had a regular dialogue with President Spence since coming on the job two years ago.



"Ever since that day we've been meeting on a regular basis," Hogues said. "And President Spence, he does not mince words. He is not shy about what he stands for, and he stands for the people. So, every time we talk his North Star is: I have to bring this back to my people."

Hogues said New York State is "moving together" with the people in order to best serve them.

"People are our greatest resource, and so we have to appreciate you, we have to make sure we are listening to you, we have to make sure you we are compensating you properly and thinking about your health and safety," said Hogues. "We have to make sure we are training you and thinking about your families. You deserve work-life balance."

Instead of prolonging his speech, the commissioner opted instead to take questions from delegates for the remainder of his time on stage.

Members asked questions about the dental plan, which goes into effect in October, as well as changes to exams that still ask for sensitive information like Social Security numbers, and how the HELPS program is going to be refined. In response to questions he couldn't answer on the spot, Commissioner Hogues promised to get back to members with answers.

Final Remarks from Randi Weingarten

On the final day of convention, AFT President Randi Weingarten appeared via Zoom to address the delegates. She took a moment to address that while the world, the country, and the state are facing hard times, PEF members have always had the best interests of the people at their core.



"Your membership is very acutely aware of what is right and what's wrong in the country and in the state," said Weingarten. "I watched the PEF membership take great care of my father, and I've always been in awe of what you do."

Weingarten said that while divisions across the nation deepen, especially during this election year, it is important to remember why unions fight.

"I am hopeful that we can actually get the candidates that we support elected, because they believe in the work you do," said Weingarten. "This election has to be about us and our needs. Whether it's Social Security and Medicare, whether it's the servicing and funding of public services, right now what we need to do is make it about us."

Weingarten pointed to the fight to keep SUNY Downstate open, the fight for retirement reforms, and even contract negotiations, as focuses for keeping the union together and working together. Elections, she said, are just a piece of the puzzle. Regardless of who is in office, keeping the energy together and having hope is the most important thing.

"We in the public service have to fight to make sure that we have communities, that regardless of their ideological differences, they actually can have a conversation with each other," she said. "They can actually understand that our common unity and common bind is much more important than what divides us. That is our challenge. And if we can do that in PEF, and we have, it means that we can do that across the nation."

Political allies address Convention delegates

By KATE STICKLES

The union's legislative successes would not be possible without the strong political alliances PEF has built with elected officials across the state. Several officials addressed Convention delegates in person, and others sent video greetings.



Assemblymember Pamela Hunter, representing the 128th Assembly District in Syracuse, joined delegates during plenary session on day one, thanking members for their hard work and dedication to their professions and urged participation in the upcoming elections.

"We have about 50 days until one of the most transformational and important elections we may have in some of our lifetimes" she said. "Tomorrow (Sept. 17, 2024) is National Voter Registration Day and we need to get people to the polls to vote, to make sure they are active citizens participating in our democracy. We don't want to go back; we are going to move forward together."



Endorsed by PEF for his 22nd Congressional District campaign, **State Sen. John Mannion** was in the house on day one, too, thanking PEF for its continued support and reflecting on his own days as a union member and president, representing 400 fellow educators and school staff.

"PEF has always been there for me," he said. "When union members vote, pro-union people win. What we've seen is a resurgence in the labor movement. We are getting younger people at the beginning of their career. They have faith in their union leaders. I'm proud to be a part of it."



On day two of the Convention, **State Sen. Rachel May** took to the podium to thank delegates for the work they do for the people of New York and pledge continued support for the labor movement.

"I'm so grateful for the work that all of you do," she said. "We spend a lot of time thinking about the impact of your work. About fixing Tier 6 so we can support you all; how can we support the Comptroller and your pension fund so we can make sure you are getting the rewards that you deserve? We know how hard you work."

Sen. May, a former UUP member herself, said the movement is growing.

"We are seeing organizations unionizing that have never unionized before," she said. "We are doing everything we can in the legislature to support labor. I am here with you!"

You can also view recorded remarks by [SEIU President April Verrett](#) and elected leaders [Sen. Chuck Schumer](#), [Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand](#), and [Attorney General Letitia James](#).





Karen Tully explains the poster created by her table during the Health and Safety Breakfast at Convention.

BEE involved in Health and Safety at your worksite

By **KATE STICKLES**



Bee involved. Bee active. Bee a voice for your coworkers. That was the buzz at the annual Health and Safety Breakfast during Convention, where staff and Article 18 co-chairs Leisa Abraham and Gabriela Franklyn encouraged participants to create and breathe new life into their health and safety committees.

President Wayne Spence opened the program by relating the story of his partner in parole who was required to go to the firing range while pregnant. With a background in engineering, President Spence knows the science behind sound.

"Water is a good transmitter of sound," he said. "The fetus is sitting in amniotic fluid. You can't put hearing protection on a fetus. And there is significant lead exposure on a firing range; what's protecting the baby? Quite a few law enforcement agencies don't allow pregnant women on a firing range, but parole was indifferent. We pushed and pushed and pushed and embarrassed the agency into making sure that allowances were made for officers who were pregnant."

Spence fought for those protections at his local Health and Safety Committee and ultimately unity and tenacity won that day.

"It's important to document the problems and share it with management and your members to get results," he said. "When you come across health and safety issues, if you have the ability, take a picture, don't just describe it. Sometimes a description might not be enough. Show them, this is what my day looks like, this is what the dangerous conditions in my workplace look like."

Franklyn pulled in the Convention theme of "Moving Together."

"How can we work together, moving forward?" she said. "I'm pretty sure we all have common denominator issues. Air, water, vehicles: parole officers were driving in a car that caught on fire!"

The Article 18 Health and Safety Committee meets with upper management and the Office of Employee Relations (OER) to jointly establish plans of action on safety protocols, but they can't do their job without input from local committees who have boots on the ground at worksites.

"It's very key that you guys memorialize what is going on and show us, we are the liaisons," Franklyn said. "We are very passionate, and we are very actively working on consistency and communicating information."

Following the Health and Safety Conference last year in Saratoga, there has been a drive to revitalize and rebuild health and safety committees that largely fell off during the COVID pandemic.

"Unfortunately, we don't have health and safety committees at each agency level and certainly not at each facility or local level," Abraham said. "Health and safety is the foundation of our labor union. This is something that affects everybody, including other unions, and we can learn from each other."

Abraham said there is money out there for training and they are looking for commonalities across agencies, such as de-escalation training, which can be useful for members in facilities, in offices, and in the field. While there is an obvious need at facilities like psychiatric centers, a stabbing at a Department of Transportation office highlights a greater need.

"What a lot of people don't realize is that under Article 18 there are funds for training," Franklyn said. "Fire safety, workplace violence, how to conduct walkthroughs, occupational stress, workers' compensation, writing PESH complaints – there is so much money that you are not accessing, and we are trying to find ways to educate you all about that process."

[Click here for more information about available grants.](#) The Article 18 co-chairs and Health and Safety Department staff can help with applying for grants by email at healthandsafety@pef.org. Abraham also urged delegates to contact the co-chairs or the Health and Safety Department to arrange on-site visits to membership meetings or at their facilities.

"A lot of our members are afraid to talk inside a huge meeting, so we can meet them at tables inside or outside the facility," she said. "Please invite us." Abraham and Franklyn can be reached by email at Leisa.Abraham@pef.org or Gabriela.Franklyn@pef.org.

Why bees?

Health and Safety Director Geraldine Stella elaborated on the bee theme.

"Bees have a reputation for being busy," she said. "There are different roles for bees." Participants identified some: worker bees, queen bees, killer -- let's go with fighter -- bees. "Every bee plays a different role in their colony, and they work together as a group. They can't function without each of those elements."

The same holds true for health and safety.

As an activity, delegates worked together with their "hive" to create a sample bulletin board to give members the BUZZ about Health and Safety and how to BEE involved. ([Watch this video](#) to see what participants came up with!) If you would like "BEE Involved" themed posters for your bulletin board, email healthandsafety@pef.org to request a set.



PEF nurses urged to heed AFT's 'Code Red' initiative

By **NAJEE WALKER**

This year's Nurses' Luncheon at the PEF Convention once again invited delegates who work in nursing across the state and across all agencies to share and learn from one another.

Amy Lee Pacholk, a Registered Nurse in the Teaching Research Center at SUNY Stony Brook, chairs the PEF Statewide Nurses Committee. She told nurses in attendance that they need to speak up about what's happening where they work.

"We need to hear from you so that we can properly advocate for you," said Pacholk. "We're asking for people to reapply to our Statewide Committee. And we're also asking people to apply to, and attend, Regional Committees."

Pacholk reiterated that no one understands their work better than the nurses working on the ground, and it is important to make sure their voices are heard so that PEF can fight for better working conditions.

Pacholk and the committee do know one thing that affects all nurses: Understaffing. In every agency and institution where nurses work, Pacholk said, there is a dangerously low number of staff.

That's why one of PEF's parent unions, The American Federation of Teachers (AFT), launched an initiative in February 2023 to recognize the urgent need for better staffing across the nation called "[Code Red](#)."

Kelly Nedrow is the Senior Director of Health Issues at AFT. She addressed the luncheon to educate nurses about Code Red. Nedrow said that while AFT President Randi Weingarten was skeptical about the name of the campaign at first, she recognizes that poor staffing has resulted in a "five-alarm fire" that must be addressed.

"The Code Red campaign sets up four pillars that we strive to succeed in," said Nedrow.

Those pillars seek to set minimum staffing requirements, create robust training, provide a safe work environment, and create standards to prioritize patients and workers over profits.

Over the year and a half that Code Red has been active, AFT has secured wins in Washington state and Oregon that address staffing shortages and establish laws to protect the rights of workers and restrict the power of CEOs who own facilities.

Since then, Oregon has been able to set Registered Nurse to Patient Staffing ratios and enact fines for facilities that are inconsistent in keeping those ratios.

Nedrow said that while these are significant wins for those states, there is more to be done across the nation. As more affiliates join AFT, Nedrow is optimistic about the fight going forward.

"We may not all work at the same place or have the same issues, but when we have the data that shows that these policies can work, it is one of the most powerful tools we can use when we go to the legislature," said Nedrow. "Your participation, your support and your rallying with your members is critical to all of the wins happening everywhere right now."

Shortly after Nedrow's presentation, the Statewide Nurses Committee awarded four scholarships for continuing education to delegates.

The four winners will receive \$400 to help continue their training in the nursing profession. Brandon Burns and Joane Phanord from Region 12, Clara Shamatanga from Region 10, and Michelle Webb from Region 3 were this year's winners.





PEF Veterans' Committee vows to leave no vets behind

By **KATE STICKLES**

The 46th annual PEF Convention Veterans' Luncheon brought veterans and their supporters together in the OnCenter's War Memorial Amphitheater.

PEF member and veteran John Thomsen sang the national anthem, followed by remarks from President Wayne Spence, who said it was vital that we recognize veterans inside the union, as well as outside.

"We have a lot of homeless vets," he said. "We see it happening in Europe, across the world; I thought it was just us. I hope as a country we can do better than that. That's why it's so important that we have our Veterans' Committee. We need the Veterans' Committee, not just symbolically, but also to make sure the state does its job hiring and promoting veterans."

Veterans' Committee Chairman David Krobe said the committee is actively reaching out to members and working to educate them on resources available to them for issues ranging from mental health to housing.

"Across the world, veterans are becoming more visible," he said.

The PEF Veterans' Committee has also been helping create veterans' memorials, working toward completing a fifth memorial in a small town outside Buffalo.

The committee reports to the president and is charged with reviewing issues concerning veterans in PEF and making recommendations to the president. The members of the committee are Krobe - Retiree; Christopher Buman - Region 3; Troy Decker - Region 5; Richard Fletcher - Region 5; Robert Harms - Retiree; and Yatram Bruce Jagroop - Region 1.



PEF Multi-Cultural Showcase highlights union's diversity

By **NAJEE WALKER**

This year's convention provided a chance for members to experience a piece of the cultures that make up PEF and New York State. PEF is made up of a broad and diverse group of workers from various backgrounds and faiths.

The Multi-Cultural Showcase was put together in partnership with the PEF Black Caucus and the members who make up the many cultural committees at PEF, including the Jewish, Indo-American, Caribbean and Hispanic Committees. Executive Board member Gwendolyn Culpepper organized the evening and served as master of ceremonies.

"We are glad you all could join us tonight for some really good food and an opportunity to celebrate each other and our cultures," said Culpepper.

Members were treated to culinary delights from across the world, like Pernil (roasted pork) from Puerto Rico, various curries from India, Jamaica and Trinidad, as well as traditional staples in African American cuisine, like fried chicken and cornbread.

PEF President Wayne Spence was in attendance and shared the history of the PEF Black Caucus, explaining how the group, while still connected to PEF, is its own entity.

"When the caucus formed, 46 years ago, leadership at the time did not want to fund an African American committee, due partly to how membership dues were deducted," President Spence said. "So the group formed outside of PEF, but still as a part of the membership and the union."

Culpepper brought up leadership from the Jewish Committee, Indo-American Committee, Caribbean Committee and Hispanic Committee, to share poems, stories, songs, and even recipes that uplift and celebrate their cultures.

For Carrie Saunders, the President of the PEF Black Caucus, the event was not only a success, but a beautiful sight to behold.

"The PEF Black Caucus is a little bit of everybody," said Saunders. "And that is what our food this evening represents."

Saunders thanked everyone for attending the celebration and asked that members, African American or not, join the Black Caucus. Members from any cultural background who are interested in joining any of the other committees can do so as well.

The night did not end quietly, as members took to the dance floor to join committee members and fellow delegates to work off a little of the around-the-world cuisine.





Region 4 delegates with In My Father's Kitchen co-founder Leigh-Ann Tumino, front row, fifth from left, after Regional Coordinator Monica Moore, to her right, presented the charity with \$3,000 in donations.

Delegates raise \$3,000 for In My Father's Kitchen

By **KATE STICKLES**

Delegates gave generously to this year's Community Outreach recipient, In My Father's Kitchen, a faith-based organization offering assistance to homeless people through direct street outreach.

Charities are selected by the host region, this year Region 4, and the PEF Convention Committee.

"Syracuse is one of the snowiest regions in the world. Homeless people are out there, and they won't come in," said Region 4 Coordinator Monica Moore. "That's why we selected In My Father's Kitchen. I was blown away by the generosity."

In addition to the money raised by raffling the 15 gift baskets donated by Regions and Committees, the sock brand Bombas donated 500 pairs to the charity and members donated winter clothing.

Moore presented In My Father's Kitchen co-founder Leigh-Ann Tumino with a check for \$3,080 and Tumino shared how the charity began 13 years ago after her husband John encountered a homeless man holding a sign near Destiny USA.

"One day he was driving and saw a gentleman holding a sign and he noticed that nobody would look at this gentleman," she said. "You didn't want to make eye contact because then you were committed."

Her husband went to Wegmans and bought the man food and water. When he returned, he parked and went over to talk to him.



"He unloaded his life history," she said. "Abuse at home, bullying in school, getting in with the wrong crowd. My husband said, 'I just wanted you to know that I see you and that God sees you and you are not invisible.'"

From that encounter, In My Father's Kitchen was born. It's about more than just food.

"Through our street outreach, we have found 372 people housing, with a staff of eight," said Tumino.

The organization also partnered with SUNY Upstate to visit the homeless and provide medical care, created a program to give panhandlers the chance to work and earn money for their work, and more.

Click [here](#) for information on In My Father's Kitchen.

Project 2025 discussion highlights potential impact on PEF

By **NAJEE WALKER**

At this year's convention, PEF President Wayne Spence spoke about the importance of being educated before going to the voting booth this November and wanted the union to do its part to educate delegates. As part of that effort, President Spence and Vice President Randi DiAntonio held a discussion on Project 2025.

To lead the discussion with delegates, President Spence and Vice President DiAntonio invited the Vice President for Campaigns & Outreach at the Center for American Progress, Joe Radosевич, to discuss Project 2025 and its potential effect on PEF and other unions across the nation. The Center for American Progress is a non-partisan think tank based in Washington, D.C.

"As public employees, politics and public policy effect every single aspect of our working lives and effect our family life," said Vice President DiAntonio. "And Project 2025, while a 900-page document, has almost 50 pages dedicated to the impact that this will have policy-wise on organized labor."

Radosевич made sure to emphasize that this was not a discussion around partisan politics, but rather a discussion around the policies and procedures highlighted in the document. Additionally, Radosевич focused on the founders and funders of the project, such as the Freedom Foundation, which is also behind the anti-union postal and email campaigns aimed at getting PEF members to drop their union membership.

A document, or plan like Project 2025, according to Radosевич, is not atypical during any election season. Presidents, Governors and other elected officials often have plans to prepare themselves for the first 100 days and for the transition of government. But that is exactly why, Radosевич said, the document and its plans should be taken seriously.

"Sometimes we hear that this has been going on for the last 40 years to prepare for a new administration, and that's true," said Radosевич. "In 2018, President Trump enacted about two-thirds of the policies in the last mandate for leadership."

Radosевич explained that while some Americans on either side of the political spectrum may have things they like and do not like about Project 2025, according to his organization's research, most do not like the plan overall.

Research from American Progress showed that some Americans do support some policies, like ending FBI independence or allowing the President to have oversight over the Department of Justice. However, many of those same policies would directly impact unions and work against PEF's priorities.

Project 2025 seeks to use an executive order that would classify federal employees as schedule F, which would exempt them from

being protected by civil service rules and could result in the firing of thousands of employees. PEF's policy is in direct contradiction to that.

"PEF will monitor and oppose the use of hiring practices designed to skirt civil service law and which are inherently subjective, such as the Selective Certification Hiring and Promotional process," PEF's policy reads. "So as to prevent these processes from negatively impacting the promotional potential for our members."

Thankfully, Radosевич said, American Progress' research shows most Americans are opposed to changes in the civil service system. About 79% do not want public service employees to be fired and replaced with staff loyal to the President.

Other anti-union agenda items in Project 2025 include allowing states to repeal national overtime and minimum wage laws and allowing states to ban labor unions and weaken the National Labor Relations Act and National Labor Relations Board.

After the presentation, Radosевич, DiAntonio and PEF Legislative Director Patrick Lyons, opened the floor to questions. Delegates engaged in conversations around their concerns around the project's plans to increase the Social Security age, negatively impact apprenticeship programs, and even CDC monitoring of reproductive health activity.

Each delegate was given a [document](#) that outlines PEF's positions on these and other labor issues alongside a comparison of Project 2025's plan.



The cover of Project 2025, a 900-page blueprint for conservative governance, produced by the Heritage Foundation.



Solidarity Forever

Solidarity Forever is still a union classic over 110 years later

By **NAJEE WALKER**

As part of a resolution passed by the Convention body in 2022, the popular union anthem “Solidarity Forever” is sung at the end of each Convention by the delegates. The song has a long and storied history and is deeply rooted in the movement for workers’ rights and, in some ways, civil rights.

The song’s writer, Ralph Hosea Chaplin, was born in 1887. At age seven, he attended the [Pullman Strike](#) in 1894 which saw 30 workers killed and 57 wounded as part of the demonstration. Chaplin witnessed the violence, which shaped his ideas of worker solidarity from a young age.

Chaplin worked with Mother Jones to help organize and lead a strike of coal miners in West Virginia between 1912 and 1913, another bloody event that would lead him to eventually write the ‘Solidarity Forever’ anthem—but first as a poem. While the song was written between 1913 and 1914, it was not completed until 1915.

The song is sung to the tune of “John Brown’s Body” and “Battle Hymn of the Republic” both which celebrate and call to action anti-slavery activists and have roots in civil rights, abolitionism, and support of the Union during the American Civil War.

It was later sung by [Pete Seeger](#), who in the 1960s began to emerge as a singer of protest music and a supporter of civil rights, environmental rights and workers’ rights.

Despite its popularity and adoption by unions throughout its many years, Chaplin did not like that the song gained popularity during his lifetime.

“I didn’t write ‘Solidarity Forever’ for ambitious politicians or for job-hungry labor fakirs seeking a ride on the gravy train,” said Chaplin in [an article](#).

Over the years, verses have been added to ‘Solidary Forever’ to reflect various issues, including women’s rights. As a result, several versions of the song exist. It has also been translated into several languages, including French, Spanish, Polish and German.



Are you interested in a career with PEF?

The New York State Public Employees Federation (PEF) is a diverse and powerful labor union committed to creating a better working life for its members. PEF staff work in various departments in collaboration with PEF's elected union leadership to serve 50,000 members employed in professional, scientific, and technical titles across the State. Some of PEF's departments include: Communications, Contract Administration, Field Services, Finance, Health & Safety, Legal, Legislative and Organizing. If you believe in workers' rights, justice and equality, then a career in the labor movement may be right for you. To see what opportunities are available at PEF, please visit our [Careers Page](#).

www.pef.org/careers-at-pef



Gov. Hochul, joined by Assemblymember Stacey Pheffer Amato and Senator Robert Jackson, speaks at a Sept. 4 signing ceremony in New York City.

PEF advocacy pays off as Governor signs union priorities into law

By **NAJEE WALKER**

At a ceremony in New York City on September 4, Governor Kathy Hochul signed several bills written or supported by PEF. The legislation improves due process rights under Section 72 and expands access to the Civil Service system as New York seeks to fill thousands of vacant positions across all agencies.

Under Civil Service Law, Section 72 governs the process by which state agencies address workers who the employer feels are unable to perform their duties due to a disability other than an occupational disability. A new law signed by the Governor and introduced by Senator Robert Jackson and Assemblywoman Stacey Pfeffer Amato ensures that any and all information relating to disability accusations be made available to the affected employee. Previously, that information could be withheld or redacted.

Additionally, legislation introduced by Senator James Skoufis and Assemblywoman Marianne Buttenschon, will require agencies to develop a policy to notify affected employees when certain information is being requested.

Both bills empower employees and their union representatives to protect the due process rights of workers.

Additional Section 72 legislation that seeks to make a hearing officer's final determination legally binding and provides the right to appeal that decision has passed both houses and is awaiting consideration by the Governor. That legislation was initiated by PEF and was supported by other public sector unions.

Three other bills -- all introduced by Senator Jackson and Assemblywoman Pheffer Amato -- chairs of their respective Civil Service Committees -- also were signed into law by the governor. They reform and expand the Civil Service System and are major victories for PEF and other public service unions seeking to build stronger workforces.

The laws encourage more New Yorkers to take civil service exams by allowing applicants to take competitive exams if they will meet either minimum age requirements or minimum education requirements within 12 months, and by providing that New York State Civil Service review and update questions within exams at least every five years.

For New Yorkers who pass the exams and begin their careers in public service, another new law allows provisional employees who are appointed to the same title immediately following the provisional appointment to use time earned in their provisional appointment towards the requirements for taking a promotional exam.

Several other Civil Service reforms provide better test notifications, credit probationary time for provisional employees, and require the commissioner of the Department of Civil Service to prepare a report on titles that require license and registration as a mental health practitioner in one or more professions under Article 163 of the Education Law.

PEF President Wayne Spence believes the changes will help the State address some of its staffing concerns.

"On behalf of the 54,000 members of the New York State Public Employees Federation, we appreciate Governor Hochul's support of these important bills," said Spence in a press release distributed by the Governor's office. "They are critical as we work to address the continued staffing issues across state agencies."

There are still hundreds of bills for the Governor to potentially sign into law, and of those, at least 12 are major PEF priorities.

Bills addressing Workplace Bullying, Artificial Intelligence and mandatory staffing reports at the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities are high on the list of PEF priorities that are still awaiting the Governor's signature. Each of these bills seeks to define and develop new policies to address concerns that negatively impact public employees.

PEF is also supporting bills that expand Workers' Compensation Benefits for mental injury and work-related stress, regulate temperatures in correctional facilities, and allow for a one-year public notice and engagement when a hospital seeks to close entirely or close a unit that provides certain services like maternity, mental health or substance use care.

PEF members are encouraged to urge the Governor to sign these bills. The union has made it easy for members to copy and paste pre-written letters and submit them via the Governor's website.



PEF Region 3 members march through the streets of Rochester on Labor Day.

PEF members hit the streets for Labor Day

Across the state, PEF members and their families came out by the hundreds to celebrate Labor Day with parades and picnics.

In Region 3, hundreds of members and leaders, including Vice President Randi DiAntonio and Regional Coordinator Leisa Abraham, hit the streets to participate in the Rochester Labor Day parade. In addition to celebrating Labor Day, PEF marchers urged people to vote in the upcoming elections with “Union Strong Voter” and “Vote Labor” signs.

“I am so proud and honored that so many members, retirees and their families joined us to show solidarity and the power of coming together as one, even when it was difficult for them,” said Abraham. “On a day that they could have chosen to stay home or do other activities, they chose to be Union Strong!”

Region 7 Coordinator Barbara Stransky spent months working together with fellow unions to highlight the need to “Fix Tier 6,” designing themed t-shirts for the 44th Annual Solidarity Parade and Picnic in Massena and joining the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 2032 with its decked-out float. Hundreds of members marched to drive home the need for reform.

On Labor Day in Region 4, hundreds took part in the traditional end-of-the-State Fair parade and PEF made a strong showing.

“It was an awesome turnout celebrating labor!” Region 4 Coordinator Monica Moore said. “Thank you to all members who participated!”

In Region 1, members joined the Western New York AFL-CIO for its Labor Day parade, where this year’s theme was to “honor those who have been lost in the fight for workers’ rights” and “pledge to continue their legacies by advocating for safer working conditions, fair wages, and respect for all workers.”

Region 8 members participated in the Michael Burns Labor Day Celebration picnic, sponsored by the Capital District Area Labor Federation Labor Day Parade Committee, Solidarity Committee and Greater Capital Region Building and Construction Trades. They enjoyed good food and great company in Clifton Park, coming together with unions from across the Region to “honor and appreciate the hard work, dedication and contributions of workers everywhere.”

New York City celebrated Labor Day on September 7 with its traditional parade. Although PEF did not formally participate, PEF President Wayne Spence, PEF Vice President Darlene Williams, and Region 10 Coordinator Tamara Martin were invited to join a contingent of labor and elected officials at the front of the parade as it made its way up Fifth Avenue.



★ ★ ★ ★ ★
LABOR
DAY PARADES!
★ GET YOUR FLOAT ON! ★

PEF member Yvette Myhand is all smiles along the Rochester parade route.





PEF leaders, staff remember those lost on 9/11

By **KATE STICKLES**

PEF leaders and staff gathered at the memorial outside the union's headquarters in Latham to remember the more than 3,000 people who died in the terrorist attacks 23 years ago on Sept. 11, 2001.

"It's still vivid in my mind," said President Wayne Spence. "I still remember it as if it was yesterday." PEF lost 34 PEF members from the Department of Taxation and Finance in New York City on that tragic day.

PEF Secretary-Treasurer Joe Donahue, who works for Tax and Finance, remembered the stunned disbelief as he watched the events unfold on the television.

"We all felt the loss," he said. "After that horrific event, people got together. We were all Americans; we were all one. This memorial stands as a permanent reminder that we will never forget."

PEF Executive Director Todd Kerner, who also worked for Tax and Finance and was in the city that day, hopes future generations of PEF continue the tradition of honoring the memories of those we lost.

"People just wanted to do their jobs," he said. "I hope we continue to remember their sacrifice."

President Spence closed the ceremony by honoring the work of the PEF Membership Benefits Program (PEF MBP) in the difficult days after the attacks.

"There were no bodies," he said. "Insurance companies were not ready to say these people had passed and give benefits to their families."

PEF MBP went to bat for them.

"[Then President] Roger Benson tasked Membership Benefits to figure it out. They contacted our internationals, AFT and SEIU, to come up with a plan to get money to these families, so they could get some aid," he said. "The work they did to make sure these families had what they needed to survive went way beyond. They had to take on the state of New York and insurance companies."



Joseph Scacalossi Winner Profiles

By **NAJEE WALKER**

Winners of this year's Joseph Scacalossi Scholarships were recognized by President Spence at a ceremony in early August.



Jake Baker is a full-time student attending LeMoyne College in Syracuse, with dual enrollment at Syracuse University. He is pursuing degrees in mechanical and aerospace engineering.

Jake has been involved in team sports throughout his life and spent much of his high school career in Albany playing Lacrosse. He also played junior varsity Basketball and Football at Columbia High School. He has received several accolades for his athletic accomplishments, including the NYSPHSSA Award and the Times Union All-Star Award for Lacrosse.

Jake also received several awards for scholarly achievements, including induction into the National Honor Society. He graduated Magna Cum Laude in 2023, and made LeMoyne College's Dean's List for Fall 2023 and Spring 2024.

Community has been a large part of Jake's life as well, as he focused on being a member of the Executive Student Council and raised more \$75,000 for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society in 2023. He participated in many fundraisers throughout his high school career and prepared and served food to the homeless population as part of Joseph's House & Shelter.



Alexandra Robillard is a graduate of Iroquois Central High School in East Aurora, who is attending the University of Rochester. She is studying Biomedical Engineering.

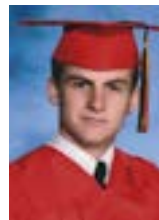
Alexandra was heavily involved in sports while in high school. As a freshman, she received the Scholar Athlete Award for Varsity Field Hockey and continued to win the award each year. She also received awards for Softball and has earned several medals at individual Tae Kwon Do competitions.

When she wasn't on the field or in the Tae Kwon Do studio, Alexandra was enjoying music, spending 11 years playing piano and eight playing the saxophone. She has performed as part of the Southtowns Piano Festival and the Erie County Music Educators Solo Festival.

Alexandra's efforts to give back to her community meant volunteering through her church, by making pillows and sleep

materials for the homeless, serving food at soup kitchens, and more. She took pride in her school by volunteering for campus clean ups, book fairs, and more.

Alexandra graduated Iroquois Central High School as the Class 2024 Salutatorian, has achieved academic excellence in science and language, and the President's Award for Outstanding Academic Excellence.



Alec Torquato received his Advanced Regents Degree from Schem East High School in Farmingville,. Now, Alec attends the University of Central Florida in Orlando, pursuing a degree in Hospitality Management and Real Estate.

Ice Hockey has kept Alec's attention since 2015. He has participated in recreational ice hockey leagues and club ice hockey leagues, as well as Track and Field competitions throughout his high school career. Alec has even been employed as a Certified Ice Hockey Official for USA Hockey and the National Ice Hockey Officials Association.

As a student, Alec was inducted into several honor societies, including the National Honors Society, Foreign Language Honor Society and Business and Marketing Honor Society. He also spent his time in high school focused on creating activities and a sense of community at his school as part of his class and student government.

For 12 years, Alec has been a member of the Boy Scouts of America and received the Eagle Palm Award three times at the Bronze, Silver and Gold levels. Additionally, he spent his time as a Boy Scout leading and participating in food drives, clothing drives and environmental service projects. At the height of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Alec spent his time collecting food and supplies for those hardest hit by the crisis. He was awarded an award in 2020 from the BSA, as well as the 8th Legislative District Citation of Recognition for responding to the community needs during the pandemic. He received the 8th Legislative District Citation again in 2022 for assisting elderly community members during a severe snowstorm in 2022.



Craig Costa is attending Campbell University this fall. He is studying Mechanical Engineering. As a high school student, Craig was involved in almost every aspect of student life, including as his Class Vice President, a member of the student council and a theatre club member. He graduated third in his class with a Regents Diploma with Advanced Distinction with Honors, Mastery in Math, Mastery in Science and the NYS Seal of Civic Readiness.



When he was not studying, acting, or presiding over student government, Craig was participating in school athletics as part of the Varsity Cross Country and Indoor/Outdoor Track team. He is now a member of Campbell University's Division I Cross Country and track teams.

Craig loves volunteering, especially when it comes to his local Little League. He maintains four Little League fields in his community and has worked to recruit more students to help maintain the fields nearly year-round.



Audrey Seymour is a graduate of Liverpool High School. She graduated in June with a 95% grade point average. While looking for more opportunities to earn money for college, she founded the "Dollar for Scholars" Scholarship and is now a proud recipient.

Audrey was a busy high school student, maintaining good grades while also being a member of the Ski Club, Key Club, Varsity Golf, Junior Varsity Soccer and Symphonic Orchestra. She was also inducted into the National Honors Society and was a member of the Student Association of Political Awareness.

Despite being busy with sports and music, Audrey still found time to complete more than 50 hours of community-based volunteering.

She is attending the University at Albany this fall, seeking a degree in Human Biology and on a Pre-Health Track.



Courtney Koprevich graduated as Salutatorian of her class at Frontier High School. As a high school student, Courtney showed school spirit and leadership as part of her school's student government and found an interest in technology at the Computer Programming Club.

She was inducted and participated in the National Honor Society and the Tri-M Honor Society. Additionally, she found the time to participate in Varsity Soccer, Varsity Lacrosse and the Symphonic Orchestra.

When she was not busy with sports, studying, or programming, Courtney enjoyed volunteering in her community and at school. Perhaps most of all, Courtney enjoys cooking and spending time with friends and family.

She is attending Robert Morris University this fall, studying Statistics and Data Science.



Maeve Talbot is a student attending Marywood University. She is a sophomore at Marywood University this fall.

In high school, Maeve was the treasurer for her school's chapter of the National Honor Society. She was also the treasurer for the Concession Stand Club. Maeve loved to be involved in as much as possible, and joined the Drama Club, Connect Club and took a role as part of the yearbook staff in her senior year.

Sports are a big part of Maeve's life, and as a student she played her favorite sport—tennis—as part of her high school girls' varsity team.

Maeve is proud to be involved at her local church and volunteers to help the community. She also took a role in education as part of her church's "Sunday School" program.

Aside from academics, Maeve enjoys tennis, finding time for friends and family, creating art and—perhaps most importantly—spending plenty of time with her dog.

While attending Marywood University, Maeve is studying architecture.



Riya Mistry is a graduate of Shenendehowa High School, where she was a member of the Math Honors Society, World Language Honor Society, National Honors Society and Rho Kappa Honor Society.

Riya's high school career went far beyond her academics as she spent time as a member of the Future Business Leaders of America and the non-profit Distributive Education Clubs of America. She also spent time as part of her Class Student Council and Student Faculty Administration Senate, Youth Court, Leo Club, UNICEF and the Society of Women Engineers.

Riya ran track, played volleyball and wrestled as part of her high school extracurricular activities.

She is a long-time volunteer at the Regional Food Bank in her area and was a part of the Girl Scouts of America. When she isn't volunteering, she continues to enjoy wrestling and weightlifting.

Riya is attending Clarkson University this fall, seeking a degree in Engineering and Management.



Jackson Brauer is a graduate of Orchard Park High School. Jackson received several awards to offset the cost of college, including the Tri-M Honor Society Scholarship, the Kelly Anne Ryan Memorial Scholarship, the Orchard Park School Related Professionals Association Scholarship and several others.

For Jackson, there was almost no aspect of student life he did not participate in. During his high school career, Jackson was accepted into the National Honor Society, Spanish Honor Society and served as President of the Tri-M Honor Society. Additionally, Jackson loved TV, Music and Acting, and participated in the Drama Club, the Orchard Park School Play and Musical, the Quaker Television Club, Swing Chorus and Area All State Chorus.

Jackson proudly participated in Orchard Park's "Tech Wars" and produced a prize winning short independent film.

When he isn't acting or producing, Jackson was swimming as part of his school's varsity swim team.

He volunteered at Feedmore of WNY, Friends of the Night, HomeSpace and the SPCA.

This fall, Jackson is attending Ithaca College and studying Television, Film and Digital Media Production.



Emily Curley is a high school graduate from Sackets Harbor Central School. She achieved high honors and was a part of the National Honor Society and Spanish National Honor Society. She graduated third in her class and was the class treasurer for her high school career. Emily is attending the University at Buffalo and studying Architecture.

Emily is the recipient of several other scholarships, including the Northern Credit Union Scholarship, the Natalie Bauer Memorial Scholarship, the American Legion Scholarship, and several others.

Emily served as a leader in sports. She was captain of her high school's soccer, basketball and softball teams. She was also a part of the Whiz Club and Art Club.

Emily loved volunteering in her community and helped to organize and participate in her local "Coaches for Cancer" game each year. She also participated in a program called "Patriot Pal," which enabled her to teach and look after elementary school students. Her love of teaching and children led to other volunteer opportunities, including chaperoning for dances.

As part of her volunteer work, she also worked with her local Legion and cleaned her community and neighborhood with other members of the National Honor Society.

The PEF Joseph Scacalossi Scholarship provides each recipient \$1,000 a year for four years. Dependents of PEF members or PEF Retirees who are current high school seniors or college freshmen can apply to be considered for the [2025 Joseph Scacalossi Scholarship Fund](#).



Do you want to be a union leader? Executive Board special elections resume in October

The PEF Executive Board meets quarterly and is the highest-ranking deliberative body of the union other than the annual Convention. A full Executive Board ensures that all members of the union are represented and have a seat at the table for discussions and voting on the business of the union.

There are currently 15 vacancies, so members in those constituencies are urged to participate in the special election with the start of petitioning on Oct. 1, 2024.

"The PEF Executive Board reviews the union's finances, get briefings on membership trends, department activities, campaigns and initiatives, and so much more," said President Wayne Spence. "I encourage anyone who is eligible and interested to run for election."



The vacancies, their corresponding constituencies and signature requirements, are listed below:

Seat 10: Department of Financial Services

Members representing Upstate and Downstate Banking (37000)

Seat 15: Civil Service

1 seat statewide (08000)

Seat 90: Higher Education Services Corporation

1 seat statewide (11100)

Seat 161: Ex Criminal Justice SV

State Police (01060), Criminal Justice Sv (01490)

Seat 165: Justice Center

Housing & Community Renewal (01080), Veterans Affairs (01190), Justice Center (01160), Off Cannabis Mgmt (01033)

Seat 200: Health Main Office

Helen Hayes (12030), Veterans Home Batavia (12180), Veterans Home NYC (12150), Veterans Home Oxford (12120), Veterans Home Montrose (12190)

Seat 220: WCB

All worker's compensation board PS&T members statewide (14010)

Seat 295: Office of Mental Health

Mohawk Valley PC (50210), Mohawk Valley C&Y (50540), Central NY PC (50390) in Regions 4&6, MH Main Office (50000) items in Regions 4&6 only, Hutchings PC (50190), Hutchings C&Y (50738), SEC Treatment and Rehab Center (50600) Region 6 items only

Seat 300: OPWDD Central NY DDSO

Central NY DDSO/RO (51240) titles in Regions 4&6 and OPWDD Main Office (51000) items Regions 4&6 only

Seat 350: OPWDD Taconic DDSO

Hudson Valley DDSO/RO (51210), Taconic DDSO/RO (51250) in regions 8 & 9, Region 9 items only: OPWDD Main Office (51000)

Seat 385: MH S. Beach Center

South Beach Children's Services (50500), South Beach PC (50790)

Seat 425: Public Service

1 seat statewide (16000)

Seat 490: DOT Main Office

DOT Main Office, Albany – Div. 177 (17000) and DOT Region 1, Albany – Div. 258 (17010)

Seat 530: DOT

DOT Regions 3 and 7, Syracuse and Watertown (17030,17070) Div. 256 and 247

Seat 545: Political Subdivisions of NYS

1 seat statewide (99002), Albany Housing Authority (99004), Albany County Probation (99008), Allegany County Employees

Petitions are due Oct. 23, 2024. For any contested election, ballots will be mailed Nov. 14, 2024, by the American Arbitration Association (AAA) and must be returned to the address listed on the return envelope no later than 5 p.m. on Dec. 6, 2024. Ballots will be counted on Dec. 9, 2024.

For more information, election rules, and petitions, visit www.pef.org/elections. For hardcopy petitions, contact the PEF Divisions Department at 800-342-4306, ext. 337 to have a supply mailed to you. Petitions will not be available for pickup at PEF Headquarters or any PEF Regional Office.

If you have any questions, email the PEF Special Elections Committee at SpecialElections@pef.org.



PEF engages members and members engage fairgoers at New York State Fair

By **NAJEE WALKER**

The New York State Fair is an annual chance to celebrate all the things that make New York a great place to live and work. Games, rides, food and all the work and innovation that make New York a leader across the U.S. are on display for 13 days, including the work of state employees and the unions that support them.

The PEF booth in the Center of Progress building let members and non-members know how the union supports New York's working professionals. Visitors signed thousands of petitions urging Governor Kathy Hochul to sign PEF priority bills into law before year's end, including bills that address abusive conduct and bullying in the workplace as well as legislation to expand Workers' Compensation benefits for work-related mental health injuries. Those were only two of seven petitions, which all members are encouraged to sign online at www.pef.org.

PEF member volunteers and staff spent time at the booth getting to know members from across the state, and rekindled relationships with retirees and former PEF members.

Across the fairgrounds, PEF members from almost all State agencies staffed booths — from the Department of Transportation, to the Office of Cannabis Management, and the Workers' Compensation Board, fairgoers were provided information about what state workers and PEF members do for them, and how they themselves could become part of a strong workforce backed by unions.

For Colleen Cox, a technical writer at the Workers' Compensation Board, and her colleague Allie Price, a public information specialist, PEF's benefits mean a lot to them, but they also love to have fun, and purchasing tickets through PEF's Membership Benefits Program means they can do just that at a discounted rate.

"I like being a PEF member because I like that PEF advocates for our benefits," Cox said. "But I also love all the fun benefits, like e-tickets, and ski tickets."



For Jasmine Alfonso, an advocacy specialist with the New York State Justice Center, the work she does to support families across the state is already close to her heart, but as a first-time union member, she is proud that PEF supports her.

"It is great to be part of a union, I've never had that before," said Alfonso. "The services they provide to me have been fantastic to learn about. And I am new! So, it has been great to learn."

The fair was also a chance for visitors to learn about new state agencies and initiatives.

PEF member Julien Vincent, a community liaison with Office of Cannabis Management, was glad to be at the fair to engage the public and discuss new opportunities around cannabis to help grow the industry in New York.

"I love that I get to meet and interact with the community and help people locally as well as throughout New York State," said Vincent. "A lot of people are looking for a job in the industry and I like to help them find the jobs and careers that they are looking for."

The Office of Addiction Services and Support (OASAS) also rolled out a new program to help with gambling addiction. At the agency's fair booth, PEF members asked the public to fill out a survey as part of the new Problem Gambling Bureau. OASAS will use the responses to launch an awareness campaign and other support services for gambling addiction.





New York's Surprise Bill Law provides protection for unexpected out-of-network billing

By **ERIKA FRASIER**

Receiving an unexpected or “surprise” bill from an out-of-network (OON) provider can put an immense amount of stress on a patient and cause extreme financial hardships. Patients are left thinking they are responsible for substantially higher bills from an OON provider rather than if the same service was rendered with an in-network (INN) provider.

Empire Plan enrollees who receive care from a health care provider in New York have protection. Under New York State's Surprise Bill Law, patients do not have to pay OON provider charges for surprise OON services that are higher than the patient's standard INN copayment, deductible, or coinsurance.

This law is intended to protect patients from inadvertently receiving large bills for OON services and/or providers' costs that were beyond the patient's control. Provisions of the law also expand the protections currently provided to members of HMOs participating in the New York State Health Insurance Program (NYSHIP).

The law requires that physicians, hospitals, and health plans must disclose specific information to patients and protect patients who must go OON for a specialist or procedure not available within their health plan's network.

What is a “Surprise Bill”?

A bill will be considered a “surprise bill” (according to the state Department of Financial Services (DFS)) under the following circumstances:

- If the patient was treated at any point by an OON provider without giving written consent to be treated OON
- If no INN physician was available at the time to provide care, or if an INN physician provided a referral to an OON provider without explaining that the provider was OON.
- If any emergency or unforeseen medical needs that arose over the course of a visit required the immediate attention of an OON provider.

For example, a patient could have a scheduled surgery with an INN surgeon, but be unaware that the anesthesiologist was OON or a patient having a severe cardiac event could be billed for OON care administered at the nearest hospital, even though the patient was taken to the hospital by ambulance.



Protection from “Surprise Bills”

Patients who receive a surprise bill for OON emergency services will not be required to pay more than their INN copayment/cost-sharing amount, regardless of their treating physician network status. Similarly, patients who receive a surprise bill for OON non-emergency services will not have to pay more than their usual INN copayment/cost-sharing amount.

Billing Resolution and Independent Dispute Resolution (IDR) Process

In the event a patient receives a surprise bill, the health plan administrator will make a payment to the provider. If the provider believes the amount is incorrect or too low, the plan and provider go through the IDR process to determine the final amount to be paid. The patient is not held responsible as long as the care/services received are in line with the surprise billing circumstances outlined within the law.

If you believe you have received a surprise bill, please complete the Surprise Bill Certification Form [here](#) and submit a copy to your health plan administrator along with a copy to your provider’s office. The health plan will review your inquiry to ensure that the bill in question meets the New York State definition of a surprise bill and will work with your provider regarding payment.

If the surprise bill is covered under the Surprise Bill Law, the health plan will work with the provider to resolve the bill, and a surprise bill adjustment amount will appear on your next monthly health statement or explanation of benefits (EOB) after it has been processed. If the surprise bill is not covered under the Surprise Bill Law, you will be notified of the denial and will be responsible for any costs not covered under your contract.

Network

If an Empire Plan enrollee does not have reasonable access to an INN physician, the enrollee can receive services from an OON physician at the INN level of benefits. This is called the Guaranteed Access Program (GAP). If you need assistance with finding a provider, please call United HealthCare (UHC) at 1-877-769-7447 to discuss the GAP before utilizing an OON provider or seeking OON services.

Additional Information

For more detailed information, call the DFS at 1-800-342-3736 or visit the [DFS website](#). You may also wish to learn about the [Federal No Surprises Act](#). And if necessary, you may file a complaint with [DFS](#).



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Keeping PEF members current on PEF news, emailed to your monthly. Make sure we have your personal email address.

PEF will never email at your work address.

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Meet your newly elected VP, Trustees, and RCs

By **KATE STICKLES**

Following the 2024 PEF Triennial Election, several top leadership roles have changed hands.

Bruce Giddings joins vice presidents Randi DiAntonio and Darlene Williams; Radhakrishna Mohan and Kelly Nadeau join trustee Muriel Hardy-Lee; and four new Regional Coordinators join the leadership ranks – Monica Moore (R4), Gabriela Franklyn (R9), Tamara Martin (R10) and Corinne Testa (R12).

Bruce Giddings, Vice President



Giddings was elected Vice President after serving three years as a PEF Trustee, where he conducted critical oversight of union policies, working in collaboration with his fellow trustees to ensure the union's policies were sound and in the best interest of members.

Originally hired by New York State in 1988 as a principle drafting tech, Giddings is now an assistant electrical engineer at the state Department of Environmental Conservation. His work has taken him from Port Jefferson,

Long Island, to Love Canal in Buffalo, to Plattsburgh and Cape Vincent in the north.

"I have enjoyed designing recreation projects and fish and wildlife projects in the Adirondacks and Catskill parks," Giddings said. "Serving the public by building them new and renovated facilities motivates me."

Giddings joined PEF in March 1988. He became a Steward for PEF Division 169 and then was elected Treasurer. He has held a seat on the PEF Executive Board for six years and served as Civil Service Committee co-chair; on labor/management and health and safety committees; and on the AFT Climate Task Force, AFT Greening Schools, and Workplaces Committee.

During the COVID pandemic, he provided members with information about telecommuting and ensured oversight of agency health and safety guidelines and protocols. As a vice president, he intends to work on projects and issues assigned by President Spence, always maintaining his core values of integrity, fairness and the ability to listen.

"It offers me new challenges, which inspires me to better serve the members I have represented and the new members I have yet to serve," he said. "I know that I can help strengthen the mission and forward direction of our union."

Being a union leader for more than two decades has been rewarding, Giddings said.

"I am proud of the continued years of service I offer to my colleagues and PEF siblings. I am proud to know that I have helped inform and direct members so they may proceed with their valuable work serving New Yorkers. But most of all, I am proud to be an example to my three sons," Giddings said. "I hope they follow in their father's footsteps and find joy in serving others."

Giddings lives in Albany, where he is active in his community and a Deacon in his church.

Radhakrishna Mohan, Trustee



Addressing issues in the workplace is one of Radhakrishna Mohan's top priorities as a PEF Trustee.

"I thought it is time to assume more responsibility to serve our members," said Mohan, who has been a PEF member for more than 26 years. "It gives me a great zeal of enthusiasm to serve members, to help them in any way to address their issues."

Mohan served as a steward, council leader, Executive Board member, co-chair of the Political Action Committee, current Chair of the Article 13 Workers' Compensation Committee and, most recently, Region 10 Coordinator.

He also served on PEF's Statewide IT Committee, a position he is uniquely suited for as an information technology specialist at the State Insurance Fund. He is also a founding member and president of PEF's Indo-American Committee.

At the State Insurance Fund, Mohan developed an agency telecommuting policy long before the COVID-19 pandemic; advocated for cancer screening time off for women equivalent to the four hours afforded to men; and continues work on making sure fellow IT PEF members are fairly compensated for extra time worked.

"When I see something is not right, I would like to address that and find the best solution for those situations," he said.

Kelly Nadeau, Trustee

Kelly Nadeau began her career with New York State in 2006 and became a PEF member in 2014. She worked her way up the Civil



Service ladder from an entry-level position at grade 6 to her current position as an Associate Accountant for the New York State Comptroller, grade 23.

Nadeau is responsible for preparing accurate and timely financial statements for the State of New York. She has proven experience in governmental accounting and auditing for fraud, waste, abuse, and misappropriation of state funds. Nadeau ensures compliance with established laws, policies, and standards.

While raising a family and working full time, Nadeau achieved her Bachelor of Science in Business, Management and Economics with a concentration in Human Resources along with additional credits in accounting and auditing.

It was not until 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, that she had a strong desire to participate in union leadership. Nadeau wanted to become more involved in the union by having her voice heard and taking a stand on issues that matter to all PEF members -- including a better work/life balance (telecommuting), better wages and benefits, safe workplaces, and equality for all members. She aspires to empower young members and ensure positive changes are made for future generations to come.

Nadeau holds many elected and appointed leadership positions in PEF: Steward and Treasurer for Division 263, Executive Board member, and Region 8 Treasurer. She remains active on several committees including Labor Management, Grievance, EAP, and is a credentialed member of the Political Action Committee.

"As Trustee, I will leverage my knowledge and experience in government oversight and will remain as the eyes, ears, and voice of all PEF members," Nadeau said. "I will impartially uphold my constitutional duty as Trustee to report on all matters related to the fair and equitable discharge of union power on members' behalf."

Monica Moore, Region 4 Coordinator



Moore has held multiple positions within PEF Division 304 (OPWDD Central New York DDSO), serving as council leader, treasurer and secretary. She has also served on the PEF Executive Board, and sits on several committees, including OPWDD Labor Management, local Labor Management, Health and Safety, Safe Patient Handling, Workplace Violence and is the co-chair of the EAP Committee.

Moore has attended every PEF Convention since 2010 as a delegate. She is also an active member of the Greater Syracuse Labor Council and the Region 4 Women's Committee. She works for OPWDD as a Social Worker Assistant 2, having started her career with the agency in 1987.

Moore fosters positive relationships with families, individuals, voluntary agencies, care managers and leadership. Her dedication to serving others has always been a priority and has been demonstrated throughout her career. Moore is a leader with proven performance, integrity, and dedication. She is excited to meet and engage with all members in Region 4 and focused on making sure

they have a strong and active voice in their union.

Gabriela Franklyn, Region 9 Coordinator



Gabriela Franklyn was elected Region 9 Coordinator in June 2024 and took office on August 1. She is looking forward to getting to know all the members in Region 9 she hasn't yet met and working together to empower her union siblings.

She is a parole officer with the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision based in New Rochelle. During her 30 years in State service, she has also worked as a case worker and a probation officer.

For PEF, Franklyn serves as the Assistant Council Leader of Division 236. Since it is a statewide division, she assisted in establishing productive Labor-Management and Health and Safety Committees throughout the State. She also serves on the Hudson Valley Labor Federation as a PEF delegate.

Her priorities for Region 9 include maintaining safe workplaces for all and increasing the wellness of PEF members. She is fully committed to empowering members through advocacy and reliable leadership. Any PEF member wishing to become more involved in Region 9 is encouraged to contact her.

Tamara Martin, Region 10 Coordinator



Tamara Martin took office as Region 10 Coordinator on Aug. 1, 2024.

She is a Legal Assistant II at the New York State Attorney General's Office in Manhattan and the Council Leader of PEF Division 187.

She is a fierce advocate and organizer and also serves as a steward helping her union siblings navigate all things PEF. She sits on the local Health & Safety Committee, is the Chair of the Statewide Labor/Management Committee, Co-

Chair for Region 10's Political Action Committee (PAC) and Assistant Chair of the Joint Affirmative Action Advisory Committee.

She negotiated the current statewide telecommuting agreement for the Law Department, which has been used as a template for telecommuting agreements at other state agencies.

She works with PEF's Political Director and other members of the region's PAC to engage elected officials on PEF's budget priorities and other issues that affect PEF members.

While attending the Union Leadership Institute at Cornell, she streamlined the complaint/review process for discrimination cases filed by PEF members and created the form that PEF members currently use to file discrimination complaints.

Martin has a Bachelor's degree in Organizational Management and a Master's in Public Administration.

Corinne Testa, Region 12 Coordinator



Corinne Testa is an assistant engineer with the Department of Transportation and a lifelong resident of Long Island. An alumna of Stony Brook University who lives in Nassau County, she is the Vice President of the American Society of Civil Engineers Younger Members Committee, as well as the recipient of the 2024 Young Government Engineer of the Year Award.

As Region 12 Coordinator, Testa aims to advocate for cost-of-living adjustments, increased communication, and more member engagement across Region 12. Enthusiastic about change with experience in leading and organizing, she is ready to use her voice to be a strong advocate for all public employees working on Long Island from western Nassau to eastern Suffolk.

In addition to the issues of Long Islanders at large, she is acutely aware of younger members' needs. A member of Tier 6, she hopes to push for continued improvements to the State pension plan, such as a decreased minimum retirement age, standardized flat percentage contributions, and halting employee contributions after a set number of years.

Editor's Note: Members wishing to contact any PEF regional office may visit this page for contact information.



Michele Rosello named new chair of PEF Statewide Women's Committee

An ever-proud social worker from Region 11, Rosello is the Council Leader at Creedmoor Psychiatric Center in Queens and served as the chairperson of the New York City Region 10 and 11 Women's Committee. She is no stranger to member engagement, hard work, and creative collaborations.

"I am excited about the opportunity to serve the membership and grateful to President Spence, Bernadette O'Connor and Scarlett Ahmed for the opportunity to lead others in this role," she said.

The mission of the Statewide Women's Committee is to make PEF more sensitive to the issues of working women and their families; to build ties of solidarity among PEF women and their allies; and to provide leadership training, assistance, and support among PEF women by educating, promoting, and participating in cultural, social, political, and educational activities.

Rosello and the existing committee members hit the ground running by coordinating with the PEF Training and Education Department to provide the Delegates of the 46th Annual PEF Convention training on Robert's Rules of Order, the parliamentary procedure PEF follows to conduct business at Convention. The first training was conducted on Aug. 7 via Zoom.

The training was capped at 45 participants and Rosello was happy to report that a total of 38 members attended the training that evening.

"I made a point of reaching out to all the delegates that responded to the training invite and confirming their attendance. I did notice there were some folks that just showed up, but I was glad that members were interested in learning and being prepared for plenary," she said.

Rosello was inspired to create the training after feeling like a fish-out-of-water at her first Convention, wanting to say something at a microphone, but uncertain which color card to hold up or how to phrase her question.

"My hope is that more folks will feel comfortable and confident to step up to the microphone and participate in the discussions and debates," she said.

If you are interested in becoming a member, contact Rosello at Michele.Rosello@pef.org and include the word "membership" in the subject line.





Fun for PEF Families and Friends at Six Flags

Hundreds of members and their families came out on a beautiful Saturday, Aug. 10, for the PEF Membership Benefits Program's Family and Friends Day at Six Flags Great Escape in Queensbury. MBP holds several such events each summer, letting members and their families enjoy amusement parks for an affordable price.

More than 400 PEF members were treated to food and fun under the sun for just \$30. Members like Anna Bogusky were grateful for the discount, lamenting that the price for parking alone at the theme park would have been a deterrent otherwise.

"Parking is already \$35," said Bogusky, a program operations specialist who works at OPWDD. "I'm so glad that I only paid basically for admission to the park and don't have to worry about anything else."

Members were also given a chance to win tons of prizes secured by PEF MBP including Albany Park, Ride and Fly tickets, gift cards, movie tickets, Baseball Hall of Fame memberships and yes — more Six Flags Great Escape and New England tickets.

This was the last Family and Friends Day of Summer 2024, but follow @PEFMBP on Facebook, X and Instagram to be the first to hear about next year's events!





PEF members and their families venture out to Six Flags Great Escape in Queensbury, NY on August 10 to enjoy a bright sunny day of fun, thrills, good food and great company!



Recommit Today!

New + Existing PEF Members

SIGN NOW!

Region 3 shows off its PEF Pride in Rochester

By NAJEE WALKER

Although Pride Month is considered across the world to be in June, Rochester was one of the first communities to celebrate their LGBTQ+ community in July. Members from PEF Region 3 marched in the city's parade on July 20 alongside community members, legislators, and other unions.

Region 3 has been attending the Pride Parade in Rochester since 2014, making this their 10th year. More than 20 PEF members and their families took to the streets with rainbow PEF shirts, hats and flower crowns to share in the celebration and show their support as a union family.

Members marched, shook hands, and took photos with State Senator Samra Brouk, State Senator Jeremy Cooney, State Assemblywoman Jen Lundsford, State Assemblywoman Sarah Clark, and State Assemblyman Harry Bronson, who all attended the event.

Region 3 Coordinator Leisa Abraham said she loves participating in the event and expects Region 3 will always have a place in the celebration.

"I find it to be one of the more joyful community events to participate in," Abraham said. "It's such a colorful event, a freeing event, and you are accepted no matter who you are! It's very family-oriented and everyone seems to have such a close bond."

Abraham likened the bond to being in a union, and said that sharing in each other's company made her feel a special sense of belonging.

"It was all love and smiles out there," said Abraham. "And that made me feel proud."



PRIDE



Running a marathon in memory of member who died of leukemia and to support member battling blood disorder

By **KATE STICKLES**

Elaine Morris, a PEF member at the State Education Department, is running the Walt Disney World's Goofy Challenge on Jan. 11 and 12, 2025, in memory of her running buddy, co-worker and friend, former PEF member Dave Clapp, who lost his battle with leukemia.

She is also running in honor of current DOCCS PEF member Carrie Williams, who is battling a rare blood disorder and awaiting a stem cell match to help her treatment. (You can visit [BeTheMatch.org](https://www.bethematch.org) and click "join" if you are interested in testing for stem cell donation).

"I am too old to donate stem cells, but I am willing to push myself to run a half marathon one day, followed by a full marathon on the next day," Morris said. "While my task is daunting, it is nothing in comparison with the daily struggle of those suffering with leukemia and other blood disorders."

Morris has challenged herself to raise \$5,000 for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society.

"Please consider donating to my effort," she said. "With everyone's support I can reach and perhaps exceed my goal."

You can access her donation link [here](#).



PEF member brings haunted past alive at State Capitol

By **KATE STICKLES**

In 1911, a fire at the New York State Capitol in Albany destroyed much of the irreplaceable collection of the New York State Library. It also took the life of 78-year-old Civil War veteran and night watchman Samuel Abbott.

Some say Mr. Abbott remains at the Capitol to this day, haunting the place where he tragically lost his life. His story is just one of the tales told during the wildly popular Capitol Hauntings Tours every October.

About 20 years ago, when the state Office of General Services (OGS) was brainstorming ideas for a Halloween-themed mystic fair on the Empire State Plaza, someone on the OGS special events team asked PEF member Stuart Lehman if he knew of any local haunted tours.

Lehman didn't, but because of his interest in history and the paranormal, he pitched an idea of his own.

"It was originally supposed to be a couple of small tours, maybe 30 people each," Lehman said. "When we announced it, more than 300 people signed up and it grew from there."

Today, the annual Capitol Hauntings Tours draw about 1,000 visitors a year and Lehman said the endeavor is a great way to share not just hauntings, but also history.

"I have always been interested in history," he said. "This is a great way of getting people interested in history. All the stories, legendary or just someone's subjective experience, they are all connected to real events in history."

"Samuel Abbott may or may not walk the halls, but there was a devastating fire in 1911 that had many ramifications for the study of history in New York and the history of fire laws," Lehman said. "I always say, 'I hope people come for the ghosts and leave with the history.'"

A long history of loving history

Lehman began his state service 38 years ago, working with the state Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation. Even then, his job had a history connection, working at historic sites like Schuyler Mansion, the Senate House, and the Herkimer Home. He joined PEF when he became an interpreter program assistant at Herkimer Home in 1998.

Nowadays, Lehman still does a lot of history work, helping design programs, assisting with exhibits, doing historic research, writing tour scripts, training tour guides and more.

"My main focus is the New York State Capitol and the history and architecture of that building," he said. "I have also worked on the Executive Mansion and its history, and Empire State Plaza."

The architecture of the Capitol includes the unique facets of the Million Dollar Staircase – or should we say, "Faces?" Lehman said you could spend all day looking at the 77 famous faces carved throughout the red Scottish sandstone staircase. On the Capitol Hauntings Tour, guides also point out the "secret demon" carving hidden within the stonework.

One of Lehman's favorite facts to share deals with the 1911 fire.

"I talk about the Native American ceremonial artifacts on the third floor and in the midst of the fire," he said. "For some reason, they did not burn up in the fire. This was recorded in letters by state anthropologist Arthur C. Parker, also a Native American. He was an unsung hero and an important pioneer in archaeology, anthropology, and museum work. This is a way to bring his story into the history of the Capitol."

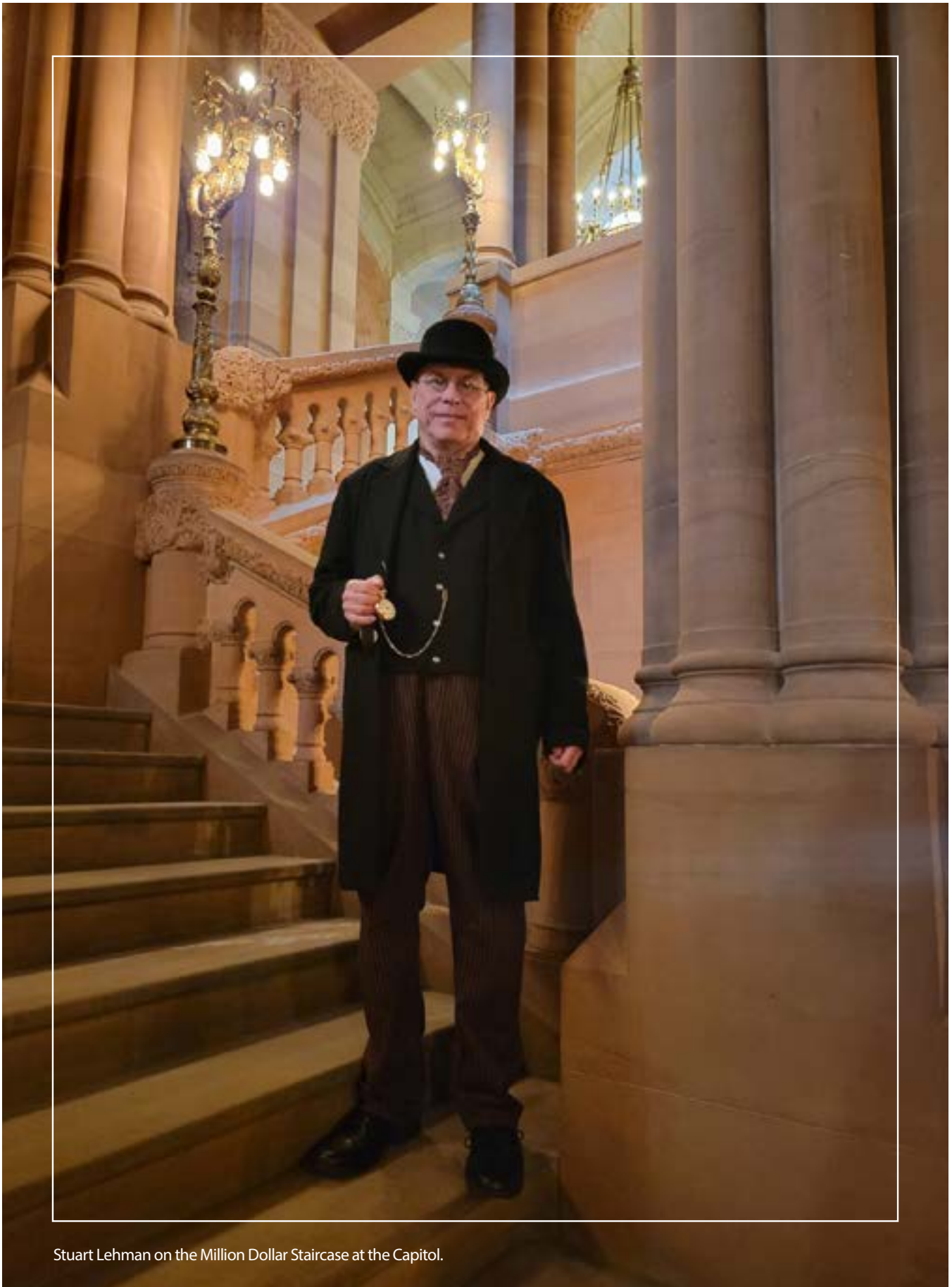
Lehman retired from the state on July 31. But he may still grace the halls as a tour guide.

"The Capitol does have a volunteer program and I'm going to be signing up," he said. "Maybe I'll come back and do some of the Capitol tours."

Take a tour

The New York State Capitol is open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday. [You can tour the Capitol free on weekdays](#) at 10 a.m., at noon, and at 2 p.m. Until August 30, Capitol Tours are also being held every [Friday at 5:30 p.m.](#) Tours might visit the legislative chambers, the Hall of Governors, the Governor's Reception Room, the Hall of New York, and more. Visit the Empire State Plaza Visitor Center for information and tours. Keep an eye out in late September/early October for information about Capitol Hauntings Tours.





Stuart Lehman on the Million Dollar Staircase at the Capitol.



PEF Region 1 awards four \$500 scholarships

PEF Region 1 has announced the winners of their annual scholarship program. Applicants are the child, grandchild, stepchild or legally adopted child of an active Region 1 PEF member. The scholarship applies to any student pursuing an Associate's, Bachelor's or Master's degree and is named for Judi Scanlon, a PEF member and nurse from the Buffalo area who was killed by a patient while conducting a home visit. This scholarship opportunity has been offered in honor of Scanlon for 21 years.

Many students applied for the scholarship, but only four were winners.

As part of their applications, students were asked to write an essay to describe the importance of labor unions and how they impact workplace health and safety programs.

Alexandra Padilla is the daughter of Peter Padilla, who is a member of Division 337 and works at the Office of Children and Family Services.

"Labor unions can be literally defined as a group of organized workers formed to protect and further their rights, but it is so much more than that," Padilla wrote in her essay. "The union itself has positively set its mark by impacting workplaces health and safety programs through protocol and awareness."

Cole Benson is the son of Kathryn Benson, who is a member of Division 168 and works for Homes and Community Renewal.

"From unfair wages to safety concerns, unions provide an effective way to report any grievances one may have while working," Benson wrote. "And they are always looking to improve on the status of the workplace."



Sienna Uebelhoer is the daughter of Paul Uebelhoer, who is a member of Division 219 and works for the Department of Transportation.

"From food production, construction, manufacturing, and service industries, including health care, workers are far safer than they would be without the oversight and Labor Unions fighting for their rights,"

Uebelhoer said in her essay.



Jerzy Nowak is the son of Annmarie Nowak, who is a member of Division 196 and works for Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Care Center.

"Growing up as a son to a union member mother, I had the advantage of having instilled in me an appreciation for hard work, solidarity and standing up for your beliefs," said Nowak in his essay. "These values have been a major force in shaping my character."

Region 1 Coordinator Michele Iorfida congratulated the winners and wished them success in their college careers.



Division 357 announces scholarship winners, new round application

Since 2023, PEF Division 357 (Statewide Office of Information Technology Services) has awarded 29 scholarships to help offset the incidental costs associated with college, such as rent, books, classroom and lab supplies, and more. In the fall of this year, the Division will match that with up to 30 additional scholarships awarded to undergraduate and graduate students, as well as high school seniors with acceptance for the fall semester.

Spring 2023 Winners (\$600/each):

1. Tasfia Shider (Moazzem Shikder), Jamaica, NY.
2. Fatima Jawneh (Alrqi Jawneh), Newark, NJ.
3. Evan Desso (Jim Desso), Niskayuna, NY.
4. Geovanna Gordon (Barbara Gordon), Bronx, NY.
5. Shrivarsha Jayaprakash (Rdahika Vardarajalu), Schenectady, NY.
6. Dani Vhashyam (Himibindu Bhashyam), Cohoes, NY.
7. Dolly Vhashyam (Himibindu Bhashyam), Cohoes, NY.
8. Aidan Defour (Lawrence Defour), Deer Park, NY.
9. Joseph Matala (Henry Matala), Schenectady, NY.
10. Kyle Moak (Lia Moak), East Nassau, NY.

Fall 2023 Winners (\$300/each):

1. Natalie Connell (Erica Connell), Cohoes, NY.
2. Shlok Sharma (Pratishtha Sharma), Watervliet, NY.
3. Samuel Anderson I (Kevin Anderson), Castleton-on-Hudson, NY.
4. Kellie LaPointe (Tony LaPointe), Rensselaer, NY.
5. Katrina Beach (Jenifer Beach), Sloansville, NY.
6. Roshan Mehta (Alok Mehta), Loudonville, NY.
7. Anushka Patel (Monal Patel), Selkirk, NY.
8. Dominic Velikov (Vita Velikov), Cohoes, NY.
9. Eric Ofori (Irene Amponsah), Glenmont, NY.
10. Ashritha Annam (Venu Annam), Watervliet, NY.
11. Saurav Bavdekar (Yatin Bavdekar), Latham, NY.
12. Margaret Partlow (Lisa Partlow), Mechanicville, NY.
13. Virginia Partlow (Lisa Partlow), Mechanicville, NY.
14. William Rubin (Joel Rubin), Fort Edward, NY.

Spring 2024 Winners (\$300/each):

1. Cassandra Waldenmaier (Michelle Waldenmaier), Delanson, NY.
2. Anna Pustay (Joseph Pustay), Menands, NY.
3. Gabrielle Duplan (Ronald Popo), Glenville, NY.
4. Caitlin Hughes (Kevin Hughes), Ballston Spa, NY.
5. Gregory Morrison (Jason Morrison), Mechanicville, NY.

Questions regarding the PEF Division 357 Scholarship Programs can be directed to Scholarship Committee Chair Tony LaPointe at Scholarships@pefd357its.org.

Congratulations to all the winners!





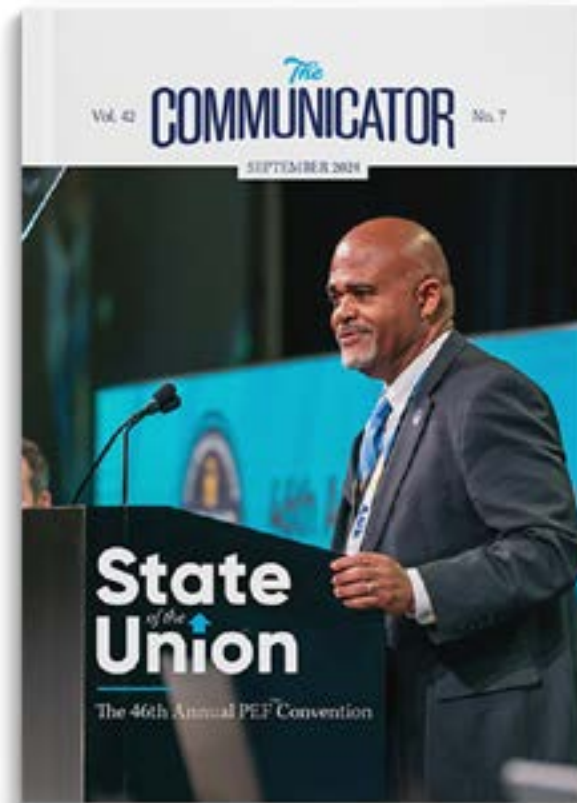
Division 234 announces scholarship winners

This year, PEF Division 234, which represents members who work at social service agencies in the Capital District, awarded seven scholarships to students pursuing higher education.

- Jacquelyn Smith (Alicia Sullivan, OTDA)
- John Glasheen-Haase (David Haase, OCFS)
- Marshall Hildreth (Kimberly Hildreth, OTDA)
- Tahera Inman (Soraya Inman, OTDA)
- Elysia Bechand (Jeannine Franze Bechand, OCFS)
- Jacob Camoin (Linda Camoin, OTDA)
- Kini-Analysa McCalmon (Thearse McCalmon, OTDA)

"Congratulations to the winners of the 2024 PEF Division 234 Scholarship Awards!" said Division 234 Treasurer and Steward Jennifer Nye. "We wish all of the winners a successful academic year and hope the award is helpful toward reaching their goals."





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Retirees in Action

By **JIM CARR**

When I was a younger man working for the Department of Corrections, I learned the importance of a union. Without unions workers have very few protections from abusive employers. I learned the value of uniting in a workplace. I believe our younger generations take many of our hard-fought gains for granted!

The history of the American labor movement needs to be taught in every school in this land.

"America is a living testimonial to what free men and women organized into free democratic trade unions can do to make a better life, we ought to be proud of it." - Vice President Hubert Humphrey

According to a poll by the independent Hart Research, 54% of adults said they know just a little or don't know much about unions. They said their chief sources of knowledge were personal experience (37%), people in unions (26%) and the media (25%). Significantly, learning about unions in school was not even mentioned.

The implications of these numbers are clear. To a very large degree, Americans are uninformed or misinformed about the labor movement and the role that workers have played, and do play, in our nation's economic, political and cultural life.

Academic standards and curriculum resources, such as textbooks, have historically ignored or been deficient in their treatment of workers and the labor movement. Significantly, there are several teachers who want to cover this history in their classrooms, but there has been no place for them to easily find materials. Until now!

The mission of the American Labor Study Center is to inform teachers about the rich and varied curriculum resources available to integrate into lessons, primarily through its website, www.labor-studies.org, but also through workshops, seminars, presentations, exhibits and personal contact.

I recently learned of the American Labor Studies Center at the annual New York state Alliance for Retired Americans conference. It has been my experience that the next generation of American workers have little or no knowledge of our labor history -- our struggles to win hard-fought gains which benefit every American worker in today's workforce, as well as our retirees who enjoy the hard-earned benefits of our labor.

Unions built the middle class, and the middle class drives the economy! Retirees know this because when we organize and work together, we enable our local chapters to show their strengths, and we know how to maintain economic security, health, and middle-class security. Protecting the things for which our union fought requires all of us pulling together. Retirees understand this because it's how we helped build the union. We need to rise up and organize in support of our friends (Union Endorsed Candidates) in the November elections.



We may love or hate politics, but however you feel they are an integral part of our lives. It is necessary to do what we can to keep and improve our situation as retirees. We ask that you stay engaged and informed, whatever your affiliation may be. This will be a pivotal year with each of us having the obligation to vote in November. Ask yourself which side are you on, the side of corporations and a billionaire class or of unions and a middle class?

Labor Day is coming soon. Before it was a federal holiday, Labor Day was organized by labor activists and individual states. After municipal ordinances were passed in 1885 and 1886, a movement developed to secure state legislation. New York was the first state to introduce a bill, but Oregon was the first to pass a law, recognizing Labor Day on Feb. 21, 1887. In 1887, four more states - Colorado, Massachusetts, New Jersey and New York - passed laws creating a Labor Day holiday. By the end of the decade, Connecticut, Nebraska and Pennsylvania followed suit. By 1894, 23 more states adopted the holiday, and on June 28, 1908, Congress passed an act making the first Monday of September of each year a legal holiday.

Please have a great Labor Day and remember, when we vote our labor values, we help secure a more prosperous future!

Solidarity Forever

Jim Carr





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.

Barbara Bertucio is a curatorial visitor services specialist 1 at the Office of General Services in Albany.

Cassandra Bradford is a registered nurse 2 at SUNY Upstate Medical Center in Syracuse.

Kevin Bromley is a registered nurse 1 with the Office of People with Developmental Disabilities in Norwood.

Rhonda Carroll-Eldridge is a dairy products specialist 1 at the Department of Agriculture and Markets in Steuben County.

Brian Cellery is an information technology specialist 3 at the Office of Information Technology Services in Albany.

Lori DeVito is an administrative specialist 1 at the Office of General 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.

Heather Farthing is a registered nurse 2 at Capital District Psychiatric Center in Albany.

Sally Fontana is social work supervisor 1, LCSW at Mohawk Valley Psychiatric Center in Utica.

Wayne Green is a maintenance supervisor 3 at St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center in Ogdensburg.

Cherie Griffin is a taxpayer services specialist 2 at the state Department of Taxation and Finance in Albany.

Rishona Haynes is a registered nurse 1 at SUNY Stony Brook on Long Island.

Ann Krenn is an Offender Rehabilitation Coordinator at Groveland Correctional Facility in Sonyea.

Roxeen Mundy is an information technology specialist 2 at the state Office of Information Technology Services in Albany.

Rose Niang is an investigative specialist 1 at the Department of Education in Manhattan.

Danielle Porter is registered nurse 1 at SUNY Upstate in Syracuse.

Darlene (Gemma) Rose is an employment counselor for the state Labor Department in Amsterdam.,

Vexilla Quinlan is a registered nurse 1 at Bronx Psychiatric Center in the Bronx.

Christine Ward is a senior Worker's Compensation Examiner at the Worker's Compensation Board in Menands.

Jennifer Wells is a registered nurse 2 at SUNY Upstate in Syracuse.

Roslyn Williams is an economic development program specialist 2 at the Department of Agriculture and Markets in Albany.

Jennifer Zullo is a research scientist 2 at the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities 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 174 and 175 of the [2023-26 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 communicator@pef.org, or call 518-785-1900.



Letters to the Editor

Sending letters to the editor is a powerful way for members to get answers to their questions, express their opinions, and contribute to public discourse. They can raise awareness, spark dialogue, and influence public opinion on various issues.

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September 2, 2024

Happy Labor Day from PEF Region 3, where more than a hundred members marched through the streets of Rochester, Union Strong!



August 27, 2024

PEF Vice President Bruce Giddings addressed the New York State AFL-CIO Constitutional Convention about a climate resolution the union considered.



August 26, 2024

Schoolkids in PEF Region 2 enjoyed a book giveaway in Addison, N.Y., courtesy of PEF and AFT's "Reading Opens the World" program.



September 20, 2024

PEF grows stronger every day! Welcome to our two newest members at Sagamore Children's Psychiatric Center, who signed their union cards at a nurse organizing event!





September 21, 2024

Region 7 members took a defensive driving course, earning them a discount on their car insurance! Learn more: <https://pefmbp.com/education-training/defensive-driving/>



September 7, 2024

A fun Friday night for 44 PEF Region 5 members, who enjoyed a pre-game picnic, a Binghamton Rumble Ponies baseball game and fireworks!

