FAIRNESS CAN BREAK THE STRANGLE HOLD THE DEFICIT HAS ON NEW YORK
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Gov. Cuomo’s proposed state budget is bad news for everybody, but CSEA President Joe McDermott challenges the state to adopt a policy of tax fairness as a workable solution.
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A message from CSEA President Joe McDermott

Fight for fairness

As this issue of The Public Sector went to press, Gov. Cuomo was releasing his executive budget proposal. Full coverage of the budget proposal will be in the next issue.

As Gov. Cuomo prepares to release his budget proposal, we know he plans to cut the state workforce by 18,000 jobs and slash aid to local governments and school districts to bridge a budget gap of at least $6 billion.

He is also talking tough about wage freezes and give backs for state employees, a stance that jeopardizes the collective bargaining process.

None of this is acceptable to CSEA, and the union is not going to sit back and wait for the Governor to steamroll over public employees.

Across New York public employees from schools, counties, towns and state agencies are banding together to fight for fairness in the state budget process.

Fairness in the cuts that right now seem likely to fall most heavily on the front-line workers of state government.

Fairness in the burdens local governments and school districts are being asked to bear.

Fairness in the way the state raises money to pay for vital services.

And fairness in negotiating our contracts.

We are not asking politely for consideration. We are demanding it from an administration that has consistently resorted to high-handed tactics that include trying to force state employees to accept a lockout and then a lag payroll.

We didn't stand by then as Gov. Cuomo tried to shove his unfair 'answers' down our throats. We beat the lockout and we are taking him to court over the lag payroll.

We aren't going to stand by now as he continues to arrogantly proclaim that the only solution is cutting thoughtlessly and raising regressive taxes.

That means working people get hit twice through unfair taxes and diminishing services. Public employees get hit a third time — with the loss of their jobs.

As this issue of The Public Sector is being mailed to you, thousands of public employees from all over the state and from every major public employee union will be gathering in Albany to turn up the heat on our lawmakers at the massive “Hot Day in February” rally.

I hope you were with us on Feb. 5. But the rally is just the beginning. We will keep showing our determination to fight the unfair cuts in aid, services and jobs that will devastate state and local government services.

The rally is the opening salvo. CSEA is committed to fighting for fairness for our members and all the residents of New York state during the budget process. We will use all our resources — including the power of our members — in this fight.

Joe

Fiscal Policy Institute to study budget issues

ALBANY — Charging that New York state’s massive budget deficit did not happen by accident, a coalition of labor, religious, community and social activist groups recently announced the formation of a research, advocacy and watchdog organization to promote changes in the state’s tax policy.

The Fiscal Policy Institute (FPI) will promote fairness in the state’s tax policy as an element in reversing New York’s dismal fiscal situation. CSEA is a leading member of the coalition forming FPI.

“We’ll be an active player in attempting to shape New York’s fiscal policy not only this year but well into the future,” said FPI Director Michael Martin. “In New York state, we have a structural problem. We don’t have a deficit by accident.”

FPI argues that New Yorkers have been duped by the “three big lies” about the state’s fiscal policies and is determined to prove those lies wrong.

Its premises are that New York is not a high corporate tax state, that state spending is not out of control and state taxes have not increased but have decreased in the last three years.

“We want to make people understand that New York’s corporate taxes are not too high and state spending is not out of control,” Martin said.

Backing him up were a series of charts that show state spending as a percentage of personal income has decreased to its lowest point in 10 years. The charts also show that the state’s corporate tax revenues lag behind federal tax revenues and by a number of measures are far less than that of the average of six other states.

Finally, the charts show that the revenue lost by the personal income tax cuts initiated in 1987 is far greater than the income generated by the new taxes raised in the last two years.

“This group will set the record straight about what’s been happening to state revenues, spending and taxes,” Martin said.

FPI’s goals are to restore the progressive personal income tax so the rich pay their share; end legalized corporate tax loopholes; extend sales tax to services purchased by upper-income consumers; passage of a corporate tax reporting and disclosure law; educate the public about why state revenues are falling and who is bearing the tax burden; and organize the public to push for change.
School bus driver Bunny Altomer recognized for her act of heroism

By Daniel X. Campbell
CSEA Communications Associate

VALATIE — The National Association for Pupil Transportation has honored CSEA Ichabod Crane School Unit President Lucretia “Bunny” Altomer as winner of the Association’s 1990 Heroism Award.

Altomer was honored for heroism for an incident occurred as she was driving her school bus on a pick up run on Route 9 in Kinderhook, about a half-mile from where the rural country road becomes a four-lane highway to Albany.

A youngster who was riding his 10-speed bicycle to school that morning was having trouble in the early morning traffic. Bunny spotted the youth and tried to assist him by turning on her emergency flashers to slow traffic. However the bike flipped over and the youth ended up in the middle of the busy roadway, unconscious.

Reacting instantaneously, Bunny turned on the bus’s stop flashers and stopped her vehicle, blocking traffic around the injured youth. She exited the bus and quickly checked the victim’s condition, then used her bus radio to call for immediate medical assistance before returning to aid the boy.

“I recognized the injured boy as one of my regular daily pickups, Tommy, and I knew that his sister was waiting at the next bus stop,” Altomer recalled.

Within minutes of her emergency call the rescue squad arrived and found Tommy Lanese still unconscious and Altomer still providing emergency aid.

As the ambulance transported Lanese to the local hospital, Altomer continued on her route. When she picked up Tommy’s sister, Altomer calmly told his sister about the accident.

“I figured that it would be better to tell Tommy’s family about the accident in person rather than have someone call up from the hospital later."

It wasn’t until after Altomer had finished her run that the impact of what she had done hit her. “I was in shock, pure shock.”

Bunny later stopped by the hospital to check on Tommy and claim her jacket, which she had laid across the injured youth to help keep him warm before the rescue squad arrived.

A national award was presented to Altomer in Tacoma, Wash., during the 16th annual NAPT conference in November.

“I love driving and I love kids. To be in this profession you’ve got to be able to remember you were a kid once yourself,” Altomer said.
Flexing their time

Brookhaven pilot program lets employees alter work schedules

By Sheryl C. Jenks
CSEA Communications Associate

BROOKHAVEN — Kelly Wilson, a clerk-typist in the Town of Brookhaven, met her mother for lunch and shopping on a recent Wednesday.

Wilson wasn’t on vacation, she didn’t take the day off and she wasn’t playing hooky.

Paul Rogalle, a town traffic engineer, said he is "flexing" on Fridays. But don’t expect him to roll up his sleeves and display his muscles.

Wilson and Rogalle are among 40 Town of Brookhaven employees enjoying a new flex time program. CSEA and the town agreed to try the program for four months.

"Flex time "takes the grind out of the Monday-through-Friday routine," said Liz Puttre, CSEA Town of Brookhaven White Collar Unit president and CSEA Suffolk County Local 852 president.

Flex time allows employees to choose to work a four-day week and have a weekday off or work five days with a flexible schedule, depending on the needs of their department.

CSEA and management agree the plan benefits everyone involved.

"The happier the employee, the better the productivity," Puttre said.

Wilson, who is expecting her first child, said flex time will enable her to return to work.

"I wasn’t sure if I was going to be able to come back to work after the baby, but now with the flex time, that’s one more day I can be with the baby without having to pay someone," she said.

Rogalle, a traffic engineer, said he enjoys a four-day week. His wife also "flexes" on Fridays.

"I think it’s a nice benefit, providing us with the opportunity to have an extra day off," he said. "I think absenteeism will be minimized and the employees will be more productive and effective.

"The union definitely played a role in seeing flex time implemented," he added.

Neighborhood Aide Joyce D’Andrea takes Wednesdays off. Newly married, she used her first free Wednesday to change her name at the Department of Motor Vehicles.

"The flex time is great because you can get errands done before the weekend and that extra hour in the morning is great at work because you can be very productive before the public comes in," she said.

Joe Sanvano, a map drafter, chose to take Fridays off.

"I don’t mind the longer hours and I like being able to get more work done in a day," he explained. "This way you have more time to complete a project."

Brookhaven Bay Management Specialist Tom Carrano now works five days a week from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and he credits the union and the town for making it happen.

"These hours allow me to save money by picking my kids up at child care earlier," Carrano said. He also believes the new schedule increases his productivity.

Katherine Busch, an administrator 1, has been with the town for 19 years. She said she began pushing for flex time long ago.

"I get my steam up in the afternoon, so working later in the day works out well for me and the town," she said.

"I think the program is marvelous, especially for working mothers, and I don’t think it would have happened without the union’s involvement."

Puttre believes the program will be renewed after the four-month trial.

"I think it will be continued and made even more flexible. So far things have worked out great for the employees and the town," she said. "If it is seen to be mutually beneficial, the committee representing CSEA and the town will develop a permanent policy town-wide."

Traffic engineer Paul Rogalle and Liz Puttre, president of the CSEA Town of Brookhaven Unit and CSEA Suffolk County Local 852.

Joyce D’Andrea
CSEA calls for indoor air standards

ALBANY — The need for a "breath of fresh air" is more than a matter of comfort for many workers — it may actually improve their health and productivity.

That was the message CSEA delivered to state legislative committees to push for indoor clean air standards to improve the well-being and productivity of public employees.

"We have a clean air act that regulates the quality of outdoor air, but there are no standards for indoor air," said CSEA Director of Occupational Safety and Health Jame Corcoran, who presented the testimony "That doesn't make sense. A recent study by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) concluded that people spend up to 90 percent of their time indoors and therefore the health risks are considerably greater than from outdoor air or drinking water."

Corcoran told the Assembly Labor, Environmental Conservation and Health committees that standards are long overdue because there is currently no legal or regulatory means to correct it.

"Complaints about building air quality are the most frequent safety and health problems CSEA encounters," Corcoran said. "They are also one of the most difficult areas to address because of the lack of standards."

Corcoran pointed out that the simplest way to improve air quality is to circulate more fresh air in a building.

Corcoran said that the state Office of General Services (OGS) selectively uses the state energy code to justify limits on fresh air intake. OGS brings a maximum of seven percent fresh air into buildings.

"They are also one of the most difficult areas to address because of the lack of standards," Corcoran said. "They are also one of the most difficult areas to address because of the lack of standards."

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WHAT TO DO ABOUT INDOOR AIR PROBLEMS — If you or others at your worksite are experiencing health or comfort problems you suspect may be caused by indoor air pollution, you should notify your supervisor. Then contact your union representative about conducting an office health survey, such as the one pictured at left. The questionnaire results can provide evidence of Sick Building Syndrome. In the absence of standards, it should be presented to management with a request to find the cause and develop solutions.

Other environmental studies have found less severe health problems such as headaches, chest tightness, coughing, wheezing, fatigue, muscle aches, chills and fever can be related to air quality.

NIOSH and other authorities diagnose "sick or tight building syndrome" if more than 20 percent of building occupants complain of discomfort or illness that might be building-related.

While sick building syndrome is recognized as a real phenomenon, there is currently no legal or regulatory means to correct it.

"Complaints about building air quality are the most frequent safety and health problems CSEA encounters," Corcoran said. "They are also one of the most difficult areas to address because of the lack of standards."
Air sickness
Comp workers press claims over unhealthy workplace

BROOKLYN — Unhealthy building air has led to a number of medical problems for several members of CSEA Local 010 who work at 180 Livingston St. In fact, some workers have gotten so sick they’ve filed workers compensation claims. What makes their story so remarkable is that the workers are employees of the Workers Compensation Board.

"Within four weeks of moving into these offices in 1987, my eyes were burning, my ears itching, I was sneezing and I had a facial rash," said Cheryl Testamark, a keyboard specialist. Testamark has since experienced shortness of breath and has been diagnosed with chronic asthma from indoor air pollution.

And she’s not alone. A CSEA survey of the employees revealed severe complaints about dust, headaches, fatigue, dizziness, rashes, irritated nose and throat, chest tightness, difficulty breathing, burning eyes and odors. Many of the workers said their symptoms seem to go away when they leave the building.

The situation is a perfect example of the need for indoor air standards: the building air is certainly unhealthy but it is apparently not in violation of any safety and health regulations.

CSEA has sought improvements since moving into the building but management’s response has been ineffective.

CSEA Local 010 President Vincent Martusciello and Unit President Wendell Rachell are convinced the building, a converted department store warehouse, suffers from tight building syndrome. CSEA efforts are focusing on getting improvements in the ventilation system. But the union also wants a thorough review of the facility by the state Health Department.

"It’s a crime that the state pays millions in rent for this space and they can’t clean up the air in here," Martusciello said.

"For a building crammed full of files and some 850 people every day, we’re just not getting enough fresh air," said Rachell, who also serves as chairperson of the CSEA Region II Safety and Health Committee.

Rachell pointed out that one of the most frequent ongoing complaints from employees is drowsiness — a well-documented problem that results when people don’t get enough oxygen.

Senior Clerk Angela Cimino has been plagued by eye irritations and chronic tonsillitis since moving into the building. Her physician told her that she’s been inhaling fiberglass particles and the inside of her nostrils look as though they’ve been cut by tiny razor blades.

"I had to have my tonsils removed, and I had to have my eustacian tube drained," she said.

"I had to have my nose cauterized almost every week when the office first moved to Brooklyn, but after the union complained about the air and got management to start cleaning the air vents, my tonsil problems became less frequent."

"My dresser looks like a pharmacy," said Calender Clerk Doris Lewis.

A dedicated employee, Lewis is proud of her employment record. "I get to work every day at 7:30 a.m. and never lost time for illness. I have two commendations in my personnel file recognizing my professionalism," she said. "But I had to pay for my own breathing test and then read my doctor’s form that said ‘respiratory disease (fiberglass in ducts).’"

Lewis’s sinuses were so infected at one point her physician wanted to hospitalize her. "When the weekends came I spent them in bed," she said. "For six months I had to have weekly injections to breathe. I’ve had so many injections, I have knots in my arms."

"We want to know exactly what’s in the air," said CSEA Region II President George Boncoraglio. "We understand that levels of various contaminants may not be hazardous individually, but taken as a whole it might be a different story. People are getting sick and something has to be done about it."

THE SOURCE OF THE PROBLEMS — CSEA Local 010 members who work for the state Workers Compensation Board have suffered a variety of medical problems since moving into offices at 180 Livingston Street in Brooklyn five years ago. CSEA believes the office air is to blame. Among those who have had serious difficulties (clockwise from left) Cheryl Testamark, Doris Lewis and Angela Cimino.
We reject it

CSEA blasts OMH five-year plan

In extremely blunt language, CSEA President Joe McDermott and other CSEA officials rejected the state Office of Mental Health's (OMH) latest five-year plan as irresponsible for staff and patients.

In public testimony before OMH, McDermott said the state's treatment of the mentally ill is now dictated by bureaucrats with calculators instead of medical experts.

"The state OMH has forgotten that mental illness is a disease," he said. OMH now apparently makes policy decisions based on "fiscal considerations and census counts and ignores the individual patient's medical needs."

The CSEA leader attacked OMH plans to run down the population of state psychiatric centers to under 8,000 and possibly close to at least six centers within the next five years.

The patient dumping comes at a time when estimates say there may be twice as many schizophrenics and manic depressives on the streets and in homeless shelters as there are in psychiatric centers.

OMH has no plans to operate state-run community residences. Instead, it is relying entirely on local governments and the private sector to pick up that responsibility even though neither has the resources nor the inclination to do so.

"OMH has simply abandoned their commitment to the mentally ill and the thousands of dedicated, skilled workers who serve them," McDermott said.

McDermott's message was reinforced by several CSEA region presidents in similar testimony around the state.

CSEA Western Region President Robert Lattimer testified that plans to close Gowanda Psychiatric Center demonstrate OMH's irresponsibility. Gowanda has long had an exemplary record of providing care, due in large part to the talent and effort of the direct care staff, he noted.

"At the very least the state should put that capable workforce to use in alternative care settings," Lattimer said.

"It not only makes sense, it's also the decent thing to do for the patients and the workers."

CSEA Central Region President James Moore told OMH officials that the union is "wholly opposed" to putting patients out on the streets without an adequate network of community living arrangements and services.

"After years of opening the back door of psychiatric centers, OMH has effectively shut the front door through admission policies that make it impossible to gain admittance until the person in need has spent up to 30 days in an acute care hospital — you might call this 'pre-admission dumping,'" Moore said.

CSEA Metropolitan Region President George Boncoraglio slammed OMH plans to use single room occupancy (SROs) hotels to house the mentally ill under the much ballyhooed "New York, New York" agreement with New York City.

"On the face of it the New York, New York plan seems to create thousands of beds for the mentally ill, but it does nothing for their needs," Boncoraglio said. "The SROs are nothing more than unsupervised residences where the streetwise will prey on the vulnerable."

Where the money really goes

Critics of the state mental health system regularly assert that "the unions" block reform of the system and monopolize mental health funds for expensive psychiatric centers.

In fact, these claims are nonsense.

While state-operated programs do currently receive the lion's share of state OMH appropriations, that is not the whole picture.

When all of the state and federal funds available for the care of the mentally ill are reviewed nearly 53 percent go to locally-operated programs.

Still, CSEA agrees that OMH funds should be used more cost-effectively.

As demonstrated by the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), a balanced network of community residences including state-run facilities is a workable approach.

OMH, however, has no balance at all and no plans for responsible future action.
NEWARK — Western New York’s winters can be very harsh, but the state-operated community residences of several developmental and psychiatric centers are being kept nice and warm, thanks to a pilot program funded jointly by CSEA and New York state.

“Boilers and Burners,” the pilot program at Newark Developmental Center, is turning CSEA members into residential heating experts.

“This program will help our general mechanics stay up to date on repairs and maintenance to residential heating systems, furnaces, boilers and such,” said Pat Martin, president of CSEA Newark Developmental Center Local 417. “Before this program was developed, they only worked on larger institutional heating plants, which are quite different.”

More than 30 mechanics from Newark and four nearby facilities — Craig and Monroe Developmental Centers and Willard, Rochester Psychiatric Centers — took part in the joint CSEA and NYS pilot program. They received classroom and practical instruction from Sam Falvo, an instructor with Empire State College, on residential heating systems.

Falvo wrote the course that will be used if the pilot program is adopted statewide.

Reggie Langdon, a 20-year Newark Developmental Center mechanic, and Bert Van Eem Aeme, a 30-year maintenance supervisor, say the program will help keep the residential heating systems operating more efficiently.

“Although the heating principles are the same for a big boiler and a small residential one, it’s good to get the hands-on pointers that go with keeping a smaller residential heating system working properly,” Van Eem Aeme said.

The general mechanics used the heating system in a nearby state-owned farm house as a working model for the practical part of their training.

“The basic principles of a good heating system are fuel and oxygen with an efficient igniter, a good basic starter,” Langdon said. “Knowing that helps in applying the knowledge to a large or small heating plant.”

The practical course included combustion testing, analyzing and adjusting burners for maximum efficiency, detecting and controlling drafts and inspecting the fuel-air source.

Local 417 President Pat Martin said the course is helping the developmental center staff during the transition to closure. Virtually the entire client population of the facility has been moved into 59 community residences and intermediate care facilities.

“Local 417 has 1,240 members, including about 50 Office of General Services members who work in the facility laundry,” Martin said. “With this joint program, our members and the people we serve should be comfortably warm this winter.”
Charley Cooper providing recognition, respect for those who blazed trails

By Sheryl C. Jenks
CSEA Communications Associate
and
William Butler
CSEA Special Correspondent

BABYLON — Charles L. Cooper is many things. He is a state employee, a CSEA member, an artist, a poet, a father and a Black historian. He is a musician, a gospel singer, a shop owner and a golfer.

One of the first things you’re aware of when you meet Cooper (“Call me Charley”) is his keen and deep sense of Black pride. His ski hat with “AFRICA” printed on it and the leather pouch with a map of Africa hanging on a thong around his neck tells you right away he’s proud of his heritage.

Charley Cooper the artist is a sign painter for the Long Island State Parks Commission. He has created hand-lettered, silk-screened and machine work signs in the sign shop at Belmore Lake State Park for 10 years. He is a member of CSEA Long Island Inter-County State Park Local 102.

His artistic talents show through on many personal projects also, such as the poem “Black Legacies,” which he wrote, illustrated and recorded. The 71-line inspirational poem recounts the contributions of nearly 100 famous Black men and women.

“I wrote ‘Black Legacies’ in 1989, and after reading it in church I got a copyright for the poem and the sketches,” Cooper said.

Another poem, “Prayer of a Golfer,” won Cooper a 1989 Golden Poets Award at the Poets Conference in Washington D.C. His poetry is currently available in 14 Long Island libraries and he expects more libraries will carry his works.

Cooper used his own money to have poster-sized copies of “Black Legacies” and his sketches printed, and also financed a tape recording of his reading of the poem, in which he also plays a Conga drum. The poem is also printed on T-shirts and sweatshirts which he sells, and he throws in a free copy of poster and tape recording.

Cooper recently opened a store, also called “Black Legacies” at 495 Granny Road in Medford, near his home. The store specializes in African art, books, fabrics, handicrafts, T-shirts, incense, hats and Gospel tapes.

He is a former Sunday school teacher and superintendent at Faith Baptist Church in Coram. Since 1981 Cooper has played and sung with the Southern Harmonizer gospelsinging troupe.

Cooper said he takes pride in helping young people find the straight-and-narrow path to dignity. His poem “Black Legacies” grew out of an inspiration to send a message to young Black people.

“I never heard them say anything positive about Blacks making in-roads in different areas. A lot of names came to my mind. My generation had to shuffle around to find someone to follow. The young today don’t appreciate what they have,” he said.

Cooper, a 56-year-old father of five, is easy to admire. But when you consider the former Philadelphia cop only recently received his General Education Diploma, his accomplishments seem all the more amazing.

“Charley is really a great guy and a hard worker,” said CSEA Local 102 President Paul D’Aleo.
Black Legacies
(A Poem of Black Heritage)

Black History is a subject to aid and abet in equality being won,
Brought about in the 50's by Carter G. Woodson,
Did you know in the 30's Jesse Owens speed caused one dictator Strife,
Might have caused the erratic behavior in his tyrannical "Life",
But the tyrant had a champ and as his chest of pride began expanding and Swelling,
The brown bomber Joe Louis squared off and demolished Max Schmeling,
However, there has always been pressure put on them that were proud and Outspoken,
Like Nat, Jack Johnson, Malcolm, Paul, John Carlos, Nehemiah none of whom could be converted as being Token!

How about our authors and poets some wrote harshly, some nicely and some Sweetly,
Folks like Langston, Wight, Haley, Baldwin, Giovanni, Dankbar, and Wheately,
Of course you have the sports Creed,
Jackie Robinson, Teddy Young, Ab luba, Wilma, Sugar Ray all had tremendous Speed,
Wait! before you young folks began to Snarl,
We have Edwin, Xerex, Goodin, Flo-Jo, Rodney and Carl,
And we could care less how much of the supposed dominant culture may Stiff
We have much pride in Harris, Curver, Booker T. and A. Philip Randolph!

Let's go to the court room and see what the law is all About,
Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall and first black female judge Juanita Kidd Stout,
Nobel Laureates Ralph Bunche, Martin Luther King...Hold on should I give you a clue...
his first name is Desmond his last is...Tu Tu,
Our physics surgeons hanging in there at the Statt,
Dr. D. H. Williams performed a successful first on the human Heart,
Dr. Charles R. Drew; talk about a trick of Fate,
He lost his life not being able to receive what he helped to Create?

Now golf is a game supposedly for the Elite
Ah! but we have champions, Charles Sifford, Jim Thorpe, Let Elder, and Calvin Poete,
Man, they kept black history so quiet when I was a Boy,
That is why just the few that I mention should literally fill you all with overwhelming pride and Joy,
Oh, about the supposed "Integation" We had a brother that eliminated all candidates but one, his name is Jesse Jackson,
But certainly there are many negatives that sometimes plague our "Race!",
But you can find that in your media anytime, right now we have positives to Embrace!

I think of music and so many unforgettable come to Mind,
Satchmo, Dizzy, Lee, Wynton each sound one of a Kind,
I'm going to say a little more about jazz to show my memory isn't that Narrow,
Let's not forget Newport, Brownie, Wardell, Louis and Jazz Ogario,
Vocalists, good grief, don't get me started, Maida, Artie, Nipsey, Lena, Ella, Ruth they all deserve just Due,
Eyestine, Prysock, Rawls, James Cleveland and Belfonte they deserve recognition Too,
Wow, Almost forgot made myself a Promise, not to forget to mention world champion figure skater Deb Thomas!

Here's a little scope about the New Year's bowl "Games!",
On this one I just mention teams without mentioning Names!
White Americans inwardly scream, isn't it a coton pickin' Shame,
That they have a black calling football signals for Notre Dame,
Hey, by Jeez talk about a deep dimension, how bout a daredevil calling numbers for Clemson,
Son of a gun, as sure as it is freezing in Alaska, they have a blasted black quarterbacking for Nebraska!

Holy Cow that's not all Paul they got a coon at the helm for Southern Cal,
Hmmm, baseball, Jackie, Willie, and Ernie as for Hank he out home runned Babe Ruth,
And Bill White made N.L. Commissioner out of the broadcast Booth,
What? Elvis is king of What? Jazz Domino James Brown, Act, Berry, and the Gang made us all put our hands together and Clap,
Our history says we've done Gospel, Blues, Jazz, Fusion, Classic, Rock and Rap,
Oh! while it's on my mind, I should mention the Anglican "Parish"
They just assigned their first female Bishop by the name of Barbara Harris,
Space could not completely dude us, Brother Ron died in Space,
Now I understand there is a young Black sister in that highly technical Place!

Oh yes we have music conducting Afro's,
Drivest, Freeman, Roberts, Morgan, Harvey, Humper, Tania are some of those "Maestros!",
Matthew Benson, first black American dog sled Jockey,
and speaking of ice there are 4 Canadian Brothers in professional Hockey,
In our black schools, I understand you have some of the land's greatest Teachers,
In our churches the land's greatest Preachers,
And of course when it comes to making money Steady,
I should mention Bill, Richard, Michael, and Eddie!

You know only prayer and song could have kept us with all the stumbling blocks put in our Way,
We've been turned and feathered, castrated, ridiculed even our children were bombed and killed where we went to Pray,
Listen, I only mention a smidgen of the intelligence and talent attributed to the Black Story,
Oh! for one believe they are all gifts from God, and we should give him the Glory!

All that I said was just great pride, not a boast,
All made possible by God, the Father Son And The Holy Ghost,
That is the end of my little Thesis,
may you all be blessed in the mighty name of Jesus!
CANTON — His military service helped earn him the seniority and expertise he needed, but St. Lawrence County Highway Department employee Joe York had to count on CSEA to get him the promotion he deserved.

CSEA fought and won a grievance arbitration that not only gave York the promotion he should have had three years ago, but also awarded him back pay totaling more than $19,000.

York, formerly a welder and a shop steward, filed a grievance in February 1988 when he was passed over for a promotion to the title of highway maintenance foreman. According to the CSEA contract, promotions are to be decided according to qualifications and seniority.

York, a member of CSEA St. Lawrence County Employees Unit, had more seniority and felt he was better qualified than the person who got the job.

The grievance progressed and finally went to binding arbitration. The arbitrator ruled that York was in fact more qualified and more senior. He ordered the county to promote York and give him back pay including overtime back to February 1988.

According to York, the arbitrator noted that his military service credit helped to give him the seniority he needed to get the job. York is a staff sergeant and squad leader for the 98th Division Alpha Company, a combat engineer company based in Ogdensburg. With 20 years of service in the reserves, he said, the credit helped to “unbalance the scales in my favor.”

York also credited his military service, which included training on roadway maintenance, as experience that qualified him for the job. He was glad that the arbitrator agreed.

“Winning this showed not only me but a lot of other people that the union does work,” he said. “It takes time and patience, but it definitely pays off.”

With a settlement of more than $12,000 after taxes, that payoff was enough for York to surprise his wife and family with a gift that they all could use — a new van to transport the family in. His sons, Andy and Joey, are active athletes, so the van gets a lot of use, currently as a “hockey vehicle.”

York thanked Unit President Joe Frank, Head Shop Steward Dick Foster, CSEA Labor Relations Specialist Steve Ragan and Regional Attorney Bob Ballan for their help in winning the grievance.

“I’m really grateful to everyone who helped. It was a team effort, so we pulled together and we won,” he said. “I’m glad CSEA was there backing me up. I couldn’t have done it without them.”
February is the month when all workers can find out just how safe their workplace really is. That's when employers are required to post the annual log of all workplace illness and injury from the previous calendar year.

For public employees, the DOSH-900 form, pictured above, should be a familiar document. Whether you're a state, local government or school district employee, the form must be posted in a conspicuous place in your workplace for the entire month. It must also be made available on request at any other time.

If your workplace DOSH-900 appears incomplete or inaccurate, contact your CSEA shop steward or local officer with the information to have management make the necessary corrections.

If management fails to post the DOSH-900 form on Feb. 1, ask them to do so.

If they still don't comply, complete the complaint form, above right, and file it with the appropriate Labor Department office listed below:

New York State Department of Labor/Public Employee Safety and Health

175 Fulton Street, Hempstead, New York, 11550, (516) 4854408; serving Nassau and Suffolk counties.

One Main Street, Brooklyn, New York 11201, (718) 797-7700; serving Brooklyn, Bronx, Manhattan, Queens and Staten Island.

30 Glenn Street, White Plains, New York 10603, (914) 9979150; serving Orange, Putnam, Westchester and Rockland counties.


That's a lot of giving

When it comes to giving of herself, CSEA Buffalo area Division for Youth Local 562 activist Pat Carlyle is without peer. And a lot of people can thank her for a new lease on life. Carlyle, pictured here receiving congratulations from Local 562 President Bill Jordan, was recently recognized as a 30-gallon blood donor.

She has been donating blood for more than 25 years.
By Mark M. Kotzin
CSEA Communications Associate

BINGHAMTON — An on-the-job accident at SUNY Binghamton on New Year’s Eve left one CSEA member critically burned and CSEA officials looking for answers.

The incident occurred while a team of stationary engineers worked to replace a steam generator gasket. After one unsuccessful attempt, the group was bringing the generator back up to power to test a second gasket. At 300 pounds of pressure and 420 degrees Fahrenheit, the gasket burst, showering Principal Stationary Engineer Richard Rezucha with scalding steam, which burned over 64 percent of his body.

Six others were in the room, but only Rezucha was next to the generator when it blew. The others were near enough to doorways to escape without injury; Rezucha had to crawl behind the generator and under pipes through the scalding water before he could get out the back door.

He was airlifted to Upstate Medical Hospital in Syracuse, where he was recently upgraded from critical to serious condition.

Co-workers have traveled to Syracuse to donate blood and have taken up a collection to help pay Rezucha’s medical expenses, said CSEA SUNY Binghamton Local 648 President Bob Goeckel. Rezucha is married and has three children.

Searching for the cause

CSEA officials are trying to discover what caused the accident. So far, there is no clear indication of the cause, said CSEA Occupational Safety and Health Specialist John Bieger. While the university claims the gasket material was faulty, Bieger said he has concluded that the installation may have been the problem.

According to his investigation, neither the university nor the workers violated any safety laws, but Bieger said the standard operating procedure may have been unsafe.

The university has changed the procedure since the incident. The gasket was also hand-cut, rather than a more expensive manufactured gasket which might have prevented the incident.

CSEA Central Region President Jim Moore was angry that scrimping on the gasket may have contributed to the accident.

“Is the cost to get a better gasket more than the cost of a human life?” he asked. “It’s so unfortunate that we must illustrate the need for higher safety standards with a tragedy like this.”

Road conditions result in serious injury

FULTON — Another CSEA member has suffered serious injuries in an on-the-job accident when a driver lost control of her car on an icy road.

Frank Ridgeway, a Fulton sanitation worker and member of CSEA Oswego County Local 836, was hurt when a car struck him and pinned him against his garbage truck.

Ridgeway’s leg was crushed so severely that it had to be removed at University Hospital in Syracuse.

According to CSEA Occupational Safety and Health Specialist John Bieger, Ridgeway was following proper safety procedure, wearing a reflective safety vest and was not at fault in the accident. The state Department of Labor investigated the accident but did not cite the city for any violations.

The driver involved was ticketed for failure to reduce speed near a hazardous situation.

CSEA Central Region V President Jim Moore said the accident illustrates the danger public employees face.

“This is just one of those freak accidents that demonstrate the danger inherent in certain types of public employment,” he said.
Honoring co-workers in the Gulf

By Sheryl C. Jenks
CSEA Communications Associate

RIVERHEAD — CSEA Judiciary Local 330 recently made a special tribute to colleagues and sons of colleagues who have been called to serve in Operation Desert Storm.

When they heard CSEA member Robert Kolterman, a captain in the Army Reserve, had been called to report on Christmas, Local 330 President Warren Simonoff and Local 330 Secretary Mary Ellen DeLouise were spurred into action.

They sent fliers to all the court employees asking them to help fill care packages with letters, photos and food and to take part in a special video message which was shot on the steps of the Supreme Court Building in Riverhead.

It was a freezing day, but members, friends, family, politicians and the media showed up for the video.

The local made huge oaktag cards for Kolterman, a law secretary; Andrew F. Rea, son of CSEA member Susan Rea; Anthony P. Moncayo, a former CSEA members; and two other colleagues not affiliated with CSEA.

"When we sent the fliers around for Bob, we were told there were other employees who had been sent over and we wanted to recognize them, too. So now we will send our thoughts and good wishes to all of them," DeLouise said.

In addition to cards and letters, the care packages include playing cards, batteries and food donated by court employees.

Suffolk County Clerk Edward P. Romaine added an assortment of toiletries such as razors and shaving cream.

"We thought it was really nice for Ed Romaine to join us and add to the care packages," DeLouise said.

As he stood on the courthouse steps surrounded by wellwishers, Simonoff said, "The real reason we're here today is to let you know we that we love you and we're thinking about you. Get home safely.

The tribute was videotaped and a copy is being added to the care packages.

"WE'RE THINKING ABOUT YOU" — CSEA Local 330 President Warren Simonoff stands at the podium on the Supreme Court steps in Riverhead surrounded by union members, colleagues and the families of some of the people who are serving in Operation Desert Storm.

'A GOOD SIGN' — The St. Mary's School for the Deaf Unit of CSEA Erie County Educational Local 868 signed their first contract with CSEA representation. Giving the International Deaf Symbol for "signed contract" are, from left, CSEA Collective Bargaining Specialist Vince Sicari, Unit President Karen Spegelhoff, Personnel Director Thomas Koch and School Director Dr. David Updegraff.
Harsh management attitude demoralizing labor-management relations at J. N. Adam

By Ron Wofford
CSEA Communications Associate

Byron Wofford
CSEA Communications Associate

PERRYSBURG — Union officials say an over-zealous, oppressive management style by the facility’s director has greatly harmed labor-management relations and driven employee morale to rock-bottom at the J.N. Adam Developmental Center.

"It’s bad enough that our members are working under the stress of this facility’s closure, but they’re being hounded by scare tactics that are harsh and unreasonable as well," said CSEA J.N. Adam Local 400 President Dana Tietz.

"Whether or not a person is guilty of anything, they are being punished by (Facility Director) Ivan Canutson before they have a fair hearing," Tietz charged. "In the past several months he has suspended about a dozen workers without pay for minor matters that should have only called for counseling."

The union has filed grievances on behalf of members affected, Tietz said, but the time required to reach arbitration is an added hardship for families living near the poverty line.

Cruel, heartless

“Management has unnecessarily suspended workers who are the sole support for babies,” said Local 400 First Vice President Dave Witherell. "It’s totally cruel and heartless."

"The hardships thrust upon good, hard-working people here are causing untold economic troubles for their families,” Tietz added.

A reign of terror

Tietz and Witherell said the morale of members has been "damaged tremendously" by what they characterized as a "reign of terror" by Canutson since he became facility director.

"Canutson has been quick to drop NODs (notice of discipline) on people instead of using a little common sense or positive intervention. He’s very heavy on interrogations, too."

Tietz said Canutson has also tried to have unemployment insurance denied for workers he has suspended before a hearing, but CSEA has succeeded in stopping some of those attempts.

Human beings involved

"Canutson doesn’t seem to realize that he’s dealing with human beings," Tietz said. "He should be working to develop a more positive working relationship, which would translate to improved care for the population we serve. But it seems he wants to be destructive rather than constructive."

And, union officials said, the director apparently has singled out CSEA members for the most severe punishment.

"There haven’t been any suspensions without pay for members of any other unions that we’re aware of," Witherell said. That fact disputes the director’s claim that he manages strictly "by the book," Witherell said.

"Our member are taking the brunt of his heavy-handedness," Tietz said. "But we’re not taking it lying down; we’ll continue to use every means at our disposal to protect our members’ rights."

IN THE ABOVE PHOTO, CSEA’s Office of Court Administration negotiation team poses for a group photo prior to a recent bargaining session. Standing, from left, are Ralph W. Hesson of Local 335, William Vasallo of Local 010, CSEA Assistant Contract Administrator Lou Dal Porto, team chairperson Edward A. Heffernan of Local 694 and CSEA Deputy Director of Contract Administration James Henretty. Seated, from left, are team vice chairperson Thomas F. Jefferson of Local 694, CSEA staff secretary Diane Urbietis, team secretary Shirley Payne of Local 334, Robert Lorenc of Local 332 and Pasquale M. Ferraro of Local 330. In photo at right, Henretty discusses an issue with Jefferson.

CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS continue between CSEA and New York state on behalf of more than 100,000 CSEA members in five state bargaining units. Contracts covering state workers in the Administrative Services Unit, Institutional Services Unit, Operational Services Unit, Division of Military and Naval Affairs and Office of Court Administration all expire March 31.
CSEA member clowns around

By Anita Manley
CSEA Communications Associate

WAPPINGERS FALLS — You won’t insult Melissa and Ron Levine if you accuse them of clowning around. In fact, it’s a real compliment.

As Missy and Seltzer, the two don wigs, make-up and costumes to clown around at birthdays, banquets, holiday parties, store openings and college homecomings.

Melissa, a principal actuarial clerk with the state Insurance Fund and a member of CSEA Local 351, joined her husband’s clown act two years ago. Ron, a former state employee, got started seven years ago. A lifelong circus lover, he started to perform professionally part time.

A member of World Clowns, Clowns of America and the Society of American Magicians, Ron studied the art of clowning by watching videos, attending workshops and seminars and absorbing tons of material.

With his reputation for clowning spreading by word of mouth, Ron found himself busy most weekends. Melissa, meanwhile, became business manager for The Comedy Express Team and handled bookings, billing and planning.

It took another clown act’s cancellation to get Melissa into the limelight. One weekend Ron was at a shopping mall where a store was about to open. The clown act the store hired had suddenly cancelled, so he volunteered Melissa. That was her debut and she’s been clowning ever since.

Just what is a clown?

“A clown is a cartoon character come to life,” Ron said. “Clowning comes from the heart. It is a sense of innocence, guilt, stupidity and all human emotions in their simplest forms.”

Clowning is also an art, Ron explained. Each clown perfects his or her own costume and make-up so that they become a trademark. Costumes can be very expensive, with wigs selling for nearly $200 and clown shoes for more than $250.

Props are an important part of the act. Ron and Melissa found that many are cheaply made and wear out quickly, so they began making their own. They now sell some of their own products, including spring-loaded snakes — the ones kids and adults love to see jump out of a can.

Clowning has brought them many friends, the Levines said. They exchange ideas with colleagues from all over the world.

The Levines’ act has evolved into a two-person vaudeville show with skits, jokes, magic and comedy. A juggler/magician sometimes joins their performances. They tailor their performances to the audiences’ ages.

“If the children are three years old, I become three years old,” Ron said.

The clowns keep a full schedule, entertaining at birthday parties, trade shows, banquets, store openings, college homecoming weekends and holiday shows. At birthday parties, the Levines give each child a gift, a special certificate and a picture with the clowns.

“A child knows if you are someone who just threw on make-up and is acting like a clown,” Ron said. “Clowning is not an actor’s part. It is an expression of your own nuttiness and personality exaggerated.”

Melissa loves to clown around. “We like to entertain kids whether they’re one or 90,” she said. “It’s fun to see their reactions.”
Do you really understand your NYS health insurance program?

The updated New York State Health Insurance General Information Booklet has been distributed to all currently enrolled state employees. To help you better understand your benefits and use them to your advantage, and to test your knowledge of the New York State Health Insurance Program, enter the CSEA Joint Committee on Health Benefits Word Search Contest. Answers to all the questions can be found within the General Information Booklet. The first 25 people who submit correct contest puzzles to the Joint Committee on Health Benefits will receive a copy of Healthwise Handbook, a 250-page guide to family-based care. This book provides easy-to-understand information on preventing and treating common illnesses and subsequently can lower your health care costs.

Word Search contest fun way to learn

1. If you are enrolled in the Pre-Tax Contribution Program, there will be an "N" (for non-taxable) next to the health insurance contribution in the Code ________ Amount box on your pay stub.

2. If you change from individual to family coverage under the New York State Health Insurance Program after more than 28 days of the dependent’s eligibility (i.e. marriage, birth), the dependent’s coverage will begin the first day of the ________ payroll period.

3. If you and your spouse are both employed by New York state and are eligible for health insurance benefits, you may also be eligible for the ________ eligibility family benefit.

4. Coverage under the New York State Health Insurance Program for dependent children terminates at age 19 unless they receive more than half of their support from you and are full-_______ students.

5. When you retire, you may be entitled to use your accumulated unused ________ ________ to offset all or part of the cost of your health insurance during retirement.

6. To enroll in a Health Maintenance Organization participating in the New York State Health Insurance Program, you must live within the HMO’s ________ service area.

7. If you are laid off and your name has been placed on a Department of Civil Service ________ list, you may continue your health insurance coverage for up to one year. During this time, you are required to pay only the ________ ________ share of the premium.

8. The Division of Employee Benefits in the Department of Civil Service works with the Health ________ Administrator (located in the Personnel Office of each State agency) to process transactions and assist you with your health insurance questions.

9. If you are ________ for the New York State Health Insurance Program and you decide you want to be covered, you need to sign up for coverage by contacting your Health Benefits Administrator.

10. If you or a dependent whom you wish to enroll is covered by another group insurance plan you must compete a ________ ________ of Benefits Form PS-600.

11. If health insurance ________ ________ cards have been lost or damaged, Empire Plan enrollees should contact their Health Benefits Administrators; HMO enrollees should contact their provider directly and retirees should contact the Department of Civil Service Employee Benefits Division to receive replacements.

12. During the annual Option ________ Period, usually in November, you may change your health insurance option for any reason.

13. If you and your spouse are covered under the Dual Eligibility ________ Benefit and one of you are laid off and placed on a Preferred List, you will continue to be eligible for the dual eligibility Family Benefit for up to one year.

14. If your employment with the State ends before you reach retirement and you choose to continue your coverage while in vested status, you are responsible for paying both the employer and employee shares of the health ________ ________ premium.

CSEA Joint Committee on Health Benefits
143 Washington Avenue, Albany NY 12210

Be sure to include your name, address and Social Security number with your completed Word Search. Mail your entry to:

Civil Service Employees Association
Joint Committee on Health Benefits
143 Washington Avenue
Albany, N.Y. 12210

An answer key will be published in the next edition of The Public Sector.
AT YOUR SERVICE

A REFERENCE GUIDE TO CSEA MEMBER SERVICES AND BENEFITS

CSEA Toll-Free
The union's toll-free telephone number — 1-800-342-4146 — is your direct link to CSEA Headquarters.

When you call the toll-free number, a recorded message describes the choices to put you through to the right place for the help you need.

You need a touch-tone telephone to complete your call without operator assistance. If you aren't calling from a touch-tone telephone, an operator will pick up and complete your call at the end of the message.

If you know the extension number of the individual you are trying to reach, you can press "O" plus the extension number on your touch-tone telephone at any point during the recorded message and be connected.

If you don't know the extension, the message will give you the following choices:

* For Field Operations or the Empire Plan/Health Benefits Committee, press number 1
* For Communications, the Executive Offices or Political Action, press number 3.
* If you have a question concerning dues, membership or agency shop, CSEA group insurance, other than health or need to talk to the Finance Department, press number 4.
* To hear CSEA's Current Issues Update for news of interest to CSEA members, press 5.

Employee Benefit Fund
The CSEA Employee Benefit Fund is a CSEA-administered trust fund which provides certain supplemental negotiated benefits for state employees and participating local government employees. It currently includes Dental Care, Vision Care, Prescription Drug, and Package Benefits for government employees. It currently administers Dental Care, Vision Care, Prescription Drug, and Package Benefits for state employees and participating local government employees. It currently includes Dental Care, Vision Care, Prescription Drug, and Package Benefits for government employees. It currently administers Dental Care, Vision Care, Prescription Drug, and Package Benefits for state employees and participating local government employees.

For questions regarding any of the benefits, call your CSEA Unit or Local representative or shop steward. If they are unavailable, contact your CSEA Labor Relations Specialist at the appropriate regional office. Do not delay if you believe you have a problem; grievances must be filed on a timely basis.

Insurance
CSEA offers several insurance programs at low group rates and provides the convenience of automatic payroll deduction.

These voluntary group plans include: Basic Group Life, Supplemental Life, Income Protection Program, Hospital Indemnity Plan, Family Protection Plan, Auto Insurance and Homeowners Insurance. For more details, call 1-800-366-5273 or (518) 381-1600.

Health Insurance
For health insurance questions concerning Empire Plan coverage, call the appropriate following telephone number:

EMPIRE PLAN
Blue Cross Claims 1-800-342-9815 or (518) 465-0171
Metropolitan Claims 1-800-942-4640
Participating Providers 1-800-537-0010
Empire Plan Health Call 1-800-992-1213
(Hospital admission approval/surgical review)

Retirement
If you are retiring soon, it's important that you select the proper option from the Employees' Retirement system.

By using the services of a CSEA-provided retirement counselor, you'll be able to plan for a lifestyle in your retirement years that takes into account your anticipated expenses.

For more information, call 1-800-366-6273. General retirement information and retiree membership information are available by contacting CSEA's Retiree Department at CSEA Headquarters 1-800-342-4146 or (518) 434-0191.

Technical retirement benefit questions (i.e., eligibility for service buy-back, transfer of membership), requests for retirement allowance applications, and requests for retirement estimate applications should be directed to the New York State and Local Retirement Systems at (518) 474-7736.

State employees over the age of 50 and their spouses can attend DIRECTIONS, a two and one-half day pre-retirement planning seminar sponsored by CSEA. For more information, call (518) 486-1918.

United Buying Service
Get big savings on consumer products through the union's official discount buying service. UBS combines the power of millions of members to negotiate discounts on a whole range of major name discount products.

Everything from automobiles to major appliances, video to home furnishings and more. The program is free to CSEA members and carries no service charges. To place an order or for pricing information, call 1-800-336-4UBS or 1-800-877-4UBS. UBS has also set up a hotline for information on limited special monthly offers available only to CSEA members. For a listing of specials, call the hotline at 1-203-967-2989.

Grievances, Disciplines
If you believe you have a grievance, immediately contact your local grievance representative or shop steward. If they are unavailable, contact your CSEA Unit or Local President, or your CSEA Labor Relations Specialist at the appropriate regional office.

Do not delay if you believe you have a problem; grievances must be filed on a timely basis.

CSEA REGIONAL OFFICES

LONG ISLAND REGION 1 OFFICE
Hauppauge Atrium Building
300 Vanderbilt Motor Pkwy.
Hauppauge, NY 11788
(516) 273-2282
(518) 435-0962

SOUTHERN REGION 3 OFFICE
Rural Route 1
Box 34, Old Route 9
Foxskill, NY 12524
(914) 896-8180

CENTRAL REGION 5 OFFICE
6555 Kirckville Road
East Syracuse, NY 13057
(315) 433-0050

METROPOLITAN REGION 2 OFFICE
Suite 1500
11 Broadway
New York, NY 10004
(212) 514-9200

WESTERN REGION 6 OFFICE
Suite 402
1215 Western Avenue
Albany, NY 12203
(518) 489-5424

CSEA STATEWIDE HEADQUARTERS
143 Washington Avenue, Albany, N.Y. 12210
1-800-342-4146 (toll-free)
(518) 434-0191
Press 5 for Current Issues Update.

February 4, 1991
They work hellish jobs for less than heavenly pay

Westchester County psychiatric aides

By Anita Manley
CSEA Communications Associate

VALHALLA — CSEA says psychiatric aides who work at Westchester County’s Psychiatric Institute deserve better pay and the union is preparing to file for upgrading of those employees. And hazardous duty pay should also be part of the salary package, said CSEA Labor Relations Specialist Max Neuberger.

Westchester’s psychiatric aides, who work with psychotic patients and felons who can be extremely volatile and dangerous, are paid considerably less than therapy aides who work in state facilities.

All units dangerous

“All the units here are dangerous,” Senior Psychiatric Aide Don King said. “Many of the patients have a dual diagnosis; many are psychotic and are also here for detoxification from drugs.”

Most patients are not brought to the institute willingly. Many are criminals who were ordered there by a judge and delivered by police. Wards are secure and all patients must be watched continuously. All participate in recreational and occupational therapy and younger patients attend an in-hospital school program during the day.

“Younger patients are just as dangerous as the rest,” King said. “Some of the 12-year-old boys weigh 250 pounds; they’re not little children. We’ve had patients who are wrestlers and boxers.”

Health concerns

CSEA members, who must see that patients are cleaned up when admitted, say they are concerned about bringing home lice, crabs or other serious diseases to their families. Many patients arrive at the institute ill and filthy, the employees said.

In addition to attending to patients’ daily needs, aides are expected to observe their clients and report any unusual incidents to doctors. The institute is a teaching hospital so aides must also help train nurses.

The facility also provides an out-patient clinic and employees said they worry about weapons and contraband brought into the building. Employees are expected to deal with any crisis which occurs with out-patients.

Hospital patients in nearby Westchester County Medical Center who experience psychotic episodes are also tended to by the aides. Psychiatric aides are often sent to help quell disturbances in the facility or on the grounds of the institute, said CSEA member Israel Serrano.

Millions of incidents

“There are millions of incidents here — we are punched, kicked and bitten on a daily basis,” Omar Dotson said. “It can be so quiet at times and suddenly, someone explodes. Sometimes it’s difficult to protect yourself.”

Most units average about 18 patients, with two or three psychiatric aides assigned to each unit. The employees spend nearly their entire 12-hour workday performing direct patient care.

Most aides are scheduled for three 12-hour shifts per week, but with a starting salary of $19,323 most work five or six days each week to earn enough overtime pay to keep up with the cost of living in Westchester County, CSEA said. One aide said he worked 10 straight days.

The facility has used an outside agency occasionally when staffing is short, and that is an additional concern for the employees. Inexperienced aides may not know how to deal with a volatile psychotic patient, and that can be dangerous for co-workers who need to protect each other when incidents occur, Ron Williams said. Williams recently returned to work after being seriously injured by a patient.

More training needed, too

CSEA’s Neuberger said the county should consider an upgrading, an allowance for hazardous duty and additional training for its employees at the Psychiatric Institute. He said he has nearly completed the paperwork to file for the upgrades.

“These employees are performing the same duties as our therapy aides who work in state facilities, yet they are earning considerably less than state employees,” Neuberger said. “They risk their lives every day that they go to work and should be given more training and consideration for the hazards they encounter.”

CSEA LABOR RELATIONS SPECIALIST Max Neuberger, left, meets with Westchester County psychiatric aides to discuss hazardous conditions under which they work at the Westchester County Psychiatric Institute. Aides Don King, Omar Dotson, Ron Williams and Israel Serrano describe their personal experiences to assist Neuberger in filing a request for upgradings.