

**INSIDE
THIS ISSUE:**

**My First Lobby-
ing Trip** 2-3

Unionpeople: 4-5
Michele Viscosi

UCE Leadership 5
Retreat

Oldnews: 6
**Protocols of
Peace**

**Financial State-
ments** 7-8

UNIONNEWS is an award winning publication of the United College Employees of FIT, AFT Local 3457, affiliated with the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), NEA. Juliette J. Romano, President
Louis Stollar, President Emeritus

Co-Editors

James Cascaito
Daniel Levinson Wilk

UCE Officers

Juliette J. Romano, President
Roberta Elins, Executive VP
Paul Clement, Treasurer
Connie Passarella, Secretary
Linda Tain, VP for Grievances
Eric Ramirez, VP for Faculty
Maria Zervos, VP for Staff
Albert Romano, Assistant Treasurer
James Cascaito, Membership Director

UCE Members Unite to Fight Albany's Proposed Budget Cuts to FIT

Every year, the UCE of FIT sends a contingent to Albany to lobby for funding, to ensure that the college can provide the world-class education for which we are known. This year, the stakes were higher as FIT was singled out for cutbacks that would result in reductions to the college's operating budget that could result in diminished program offerings and potential layoffs.

Late in February, UCE President Juliette Romano received a phone call at home from President Joyce Brown alerting her about a proposal in Governor Paterson's budget that would eliminate the county chargebacks for community college students in upper division programs. As FIT is the only SUNY community college that offers the baccalaureate degree, this was in essence an FIT cut.

County chargebacks occur when a SUNY community college educates students from outside its home (in our case, NYC) county. FIT receives almost \$9 million dollars in county chargebacks for its baccalaureate students, mostly from Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester counties. This cut, coupled with the proposed cuts to all community colleges in FTE base aid, would have FIT looking at almost a \$13 million dollar cut in our funding. FIT would have to raise its tuition for out of New York City baccalaureate students to the point where FIT would no longer be an affordable option for most students.

President Brown called on the UCE for assistance in fighting these cuts, and our officers and members mobilized immediately. Juliette and I met with College Relations to

develop strategies and tactics for a united effort. For the first time, the Administration shared statistics and materials with the Union to aid in our lobbying efforts.

We immediately went into action, with the invaluable assistance of NYSUT, our state federation. Juliette was in constant contact with Chris Black, our NYSUT lobbyist in Albany, and NYSUT put its 600,000 members into action, calling attention to the unfair cuts targeted at FIT. NYSUT Executive Director Andrew Pallotta addressed the Senate and Assembly and specifically mentioned the egregious cuts to FIT.

On the homefront, Juliette and I visited the district offices of Senator Thomas Duane and Assemblymember Richard Gottfried. Senator Duane, along with Senator Toby Ann Stavisky, wrote a letter urging their colleagues to sign on against the cuts to FIT. In the Assembly, Richard Gottfried drafted a similar letter and circulated it for signatures by the Assembly Members.

March 2nd was Higher Education Lobbying Day in Albany and the UCE Team, made up of Juliette Romano, Roberta Elins, Connie Passarella, Jeannette Monaco, Gina Mackey and Judy Wood rode the train to Albany to personally carry the message. Our team reflected the strength of our wall-to-wall unit, made up of classroom faculty, non-classroom faculty, adjunct faculty, staff and a retiree.

When we arrived in Albany on March 1st for the NYSUT briefing, we were warmed

by the support of our brothers and sisters from Buffalo to Montauk. Every local that was lobbying carried the FIT message in their lobbying packet. We had the strength and numbers of both the UUP and PSC/CUNY. Most significantly, the lobbyists from Westchester, Nassau and Suffolk counties, those most affected by the county chargebacks, carried the message that the cut to FIT would disproportionately harm the college, while not making any type of significant contributions to their own institutions' operating budgets.

The UCE Team visited 10 legislative offices on Lobbying Day, and left Albany feeling cautiously optimistic that we had the support needed to defeat the county chargeback issue. Politics being what it is, however, we knew that we had to keep the pressure on.

Phase two of the efforts began when NYSUT put a letter, denouncing the FIT county chargebacks, up on its website. Through our own UCE website and e-mail list, members were asked to fax their legislators, from their home computers, urging them to vote "no" on this issue. We urged our members to send this fax daily, the daily mantra being, "send your fax, brush your teeth, go to sleep." To date,

over 3,500 have been sent. If you haven't sent your fax yet, do it today. If you're not on the UCE mailing list, today is the day to go to www.uce-fit.org and sign up with your personal e-mail, so you can be part of the effort.

March 16th was the Committee of 100 Lobbying Day, and VP of Faculty Eric Ramirez, along with Lasse Savola and Daniel Levinson Wilk, were back up in Albany taking the message to an additional group of legislators.

Phase Three of our efforts began with an intensive letter-writing campaign. The office of College Relations provided us with the names of eight legislators in Westchester, Nassau and Suffolk County who had yet to sign on to the letters protesting the cuts to FIT. In a very short period of time, thanks to our members' efforts, we were able to mail 4000 letters to these legislators. We thank everyone who signed a letter, or came up to the Union office to help stuff, seal and stamp these letters.

As of the writing of this article, Albany has yet to pass the budget that will determine FIT's funding for next year. On a positive note, our lobbying efforts, in

conjunction with all of our NYSUT brothers and sisters, has resulted in a reduction of the cuts to FIT's base aid per student.

The final budget, including the county chargeback cuts to FIT, is expected to be voted on sometime in May.

We will continue our efforts to make sure that FIT does not lose its county chargeback funding. As with all of our political efforts, the money cannot be spent out of Union dues, but by law must come from our VOTE/COPE contributions. This has been an expensive campaign, and our VOTE/COPE funds need to be replenished. If you are giving to VOTE/COPE now, consider giving \$1 more per paycheck. If you are not giving to VOTE/COPE, now is the time to start. Just \$1 per paycheck can make a difference. VOTE/COPE forms are available in the Union office. These are dire economic times and funding issues are not going to disappear. Giving to VOTE/COPE is a direct investment in your own life at the college.

In Solidarity,

Roberta Elins
Executive VP

My First Lobbying Trip

On Monday March 15th, Eric Ramirez, Dan Levinson Wilk, and I boarded a train to Albany with a plan of going to talk to state legislators about budget cuts to FIT. The train was running a bit behind schedule, but we didn't let that dampen our good spirits. Once on the train, those of us who stayed awake reviewed the information that Lisa Wager, FIT's Director of Government and Community Relations, had shared with us a few days prior. Our mission was simple: persuade the powers-that-be to vote against a bill that would retract the upper-level chargebacks to FIT. To not receive these chargebacks would greatly hurt our institution. We felt that if only we could have a heart-to-heart with some of the lawmakers who were still on the fence about the bill, we just might be able to make a difference for the future of FIT.

We were cautiously optimistic, or perhaps that was just me, the naïve rookie.

Tuesday March 16th was the NYSUT (New York State United Teachers) Committee of 100 lobbying day in Albany. The other lobbyists—and there were many—were mainly there to try to halt Governor Paterson's misguided budget proposal. This proposal, as most of you know, is a disaster-in-the-making for New York State. For instance, if Paterson has his way, public education will lose hundreds of millions of dollars on top of recent budget cuts. On that Monday night, all of the lobbyists were briefed about a better option: the "Better Choice Budget Campaign," which would provide a more balanced approach in spending

in a more equitable way. After the briefing we were treated to a cocktail hour, which definitely went on a lot longer than an hour! This was just fine with us because there were many issues—budgetary and other—to discuss. Good times.

Cutting education budgets when times are tough is a short-sighted solution. Instead, it is a better idea to invest in education during a recession as it can catapult a state into much better times once the recession is over. Finland, my native country, did just that in the 1990s. Now that country enjoys not only one of the best school systems in the world, but also a high-skill labor force sustaining its competitive economy. All of the NYSUT lobbyists

I met on this trip understood the long-term effects of a quality education.

On Tuesday morning, there were buses running from the hotel to the state capitol complex. On our walk over to the Legislative Office Building, Eric, Dan, and I had the time to enjoy some pretty nice art placed in the Concourse. At this point I really didn't know what to expect from the meetings, and I certainly didn't want to be the one leading the conversation. We were armed with "The Pitch," a plethora of facts about FIT and the upper-level chargebacks, as well as several pieces of literature, including copies of letters by State Assembly Member Dick Gottfried and State Senators Thomas Duane and Toby Ann Stavisky. These letters urge legislators to reject the bill that would hurt FIT so much.

We had five appointments throughout the late morning and early afternoon. The meetings varied widely. Our first meeting was with a legislative aide, who did not seem at all interested in our issue. Talking to her was like talking to a wall. This was naturally disheartening to a novice lobbyist, and I could not help but think that it was going to be like that all day. Nevertheless, we left the literature with the aide and asked her to relay our message to her boss.

The second meeting was much better. We had a long conversation about FIT and its importance to the state. We made our argument about why the state legislators should help us out, especially when it does not cost the state any money to do so; voting against this bill would be budget-neutral to New York State as the only money changing hands is between FIT and certain counties. Lo and behold, by the end of the meeting we had garnered a vote! This was really exciting because we knew that a few more no-votes might mean that FIT could avoid a devastating budget cut. I had the same feeling of exhilaration after a later meeting in which we talked to a young legislative

aide from Brooklyn. It was easy to stress the importance of state-funded higher education in general, and of FIT in particular, when on the other side of the table was someone currently attending a SUNY college. This aide essentially promised us another new no-vote.

We stopped by Assembly Member Deborah Glick's office although we knew that we already had her support. She clearly is an advocate of higher education and social justice. She is very funny, too, and I really enjoyed meeting her. She gave us valuable advice on how to proceed with our lobbying efforts. We also stopped by several other offices of our supporters just to say "Thanks!" It is good to know that we have many friends in high places. By the end of the day we had visited the offices of nine state legislators. When this bill comes to a vote sometime later in the spring, we hope to have enough of these important friends on our side.

If my train ride up to Albany was filled with anticipation, the ride back held a sense of relief and accomplishment. It felt great to have informed several legislators of our unique situation, and I learned a lot in the process. I also felt good about the fact that the UCE of FIT had trusted me with this lobbying task. And to top it all off, I could not have asked for better mentors, or better company, than Eric and Dan.

In solidarity,

Lasse Savola
Department of Science & Math

NOTES

You may have read about the bill that was passed which allowed the Governor to furlough state workers. I want to assure all of you that the employees of FIT are not affected by this legislation. We will not be subject to a furlough. However, our brothers and sisters at the SUNY four-year institutions are affected by this bill. The Governor has in effect "laid off" workers one day a week and this action may in fact violate collective bargaining agreements. Our sister unions are going to court to fight this action.

These are very difficult times for public employees in our state and around the country. Now more than ever we need to support each other and stand together to preserve our rights. Remember "an injury to one is an injury to all." I am certain NYSUT will be coordinating activities to protest this action. I will keep you informed as we become aware of them.

The Governor has also proposed an early retirement incentive for employees in the State Retirement System and in TIAA-CREF. This is only a proposal. We do not know if there is any support for this in the legislature. We will update you as information becomes available. You can also find information at nysut.org.

In Solidarity
Juliette J. Romano
President

Unionpeople: Michele Viscosi

[Editors' Note: This narrative is a transcription of an interview with Michele Viscosi. The Unionpeople column highlights the careers of union members in their own words.]

Born in New York, in Queens. My father's family is from Brooklyn where I lived for the first few years before moving to Queens, and some of them are still there. As far as art, I started painting in high school, drawing and painting in high school. Martin Van Buren in Queens. It was a pretty good school back then. It's not so great anymore. I remember taking some classes with a friend at the Museum of Modern Art. My mother found some art class there and we used to go on Saturdays, and then go hang out in Central Park. It was the sixties, you know, so we were having a good time. Lots of fun going on in the park, yeah.

I started working right after high school and I was going to Queens College at night, but I never really pursued art as a career or anything like that. It was just sort of a hobby. I worked a few other places before coming to FIT, which was I think 1975 or 6, around there. I was working for the Dean of Liberal Arts and several different departments within the Liberal Arts area, and was very involved with the union at that time. I was on many committees: Executive, Grievance, Negotiating. I think probably all of the committees there were, I served on at one point or another.

Lou Stollar was then the president and also a faculty member here in Social Sciences, so he was one of the first people I met when I came here. I come from a very strong union background on my father's side of the family. My grandfather was a union organizer, as was my uncle back in the twenties. My uncle was a longshoreman in Brooklyn. My dad was a musician, and he was in the musician's union. So we grew up with a lot of exposure to that. First day I was here I introduced myself to Lou and said I want to join the union, and he said wow, the first day you're here!

I remember the negotiating committee. Whenever the contracts came up, we would discuss what issues we wanted to bring up during negotiations, get feedback from the other employees in the school. The grievance committee, I remember be-

ing on that committee for a while. People had grievances against another faculty member or the administration, or whatever. They would bring it to the committee for discussion and resolution. Executive committee. And a lot of grunge work. I remember Lou sending me some thank you note for stuffing two thousand envelopes in my spare time.

We were busy. Okay, this is something that the student aides really find hysterical. We had typewriters, because there was no such thing as computers, so everything we did was done on a typewriter. If you needed three or four copies you'd use those horrible carbon sheets in between all the pages. If you made a mistake, you had to go through all of them to correct the mistake. We didn't have copy machines either, so we had rexograph machines, with this purple ink that we'd get all over ourselves. Even the telephones were probably archaic compared to what we have today. I remember when we first got a phone where you could actually put someone on hold. We had all these instructions about how to do it. And now my student aides, I'll say can you come do something on the typewriter, and they don't even know what a typewriter is. Some of them, I have to explain to them what it is, how to turn it on, how to get the envelope in there, you know. But that's really what we were working with back then.

It was a lot of fun, though. It was a lot of work, and usually there was one secretary for an entire department, so you could have fifty or sixty faculty members, with the adjuncts and full time, and everybody wanted your attention, you know. I remember doing all the proctoring for the exams; we had a week when we'd do the exams, we don't do that anymore. As it is today, there were always a lot of activities going on, concerts and shows and exhibits and stuff like that, so being a young person in my twenties, it was a really fun place to work, because it wasn't just an office where you just went and sat and did your work and went home. There was always something going on, so it was fun.

I was taking classes here then also, at night. I was doing oils back then, oils and watercolors. I was kind of interested in fashion design when I was in high school, and I still have some drawings I did back then that I saved, so I guess I was doing a little bit of that too. Landscapes, flowers, a lot of flowers. I love

to paint flowers. I was dabbling in a lot of things.

And then I got married and had my first child, so I left with a heavy heart. I really didn't want to leave, but it was nice having a few years at home raising my children. When I wanted to come back it was a time when the city was going through another financial crisis, so they weren't really hiring people. I had to let my dream go of coming back here and working again. I worked a lot of other places over the years.

I always felt like this was where I wanted to be. The places I worked were closer to home, they weren't in the city, my kids were little, which worked well for me. They weren't great jobs, they weren't wonderfully satisfying or anything, but they paid the bills and I was close to home when my kids needed me. And I got to learn about a lot of different fields as well. I worked for lawyers, I worked in a hospital for a while, I ran the gamut of different places to work, and it was good because I got a lot of good experience working with a lot of crazy people.

I sort of got away from art as well, while my kids were growing up. Probably about ten years ago I started painting again. I took a class just to get back into it again, and started drawing and sculpting a little bit, and painting, and then started my quest to get back to FIT. Called HR, told them who I was, that I'd worked here before, and it probably took more than a year of back and forth before a job opened up that seemed like a good opportunity. That was ten years ago. Since the ten years I've been back here I've been taking classes here as well, in the Fine Arts department. I'm gonna be one of those ladies that are eighty years old, going up to the podium to get their degree.

My father, by the way, was an artist. We used to paint together, and we took a class together in Florida where my parents retired. That was fun. I have quite a few of his paintings in my house now. He was also a musician, and I think a lot of the time people are both.

I was never artistic with music, but he did both.

When I got here the second time around I was working for the vice president who was here at the time, Dario Cortes, and Dr. Brown had just arrived about a year before that. It was exciting and it was a little overwhelming at the beginning, coming from working in a faculty office and then going up there.

One of the faculty members once referred to it as the “nerve center” of the college, and we thought that was kind of funny, but it’s so true. Things do slow down a little bit in the summer, like they do in the faculty offices, but for the most part it just keeps coming, the work keeps flowing in, it doesn’t really stop. There’s a lot of people reporting to my vice president, so it’s a lot of meetings, it’s a lot of scheduling, and coordinating, and getting people together. I think that’s probably, at this point, the biggest part of my job. It’s changed over the years.

As soon as I got back and got situated and secure in my job, and had a little spare time, then I started taking classes again in the Fine Arts department. Sue Willis was great, I took

a few of her sculpture classes, Anthony Martino, and Stephanie DeManuelle, who’s the chair now, she’s been really helpful with me, working with me, trying to figure out a program that might be able to get me where I need to go. They’ve all been great.

Over the last two or three years I did some group shows, all of them have been group shows up until this point, mostly on Long Island, in the Hamptons or the North Fork of Long Island where there’s a lot of wineries. A lot of this is through people who I knew. I know a family that owns a winery, and I said, have you ever thought about having an art show? And they said no, let’s try it, why not. That was fun, because art and wine go together. They happened to have this big room added on to the winery where they displayed all the artwork. I did a few shows out there, I did one here at St. Francis of Assisi. They had an art gallery there, that was the first local show I did, and now I’m going to be doing one at the 220 Gallery on Sixteenth Street. Some of our faculty have had shows there.

Karen Gentile has had shows there, and she’s the one who told me to speak to the gallery owner, and that’s how this show got started. So that’s what I’m more busy working on right now. They’re all watercolors, all landscapes. It’s gonna be fun.

In Solidarity,

Michele Viscosi

Michele Viscosi's 220 Gallery opening was May 6th, 6-8 pm, at 220 W. 16th Street. The show will run to May 20th.



UCE LEADERSHIP RETREAT

The UCE held a Leadership Retreat on April 16-17, 2010 to involve more actively some of the members in our Union and encourage future leadership in the Local.

Here are some participants’ observations:

“The Union Retreat was a great opportunity to learn more about how the Union operates and how they represent employees’ needs and concerns. We also discussed how the contract came into existence after the creation of the Taylor law, and what rights and protections the contract grants. But more than that, we enjoyed getting to know some new people, or to know old people better! More than anything, I think we came away with a deeper understanding of how important it is to be involved with the Union and to contribute a portion of our salary to things like VOTE-COPE.”



“Thank you for giving me the opportunity to participate in the 2010 UCE Leadership Retreat. It was an enlightening experience to engage freely in discussions that focused on contractual issues that affect both faculty and staff. I gained a better understanding



of the contract and the process by which the contract is revised. Participants provided a wide range of perspectives that lead to a clearer understanding of the benefits of the Union’s presence at FIT. Also, the overall importance of our roles and the impact we can have on future contract negotiations was better understood. There is a clear need to actively participate in a process that affects us all.”

Esther Oliveras
Faculty Services



J. Nathan Bullock, MA
Continuing Education

Oldnews: Protocols of Peace

Last March 25th was the 99th anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire. Many of you already know the story: the crowded factory high over Washington Square Park; the scraps of fabric that somehow caught fire; the locked exit doors and collapsing fire escape; the hopeless leaps from ninth-floor windows; the 146 workers killed, most of them young women; and the commission on factory safety that followed the disaster, inspected manufacturing conditions across New York State and forced some improvements. But you may not know that the fire was just the coda to a tumultuous two-year period that changed the garment industry, and America, forever—a crucial turning point when the labor movement learned to ask the government for help.

Through the beginning of the twentieth century, workers and unions often looked on the government with suspicion and scorn. Too many times, judges struck down laws protecting workers—the ten-hour day, the minimum wage—and issued injunctions against strikes, unleashing police clubs and guns on peaceful picketers. Too many times, mayors and governors and presidents sided with bosses. It was the American Federation of Labor’s position that government officials ought to stay out of labor conflicts, and more radical groups like anarchists, socialists, communists, and the Industrial Workers of the World expressed even greater hostility toward the government.

Between 1909 and 1911, the New York locals of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union showed another way. First came the Uprising of 20,000 (which may have involved 30,000 strikers at its height, most of them women). Inspired in part by grievances against the Triangle Shirtwaist Company and sparked by Clara Lemlich’s passionate speech on November 22, 1909 (see a previous *Oldnews* column on Lemlich), it was moderately successful. Many smaller companies signed labor contracts with the ILGWU, but larger manufacturers like Triangle rode out the strike and refused to acknowledge the union.

A few months later came the Great Revolt of 1910, when a strike of fifty or sixty thousand New York cloak-makers, most of them men, brought the manufacturers to the bargaining table. The union contract signed on September 2, 1910—brokered by mediators A. Lincoln Filene (the department store tycoon) and Louis D. Brandeis (the crusading lawyer who

would eventually become the first Jewish justice on the Supreme Court of the United States)—was called the Protocol of Peace. It called for a fifty-hour week, a minimum wage, and other protections for workers and union members. Most importantly, it created a Board of Arbitration to settle major disputes that would arise in the future, and a Committee of Grievances for smaller problems. Other protocols were soon signed between other kinds of clothing manufacturers and workers, and by 1912 the ILGWU had signed contracts with 1,796 out of 1,829 clothing manufacturing shops in New York.

The Protocols of Peace were based on the idea that strikes, violence, and industrial chaos could be replaced with rules, bargains, and arbitration. Industrial peace, by ending the inefficiencies created by conflict, promised greater wealth and prosperity for everyone. But it required the support of unions, management, and interested members of the “public,” whether they be government officials or notable citizens like Filene and Brandeis. The original Protocols quickly crumbled during the economic downturn of 1913-14, but the philosophy behind them flourished in the creation of a federal Department of Labor (1913), the tripartite commissions that resolved labor disputes during the Great War (tripartite because they included representatives from business, labor, and public), and eventually in New Deal measures to support unions like the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 and the National Labor Relations (Wagner) Act of 1935.

The Wagner Act completed the change that the Protocols of Peace began in 1910. In place of the judicial tradition of strike injunctions, it set up the National Labor Relations Board, a body of judges appointed by the president of the United States who would balance the rights of workers and unions against bosses and management. There followed a golden age of capitalism, when labor peace led to profits and prosperity in many industries, with those fruits shared more equitably by management, workers, and customers than ever

before. Because of the government’s support of the labor movement, the gap between rich and poor narrowed and the dollars in the pockets of the swelling middle class fueled the post-war boom.

In recent decades, we have forgotten what Americans learned from the Protocols of Peace and its legislative descendants—that the labor movement is good for workers, and also for bosses and the prosperity of the entire nation. Recent presidents have appointed NLRB judges who are extremely hostile to labor unions, undermining the purpose of the Board. They have also promoted the outsourcing of manufacturing to third-world countries where workers do not enjoy the same protections and bosses do not understand the value of a fair wage, good working conditions, and labor peace. The gap between rich and poor has become a chasm, and some scholars argue that the American middle class no longer exists. In response, a few American labor organizers have returned to a pre-1910 state of mind—the government probably won’t help us, so let’s ignore the supposed benefits of the NLRB and confront our bosses directly, without the help of the government. President Obama’s recent appointments to the NLRB, especially his controversial appointment of pro-labor lawyer Craig Becker, will probably weaken this anti-government tendency, but is too early to tell what will happen next.

By next year, on the hundredth anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, we will have a better sense of whether the Obama administration can help stanch the decades-long hemorrhaging of the American labor movement. As we remember those 146 victims of predatory capitalism, hopefully we will also recall the alternate vision of peace and prosperity that was birthed in 1910 and ruled through the middle of the twentieth century. We know how to begin another golden age of capitalism, so let’s get to it.

In Solidarity,

Daniel Levinson Wilk
American History/Liberal Arts