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OSARC newsletter



How New Yorkers Fought Back

OSARC's April trip will explore the drama of social activism in New York City from the 17th century to the present. New Yorkers have banded together on issues as diverse as labor rights, historic preservation, civil rights, sexual orientation, and religious freedom.

We'll be taking a guided tour of the Museum of the City of New York's *Activist New York* exhibit.

Using artifacts, photographs, AV presentations and interactive components, *Activist New York* presents the passions and conflicts that underlie the city's history of agitation during different protest periods from abolition, women's suffrage, and the Settlement House movement through more recent issues like the controversy over an Islamic community center near Ground Zero.

OSARCers who have pre-registered and paid the \$14 tour fee will be treated to a docent-guided tour of the exhibit. Members will gather at the Museum of the City of New York, 1220 Fifth Avenue between 103rd and 104th Streets at 1:45pm sharp, meeting at the bench past the gift shop in the rotunda.

OSARCers attending the tour can reach the museum via the #2 or #3 train to Central Park North/110th Street. Walk one block east to Fifth Ave, then south to 104th Street. You can also take the #6 train downtown at 103rd and Lexington. The uptown #6 platform at 103rd Street is closed for renovation. For uptown service to this station, take an uptown #4 or #6 to 125th Street and transfer to a downtown #6. You can also take the M1, M2, M3, M4 or M106 bus to 104th Street.

Next Organization of Staff Analysts' Retirees Club Event

Wednesday • April 13, 2016 • 1:45pm Gathering Time

OSARC Tours "Activist New York" Exhibit

Museum of the City of New York, 1220 Fifth Avenue, between 103rd and 104th Streets (Gather at the bench past the gift shop in the rotunda)

OSARC Officers 2015-2016

Chairs.....Jay Warshofsky, Theodore White
 Vice-Chairs.....Sybil Allen, Jane Kelly
 Treasurer.....Fred Ranzoni
 Asst Treasurers.....Hattie Thomas, Judy Berg
 Secretary.....Joyce Cleveland
 COMRO Representatives.....Mark Lewis, Ted White, Jay Warshofsky



Newsletter Editor/Photos.....Rob Spencer
 Reporter/Writer.....Joyce Cleveland

We'll Be Seeing You In All The Old Familiar Places

Approximately fifty-six (56) OSARC members and friends attended the March meeting:

Sybil Allen, Hakimah Al-Zahra, Sharon Austin, Mike Barbarotto, Renee Boyce, Wayne Brelowski, Joyce Cleveland, Arthur Cohen, Bonnie Dermack, Thomas Duggan, Manny Friedman, Eleanor Gibson, Sherman Gould, Estelle Green, Stan Greenberg, Jean Grenning, Al Gundersheimer, Betty Henderson, Mary Hillman, Barbara Hunt, Ed Husbands, Rosalia Jackson, Marvel James, Barbara Jones, Linda Kavanagh, Jane Kelly, Kaye Lee, Rosanne Levitt, Carol Marker, John Mazzarella, Dan Morgan, Jill Obertubbesing, Eileen Pentel, Doreen Petrus, Gloria Pettyjohn, Bob Pfefferman, Ed Platt, Nilsa Rios, Nancy Russell, Waguih Sabongui, Michael Schady, Joyce Scott, Andrew Sessa, Marilyn Sessa, Velma Small, Bill Smarrito, Tomi Smith, Joe Sperling, Sallie Stroman, Hattie Thomas, Victor Toribio, Nadine Valenti, Dorothy Wallace, Jay Warshofsky, Teddy White, Linda Young



Thomas Duggan

Attending their first OSARC meeting were **Thomas Duggan** who retired as an Admin Staff Analyst at DCAS in 2011 and **Arthur Cohen** who retired as an Associate Staff Analyst at Finance in 2011. Welcome, **Thomas** and **Arthur**. We look forward to seeing *you* at our next meeting or event!

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In Memoriam

With sadness, we report the deaths of three retirees. **Gerard Joyce** retired as an Associate Staff Analyst at the NYPD in 2011. **Robert Kuman** retired as an Administrative Staff Analyst at the Dept of Sanitation in 2010. **Alice Shiller** retired in 1995 as a Supervising Systems Analyst at HHC's Metropolitan Hospital. The *Newsletter* extends its condolences to the family and friends of these retirees.

May Brings Speakers on Prescription Drug Coverage

April showers may bring May flowers, but May at OSARC brings important speakers. Confused about the prescription drug coverage available to City retirees in the GHI and HIP health plans? OSARC's May meeting is your opportunity to ask your questions – and have them answered – as EmblemHealth's pharmaceutical department addresses OSARCers on the drug coverage available to City workers on both plans. EmblemHealth will also provide an overview of the health plan changes facing non-Medicare retirees in July of this year in GHI and HIP.



Arthur Cohen

In addition, a representative of US Labor Against the War will make a presentation on the organization and how you can become involved. A national organization of unions and other labor organizations founded in January of 2003 to oppose Bush's threatened war on Iraq, it is today a network of more than 165 unions, labor councils, state labor federations, allied labor organizations and labor antiwar committees.

Meantime, a subcommittee of OSARC officers and former officers are checking out facilities for the gala June luncheon. Look for information on the destination chosen in the May issue of this *Newsletter* and then send in your payment for what is always a memorable event.

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Are Americans Ready for Retirement?

No, according to the annual retirement survey of the Employment Benefit Research Institute. EBRI says the divide between those ready for retirement and those lagging in preparation is growing. The survey found that many workers are not confident in their financial future. Those without defined benefit pensions and 401(k)'s find it especially tough to stay on track.

Workers without these retirement vehicles are now finding they have to remain in the workforce long after the normal retirement age, according to the AFL-CIO affiliated Alliance for Retired Americans. ARA President Robert Roach said, "they simply are unable to stop working."



Barbara Hunt

Is Raising The Social Security Retirement Age Bad?

Conservatives have frequently called for raising the full Social Security retirement age to 70. Such a move would be devastating says the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR), especially for older workers in physically demanding jobs. Raising the age to 70 would mean millions of workers would be forced to continue in jobs that become increasingly risky as they get older.

CEPR recently released new findings about the demographics of older workers in physically demanding work. Of workers 58 and older, 37% of males and 31% of females (10 million workers) hold physically demanding jobs.

Minorities and workers with lower levels of education are especially at risk. The affected jobs often include standing for most of the day and lifting heavy objects, but can also include unsafe work environments, working around hazardous materials or laboring outdoors. More than half of older Latino workers are employed in jobs that are either physically demanding or in a dangerous environment. And, 68% of older workers in physically demanding jobs do not have a high school diploma or GED.

The assumption made in proposals to raise the retirement age is that older workers are exclusively in office work environments with heating and air conditioning and few physical demands, an assumption the CEPR report debunks.



Be a Smart Cookie

Last July, Nabisco, part of the transnational Mondelez, announced plans to invest \$130 million more in a new plant in Salinas, Mexico, while closing its historic Chicago cookie plant, kicking 600 workers to the street. The workers at Nabisco, members of the Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union, had refused to accept \$46 million in concessions in perpetuity. The BCTMG has created a petition to Mondelez CEO Irene Rosenfeld seeking to save the American jobs. You can sign and find out more at www.fightforamericanjobs.org. Meanwhile, if your Nabisco cookies are made in Mexico, pass them by and tell your store manager not to stock them.

I'm Sorry, Can You Repeat That?

by Joyce Cleveland, OSARC Secretary



Art by Ted White

March OSARC guest speaker Carolyn Ginsburg Stern is the manager of the Center for Hearing and Aging (CHA). She develops educational and outreach programs on hearing health for senior adults, caregivers and healthcare providers. She also oversees community outreach programs with the CHA's audiological mobile unit. CHA was organized in 2012 as a direct response to research showing that untreated hearing loss can actually increase risks for or speed up cognitive decline, dementia and Alzheimer's Disease.

Stern holds an MBA from Columbia University's School of Business and a Bachelor of Arts from Northwestern University. Before joining the Center for Hearing and Communication in 2012, she had a successful career with American Express, Kraft Foods and Nabisco.

In a spirited meeting, Ms. Stern explored such topics as the prevalence of hearing loss, the challenges of hearing loss, stigma around hearing loss, the necessity of treating hearing loss quickly, the link between hearing loss and dementia, why hearing loss happens, hearing loss research, solutions for hearing loss and the cost of assistive hearing devices.

Guest speaker Carolyn Ginsburg Stern uses a wireless transmitter microphone (in her hand) amplifying her voice for those OSARCers trying assistive listening devices.



Hearing Loss Is Not Unique

Ms. Stern pointed out that hearing loss is not uncommon. “Did you think that hearing loss was unique or applicable to only a few older people?” she asked. Testing has shown that 30% of people in the age group from 65 to 74 have some hearing loss. At 75, the percentage rises to 32%. Between 75 and 80, 67% have some degree of hearing loss. By age 90, almost everyone is hearing challenged to some degree.

“We find that when we bring our van to senior centers, almost everyone fails the screening,” said Stern. “You are not alone if you’re experiencing challenges.”

Stern distributed personal sound amplifiers to willing OSARCers from the display of assistive listening devices she had brought to demonstrate as part of the program. “So, let’s do a sound check,” said Stern. “Can you hear me?” she asked. There were no negative responses.

“The devices you’re using give you a sense of what a

hearing aid could do for you. It’s not as sophisticated as a hearing aid, because hearing aids will block out background noise better than these devices. This device is just amplifying the sound.”

Stern pointed out that this type of device is available at many movie theaters in New York City. “If you think they may be helpful, ask the theater box office for the listening device. There are various types. Some of them have headsets. Some of them have captioning devices, so you can actually read the text of the dialogue. You can also ask for these devices at Broadway theaters.”

The Challenge of Hearing Loss

The biggest challenge of hearing loss is that hearing loss is *invisible*, Stern explained. “I’m hearing impaired, but I’ll bet you didn’t notice.” Ms. Stern has had bilateral sensorineural hearing loss since early childhood and benefits from a cochlear implant in one ear and a digital hearing aid in the other.

“I struggle with hearing loss every day. Even I forget my limits because I don’t see them. It’s not in front of my face. Then, I walk into a noisy room and I’m struggling. I don’t hear well. It’s so hard to have that self-awareness because it happens very gradually.”

“I was hearing impaired from a very young age, but for most older adults, hearing loss is very gradual. It’s just a little bit worse every year and it starts to add up. At some point, it becomes noticeable.



Renee Boyce

At the same time, you start making adjustments and readjusting to the new level of ‘not hearing.’ All of a sudden, you start needing the TV a little louder, and then the neighbors get annoyed because the TV is so loud. Hearing loss becomes your new way of life.”

The Stigma of Hearing Loss

Ms. Stern noted, “for some there is a stigma around hearing loss. They don’t want to wear hearing aids. They don’t want to address it. Why do you think that is?”

“They’re vain,” someone answered.

“There weren’t probably a lot of positive role models of deaf individuals when they were growing up” Stern responded to her own question. For most adults, deafness was negatively perceived during their formative years. “Deaf people were ‘deaf and dumb’—perceived to be not bright. With the assistive equipment they had then, amplification wasn’t very good.”

“Now, the amplification is much better. There is more

acceptance, especially among the younger population. Children go to school with many children who are deaf or hard of hearing. Many children have the cochlear implants that they get at a very young age and that helps them to acquire language much more quickly. Also, people are wearing other types of devices on their ears such as cell phone head sets and earpieces and so there is more acceptance of deaf and hard of hearing people.”

Why It Is Important To Treat Hearing Loss

Several reasons to treat hearing loss were discussed. They include safety, environmental risks, balance, quality of life, and the link of deafness to dementia.

OSARCers had a number of responses to Stern’s question to them about the relationship between safety and hearing loss. Individuals with hearing loss may not be able to hear fire alarms or the doorbell, or alarm clocks. Another person said one could be distracted on the street or in subways.

Stern added, “you are active seniors, out and about. Many New York seniors are more confined. So, when they don’t hear the doorbell, they don’t get their Meals-on-Wheels delivery. The sidewalks are busy and bicyclists and skateboarders may warn that they are coming, but if you’re not hearing well, you won’t notice until it’s too late. Hearing loss decreases the ability to hear important alarms, such as smoke or carbon monoxide detectors, doorbells or overhead announcements in the subway or when you’re in the hospital.”

Stern noted, “if you are out and about, there are risks in the environment, including not hearing people ask you to move over, cars honking as you cross the street, or being unaware that a biker is rapidly or recklessly approaching you.”

Research is showing that those with even mild hearing loss have a 30% chance of falling. It is thought that because your hearing “center” is located near your balance “center,” hearing loss can affect balance. Stern said “researchers who studied falls and hearing loss also felt that those with hearing loss are often distracted. Those with hearing loss are so focused on trying to understand information, that they are less aware of what’s going on around them. They use so much energy understanding what is going on that they have much less energy left to manage balance. You are always on the defensive to protect yourself. If you get amplification, she suggested, “it will help you to become more aware of your environment.”

Hearing loss also impacts our quality of life, causing distraction and isolation. Stern took an inventory of quality of life activities with OSARCers. How many of you like to listen to music, go to the theater, watch movies at home, go to parties, travel, go to lectures? There was agreement that

these activities were enjoyable. Her follow-up was to point out that many do less and less because they are not hearing well. “There are studies that show that those who treated their hearing loss show better satisfaction in their life. They show less depression, anxiety, and isolation. That’s the last thing you want – isolation. You do not want to be disconnected.”

“If you’re going to a house of worship, church, mosque or synagogue, how difficult is it to hear or to pray?” “Yes,” some answered. “That’s so difficult because, for so many people, those are a tremendous source of support and networking. I can’t tell you how many clients tell me they can’t participate in their place of worship. Just socializing afterward becomes an issue, because they can’t hear.”

Hearing Loss and Dementia

“Is it a surprise to anyone that there’s a link between hearing loss and cognitive issues?,” Stern asked. Several persons said they were surprised.

“Get your hearing tested every year and do something about it. Do not wait.” Stern said that people wait 7 to 10 years before they do anything regarding their hearing loss.

According to Stern, Dr. Frank Lin, a researcher at Johns Hopkins University, had a grandmother who suffered from hearing loss and he made it his life’s work to study why hearing loss is so prevalent in the aging. His theory is that “when we get older, our cognitive and physical functions naturally decline and, if you get amplification, it will stop that cognitive decline.”

Ms. Stern described the theory this way: “When you don’t hear well, you become more isolated and you’re not as connected with your community and your friends. As a result, it’s almost a double whammy. If you’re not hearing well and you’re using all that energy to process information, it really robs your brain of the ability to take care of all the other functioning that has to happen – making decisions, and managing your gait, your memory and information.” The researcher called it cognitive load. He reasoned that the brain “only has so much energy to process information and, if you’re using all that energy



Kaye Lee



Marvel James

just to make sense of sounds, you have nothing left and it really starts to wear you down and robs you of the ability to retain information and keep your brain healthy.”

Lin was not able to prove the connection, but he was able to show that “if you leave the hearing loss untreated, it can exacerbate and accelerate the memory challenges by as much as one year and that’s very significant.”

She continued, “other researchers have found that people who have hearing loss have accelerated decline in the size of their brains.” One researcher took brain images of people who were deaf, older adults who didn’t hear well, and people who had normal hearing. She found that the area of the brain that manages hearing gets very small for people who are deaf and for people who are older but do not treat their hearing loss, much smaller than for people who heard better.

There was some evidence that the brain will reorganize the brain area that manages hearing when there is hearing loss. Apparently, the brain will allow that real estate to be used for other functions. What that means is that if you wait too long with hearing loss, that the area of the brain that manages your hearing is going to be weaker and you will have a much harder time adapting to hearing aids. Stern suggested that, if you have hearing loss, cut down the 7 – 10 year period most people wait to get treatment to 2 – 3 years or less.

There’s some new research, Stern said, that shows that the risk of dementia rises exponentially as hearing loss increases. When there was mild untreated hearing loss, a person was 2 times more likely to develop dementia; when there was moderate untreated hearing loss, a person was 3 times more likely to develop dementia; and when there was severe untreated hearing loss, the person was 5 times more likely to develop dementia. She further pointed out that there are many researchers trying to assess how much amplification is going to help. She referred to studies in France and Texas showing that if you wear amplification it can improve your



ability to recall information and overall improve your memory functioning.

“I think it’s intuitive. When I hear something really well, I remember it better. If it goes in fuzzy and I’m really not hearing it clearly, I can’t remember it clearly. I just start making up stuff. I just make up what I thought I heard and that’s torture.”

Causes of Hearing Loss

Stern noted some of the causes of hearing loss. “As we get older, the main cause is aging, but noise seems to exacerbate the issue, especially if you were exposed to a lot of noise in your occupation or your leisure time, such as going to frequent concerts.”

“Medications can cause hearing loss,” she added. “Usually it’s temporary; sometimes it’s not. It’s very important to be aware of the hearing loss and to get it treated. Hopefully, your hearing will come back when you’re not on the medication anymore.”

Hearing loss usually occurs in the inner ear. The structures of the outer ear mostly serve to protect the ear. It doesn’t really do anything for hearing. Middle ear issues are usually related to infections that can often be corrected surgically. If you’re getting older and you’re having hearing loss, it’s highly likely that the problem is your inner ear that has the cochlea with all the nerve endings. There’s no surgery to correct it. There is a cochlear implant that’s very effective, but not everyone is qualified to get it. You have to fail a lot of tests to get it, but



it's very effective."

She continued, "you should know that everyone's hearing loss is like a fingerprint. It's unique - any two people with, for example, a mild hearing loss who get treatment, may be given a different treatment approach. It's important to know your level of hearing. I may have a mild hearing loss, but be an excellent lip reader; or I may have a mild hearing loss and struggle on the phone."

"It's also important to be honest about how you are functioning in your different listening situations. Hearing loss is individual and so is the adjustment to it."

Ms. Stern said, "find a trained audiologist with at least a Master's degree in audiology. There are hundreds in New York in all boroughs. You can find them listed with the American Academy of Audiologists or the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA). ASHA's Customer Care number is 800-632-8255.

Ms. Stern described steps to take when you have a hearing loss that you want to treat. Go to an audiologist who will measure your hearing loss, or start with an Ear, Nose and Throat doctor or otolaryngologist, who will examine the structure of the ear and make sure it is healthy. They can also remove any excess earwax. It is important to have it removed. You should have it done by a physician or nurse-practitioner or sometimes a physician's assistant. Sometimes your primary physician will do it. Audiologists are not allowed to remove the wax.

You may purchase a hearing aid from an audiologist or a hearing aid dispenser separately (in New York State). The hearing aid dispenser needs only a qualified audiogram. They may not check your hearing.

There was a comment about purchasing a hearing aid at Costco (an example of a hearing aid dispenser). Ms. Stern doesn't look favorably on purchasing a hearing aid from a separate dispenser. "We don't recommend that because your hearing changes over time and your hearing aid will need to be adjusted. We believe you need to develop a relationship with your audiologist."

"Your hearing loss may get worse as you age. Hearing aids can be programmed. They are digital now and can be attached to computer software programs that match your hearing aid with your hearing loss profile. As you get more comfortable with your hearing aid, you may want to return to get your hearing aid adjusted because you are more competent with using it. You can also take speech reading



Wayne Brelowski

classes and other communications courses to help you improve."

Hearing Aid Technology

"Hearing aid technology has changed over the years," Ms. Stern said. The development of the transistor has made it possible for hearing aids to become portable and smaller. There are many different types of hearing aids and that is why it's important to work with someone who can represent a broad range of products, so that you decide what's right for you."

She continued, "Even though hearing aids can be very small, I tend to prefer larger hearing aids for people who are getting older because smaller ones are difficult to manage. It's hard to see the battery and insert it correctly. For someone in their late 80's or 90's, I don't recommend something that's very small. It is really hard to maneuver small hearing aids. When you have a very severe hearing loss you need a lot of power and small hearing aids are not strong enough. Seek the guidance of your audiologist."

Cost of Hearing Aids

An impromptu survey of OSARCers at the meeting yielded a range of prices they had paid for hearing aids. One response was \$5,000 a pair! Hearing aids are costly, said Ms. Stern, but they don't *have to* cost that much. The Center for Hearing and Communication does not offer anything under \$1,500 a pair to ensure they are of quality. She noted that you can obtain hearing aids for a lot less, but "you will definitely get what you pay for."

Costco has hearing aids for \$2,000 - \$3,000 per pair, one OSARCer said. That's a good option, said Ms. Stern, but if you feel that you are someone who wants a lot of attention and care as you are fitted for the hearing aids, you may not get that at Costco. "If you don't need much of a personal relationship, it's an option."

Hearing aids are a union welfare fund benefit. The OSA Welfare Fund will cover up to \$1,500 per ear during a two year period. Hearing examinations are covered once every two years at 90% of the reasonable and customary costs. There is no cash deductible. The benefit can be claimed on the form for Superimposed Major Medical Benefits.



Joyce Scott



Mike Barbarotto

Hearing aids are great, commented Ms. Stern, but they may not necessarily be for everyone. If you want to hear better in specific instances, such as while watching TV, driving, or talking on the phone, there are hundreds of assistive devices.



Victor Toribio tries on an amplification device.

Ms. Stern had on display several assistive listening devices. One that costs \$35 was for a telephone. "Simply connect it to the phone and you are able to amplify the sound so that you can understand conversation and avoid buying a new phone."

After the meeting, many OSARCers signed up for a free hearing loss screening offered by the Center for Hearing and Communication at its New York office at 50 Broadway, 6th floor. The Center also has a Florida office in Fort Lauderdale.

OSARCers were also able to schedule hearing examinations by physicians which are not free but are covered by insurance. The CHC's New York office may be reached at (917) 305-7700.

The Center for Hearing and Communication offers an 8-week program called "*Communicate with Success*," focusing on improving the communication skills of older adults with hearing loss. Through demonstrations, interactive exercises and discussions, participants will learn to feel more confident communicating in a variety of everyday situations such as dining out, speaking with their doctor, shopping and talking on the phone. It is designed for adults 65 and older who have recently been identified with a hearing loss who are having difficulty adjusting to their problem. **This course is free** and begins Thursday, April 21, 2016 at 1 pm. To RSVP, contact Annette Gibbs at 917-305-7840 or agibbs@CHC hearing.org



Gloria Wallace

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Finishing the Fight for Civil Rights

This year, the New York Labor History Association's annual conference will focus on goals that have remained unachieved in the civil rights struggle. "**Can't Turn Back: Unfinished Tasks of the Civil Rights Movement**" will take place Friday, May 6th from 6:30– 8:30pm and Saturday, May 7th from 9am - 3pm at the Cornell School of Industrial and Labor Relations, 16 East 34th Street in Manhattan on the 6th floor. Pre-registration is required. Admission costs \$15, including a boxed lunch and beverages on Saturday. You can register online at newyorklaborhistory.org or mail a check payable to NY Labor History Assn to Peter Filardo, NYLHA Treasurer, 340 W 28 Street, 18A New York NY 10001.

The conference kicks off Friday with a keynote address by Jerald Podair entitled "They Couldn't Wait: A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin and the Struggle for American Equality," and continues Saturday, May 7th with panel discussions on such timely and enduring topics as mass organizing, housing, policing, economic inequality, and education. Panelist include: Clarence Taylor, author of "Knocking At Our Own Door: Milton A. Galamison and the Struggle to Integrate New York City Schools"; Elsia Vasquez, P.A.L.A.N.T.E. Harlem; Johanna Fernandez, author of "When the World Was their Stage: A History of the Young Lords Party, 1968-1974"; Zakiyah Ansari, New York State Alliance for Quality Education; Roberta Gold, author of "When Tenants Claimed the City: The Struggle for Citizenship in New York City Housing"; Lisa Johnson, member, 1199SEIU, the Fight For Fifteen Campaign; Peter Eisenstadt, author of "Rochdale Village: Robert Moses, 6,000 Families, and New York City's Great Experiment in Integrated Housing"; Linda Oalican, Damayan Migrant Workers Association; Premilla Nadasen, author of "Household Workers Unite: The Untold Story of African American Women Who Built A Movement"; Christine Lewis, Domestic Workers United; Jerald Podair, author of "The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis" and Kwan-Lamar Blount-Hill, former NYPD police officer and criminal justice academic.

Founded in 1976 by trade unionists, academics, students, archivists, educators, labor editors, attorneys, and retirees, mostly from New York State, NYLHA encourages the study of workers and their organizations.



Gloria Pettyjohn

Justice Antonin Scalia's Timely Death

American workers were granted a temporary reprieve from the latest attack by corporate interests and their political cronies in a 4-4 Supreme Court decision in the much feared *Friedrichs v California Teachers Union* case. Heard by the Court in January, the case seemed well on its way to a 5-4 vote against "agency shop" or "fair share" payments for public sector unions.

However, the unexpected death of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia in February resulted in a one sentence decision upholding the lower court's ruling that such fees are constitutional and do not violate the first amendment rights of civil servants who choose not to voluntarily join unions.

Meantime, conservative forces have pledged to ask the Supreme Court to rehear the case and, failing that, will undoubtedly be searching for another similar case to bring to the Supreme Court on the same issues.

As former *NY Times* labor reporter Steven Greenhouse noted in an article on the decision, the deadlock "will not last forever and labor's critics and foes have vowed to keep up the fight – redoubling efforts to persuade the courts to proscribe any legal requirement that workers pay union fees."

Friedrichs, Greenhouse pointed out, "is one of more than 20 cases in which conservative, libertarian or anti-union groups are seeking to have courts declare unconstitutional mandatory union fees or even the long-time tradition of exclusive union representation."

The head of the Service Employees International Union, observed that "the wealthy special interests in this county see worker organizations as a challenge, and they're going to continue their 40-year attack."

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, labeled the conservative agenda as a "brazen assault on working people."

To most in the public sector labor movement, the case represented a gun pointed to the head of organized public workers which, if decided as had been expected, would have severely wounded the finances of unions like OSA.

In his article, Greenhouse quoted Catherine Fisk, a labor law professor at the University of California, Irvine, that "the future of *Friedrichs* will likely hinge on who the next president is. If a Republican wins and appoints a conservative to succeed Justice Scalia, then the court's new conservative majority would be eager to rehear the case."

With a more progressive Court, Fisk observed that the threat would shift back to the states, where conservative forces have prodded state legislatures to enact so-called "right-to-work" laws over the past few decades.

In addition, they might "go the Wisconsin route and eliminate collective bargaining for various groups of public

employees."

The cases in the pipeline are not exclusive to the public sector. In some of them, the target is private sector union fee requirements.

Greenhouse reports that "conservative groups have also brought several cases asking the courts to rule that the basic notion of exclusive representation – enshrined in the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 – violates employees' first amendment rights under the notion that exclusive representation forces many workers to be represented by unions they might disagree with."

So far, that line of reasoning has not been successful.

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COMRO Report

The Committee of Municipal Retiree Organizations (COMRO) meets monthly, drawing representatives of the retiree sections of various municipal unions, including OSA, for a meeting on subjects of retiree interest. The following is based on minutes from COMRO Secretary Stu Eber and reports from OSARC representatives. Mark Lewis and Jay Warshofsky represented OSARC at the February 10 meeting and Warshofsky represented OSARC at the March 9 meeting.

Adele Rogers circulated a petition on behalf of Food and Water Watch, in opposition to the Safe and Accurate Food Labeling Act, known by its opponents as the DARK Act (Deny Americans the Right to Know Act). DARK would prevent states from requiring warning labels on genetically modified food.

Rogers also urged members to check the NYS Unclaimed Funds list, since many people are owed money by New York State but are unaware. These funds come from sources including inactive bank accounts or insurance policies. To check to see if you have any funds held by the state, visit www.osc.state.ny.us/ouf/individual.htm.

There was no COMRO guest speaker in February or March. A review of possible guest speakers for the future included: Comptroller Scott Stringer; Psychologist Herman Medevsky who lectures on finances and is the author of the book *Planning for the Time We Cannot Plan*; a representative from the Management Benefits Fund; a speaker about voting rights; a speaker from the IRS Taxpayer Advocacy Panel,



Sallie Stroman



Jay Warshofsky

whose mission is to solicit suggestions from the public on how to improve the IRS. Also mentioned were Carolyn Stern, manager of the Center for Hearing and Communication and Barry Kaufman, the new president of the NY State Alliance for Retired Americans.

COMRO also expressed a desire for a guest speaker who can address the effect of the Municipal Labor Committee's recent agreement on health care cost containment on retirees.

Warren Lewis discussed the meeting of the Common Investment Committee of the five city pension funds, which he attended in December. There were only three members of the public, including Lewis, at the December meeting. The first part of the meeting was open to the public. The public, along with reporters, were asked to leave during the closed portion of the meeting.

According to the Comptroller's report, the City pensions, as a group, are 71% funded, which is in the upper range of US municipal pensions.

Lewis mentioned a late January *New York Times* article concerning an audit of the Comptroller's Bureau of Asset Management. The report found that the unit that oversees pensions is understaffed, and lacks necessary oversight ability. Lewis explained that part of the problem is the City finds it hard to attract qualified Wall Streeters for the Bureau due to the comparatively low salaries paid by the City.

Jim Perlstein reported that the Statewide Senior Action Council has analyzed Gov. Cuomo's budget as to how it will affect senior citizens. Further information can be found on their website: <http://www.nysenior.org>.

Mark Lewis reported that he has contacted the office of Rep. Nita Lowey, and is waiting for an appointment to meet with her on COMRO's concern about the impact of federal bankruptcy on municipal pensions.

Perlstein said that the 2016 election cycle is a good opportunity to press candidates on social safety net issues. The NYC and NYS Alliance for Retired Americans have both decided not to just give the usual endorsements, but to vet candidates for federal, state and city offices with questions about specific legislation.

Mark Lewis observed that four separate elections will take place in NY State this year. The Presidential Primary will be held on 4/19/16; the Congressional Primary on 6/28/16; the NYS Senate and Assembly Primary on 9/13/16; and the General Election on 11/8/16. Mark said the NYS Assembly would agree to hold their primary on 6/28, but the NYS Senate so far has resisted, because they will still be in session and unable to campaign. Moving the state primary up would eliminate one election day and save taxpayers millions.

Norman Rosenfeld stated that NYCERS recently changed its notification procedures for post-retirement death benefits other than pensions. A "Designation of Beneficiary for Post Retirement Benefits Form" has to be filled out. Unfortunately,

the form is part of a package that is mailed after the member's death, and it arrives too late to be filled out by the member.

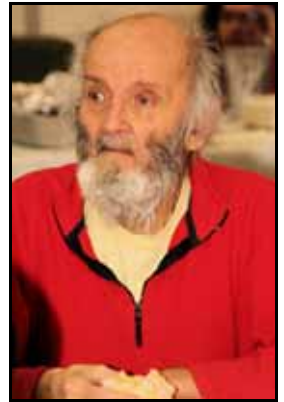
Warren Lewis reminded COMRO members that an IRA outside of a will requires the designation of primary and contingent beneficiaries. Failure to do this will result in major problems. Also, he said, many retirement accounts don't notify people that they must take required minimum distributions (RMDs) after age 70½. It is the responsibility of the individual to stay on top of this since they will be subject to penalties for failing to take the RMD.

Bob Souto reported that he and Eddie Leong attended the NYS Public Employees Conference, which discussed the Constitutional Convention referendum, which will be on the ballot in 2017. He observed that there is pressure to amend the State Constitution to take pensions away from politicians convicted of corruption. This could increase the chances that current constitutional protection of public employee pensions could be removed.

John Hyland noted that a rally and march in front of Governor Cuomo's NYC office was planned. The faculty union, PSC/CUNY has been working without a contract for six years. Negotiations have stalled. Now, Governor Cuomo has taken \$485 million out of his executive budget for CUNY and said that funding should be a City responsibility. Even if the Assembly and Senate manage to put the money back in the state budget, that will leave CUNY underfunded, the faculty with no contract or raise and the students with increased tuition costs.

Jim Perlstein said different unions have different approaches to legislative and regulatory remedies to reduce fossil fuel usage. Many unions are coming together to educate and advocate around climate change issues. Locally, Trade Unions for Energy Democracy is working with the CUNY Murphy Institute.

John Hyland reminded COMRO members of a commitment to develop questions for parent unions to ask of the presidential, congressional and state legislature candidates when they are vetting them this election year.



Dan Morgan



Sharon Austin

Happy Birthday to OSA Retirees Born in April

John Adair , Gerardo V Afbale , Anthony Aguiar , Susan B. Allison , Joseph Alvarez , Velma Ambrose , Florence Appelstein , James Arango , Jewel Bachrach , Roger Bachrach , Robert Backes , Mike Barbarotto , Gwendolyn Barnes , Beatrice Barr , Barry F Bealick , Ruth Bell , Jerome Bernstein , Aquila Blyden , James Breiningner , Everett L. Brodgon , Priscilla Budden , Maria Buffong , Joseph O. Buster , Maureen Cannaet , Philip Carlucci , Blanca Carranza , Eugenia Carrington , Belinda L Carroll , Frank Caruso , Sho-Chun (Sue) Chang , Gary Chestaro , Ruth Clark , Stephen Clifton , Robert Cohen , Linda Coleman , Maria Colucci , Henrietta Council , Charles A Covella , Stuart Cowan , Ralph De Mattia , Vera DeGazon , Rose Del Gaudio , Karamoko Diabi , Philip Dinanzio , Jr , Jack M. Dobrow , Mark Doherty , Allen Dotson , Walter J. Dugan , Mary Ann Dulisse , Dorothy L. Dye , Mohsen El-Fishawi , Mostafa Elazabawy , Gloria Erardy , Frank Farkas , Mildred Susan Feinstein , Linda Feldherr , Waltraud Fierman , Richard Fink , Kenneth Finnerty , Ann Fitton , Vivian Fletcher , Carmen A. Flores , Gerald Flynn , Judy Flynn , Karen Frederick , Peter Frith , Linda Garbarino-Kunin , Carl George , Lorraine Gewirtz , Mildred Gil , Debora Goldscheim , Lyudmila Goldsteyn , Jeffrey Goldstein , Jorge G. Gomez , Pedro Gonzalez , Donald Greco , Stanley Greenberg , Elaine L. Greene , Frederick Grimaldi , Brenda A Hamilton , Margie Harter , Amette Heim , Jacquelyn Henderson , Gwendolyn Hickman , Joyce Hicks , Hunter Hild , Bruce Himelfarb , Andrew Hollander , Jacqueline Holmes-Boyd , Marion Howe , Clark Hudson , Vivienne Hutchinson , Jeanette D Ingrassia , Howard William Ivey , Raymond James , Janice James , Susan Jensen , Gloria Jimenez , Shirley Jones , George Joseph , Amy Kahu , Margaret Kelly , Lorraine Kelly , Daniel D Kerbawy , Rebecca Kercado , Margaret Kiely , Arnold Kingston , Roberta Kolin , Lawrence A. Lamanna , Claudette aMelle , Judith Lawson , Warren Lederman , Donald Lepore , Janet Liberman , Lillie R Lockhart , John Lucarelli , Mary Ludvigsen , Emilia Magpili , Theresa Mancuso , John Maniscalco , Salvatore Mauro , Thomas McGann , James Meyer , Joseph Mickens , Nanette Milazzo , Paula Miller , Richard Mitchell , John Mobeyd , Nicholas Monello , Barbara Mont , Hope Morris , Felice Morris , Kathleen Neary-Burns , Samuel Nicolas , Robert Noble , John O'Brien , Lawrenca Ogunleye , Michael Olenick , Andrew K Omo-Abu , Melvin Parker , Richard Pearlmutter , Helen Peets-Phillip , Dean Petrelis , Gloria Pettijohn , Alfred J. Piro , Julia Quagliano-Lynn , Raisa Rapoport , Robert Reeves , Richard Reichard , Richard Reiskin , Isidore Resnick , Lewis Jr Riley , Ronald Rivera , Reinert R. Roaldsen , Jane Robinson , Horace Robinson , Nancy L. Rodriguez , Rosario Romano , Ouida Russell , Lorraine M. Russo , Darryl Samuels , Althea Scales , Joseph Schenker , Jack Schulstein , Janice Segman , Anne Selwyn , Janice Shaheen , Jenny D. Siff , Sharon S. Snell , Steven Sokolowski , Stanley Spector , William H. Spong , Anabella Stancarone , Fred Steinberg , Brenda Stoute , David Sussman , Ruben Sutton , Edward B. Tennant , David Terruso , Deloris Thomas , Preston Thomas , Gilda Thomas , Irene Toler , Barbara Toussant , Florence Wagener , Linda Walker , Thomas J. Walsh , Victoria J. Washington , Wendy Weekes-Jones , Ruth Weiner , James Welby , Wallace Williams Jr. , Peter Wood , Noel Worrell , Mary Young , Joseph Zaccone , Leola Zeigler



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Robert Highsmith
Diane Hildebrand
Susan A. Hill
Mary Hillman
Perry Hilton
Bruce Himelfarb
Isalyn Hinds
Sylvia Hodge
Andrew Hollander
Elena Holmes
Jacqueline Holmes-Boyd
Rita Honskman
Patricia Horan
Polly Horton
Marion House
David Houser
Carolyn Hubbard
Clark Hudson
William Hundley
Barbara Hunt
Dorothy Hunt
Robert P. Hurley
Sandra Hurston
Edmond Husbands
Lawrence Iannozzo
Maria A. Ibanez
Ernest Ikpe
Haydee Inclan
Margaret Ingram
Jeanette D. Ingrassia
Gennaro Inace
Raffaella Inace
Ruben Irizarry
Ana M. Irizarry-Ibrahim
Camille Isaacs
Mark Isacoff
Rosalia Jackson
Valerie Jackson
Pearl Jackson
Evelyn, Green Jackson
Janice Jackson-Jones
Brenda A. Jackson-leacock
Daniel J. Jacobson
Carollee Jacques
Christobal Jacques
Anna M. James
Marvel James
Elsie James
Calvin James
Pauline M. James
Alonzo Jamison Jr.
Noel Jefferson
Ina Jenkins
Gloria Jimenez
Colleen Jinks
Daniel P. John
Cladie Johnson
James L. Johnson
Ingrid Johnson
Marilyn Johnson
Sylvia Johnson

Lorraine Johnson
Carl Jones
Flora Jones
Barbara Jones
William Jones
Shirley Jones
Wilhelmina Jones
Roslyn Jones
Eloyee Jones
Patricia Jordan
Brenda Jordan
Deirdre Jordan
Glenn M. Joseph
Karol Joswick
Amy Kahn
Armen Kaladjan
Melvin Kalmanowitz
Herschel Kaminsky
Arnold Kaplan
Elizabeth Karetzky
DANIEL KATZ
William Katz
Laurie Katz
Linda Kavanagh
Robert Keifer
Jeffrey Keller
Jane Kelly
John Kelly
Charles Kelly
Margaret Kelly
Lorraine Kelly
Valerie Kemp
Jeannie Kempson
Carol A. Keyser
Eleanor Kinard
Mavis King
Harry King
Anthony Kinkel
Kathleen Kinney
Bruce Kirkland
Zoya Kiseleva
Elizabeth Klaber
Laura Kleeman
Daniel Klein
Alfred Klein
Ezard Knight
Vivian S. Kochanoff
Marie-Ann Koegler
Jules Kohn
Lee Kong
Marilyn Kozin
Jerome Kraus
Sandra Krentcil
Madeleine Kronish
Bruce Krueger
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Diane Lalondriz
Lawrence A. Lamanna
Saundra Lamb
Claudette LaMelle
Jerry LaMura
George Lang
Dolores Lapin-Curley
Lazare Lareche
Jacqueline Larkin-Figueroa
Jose A. Latorre
Charles W. Lawrence
Yvonne Laws
Judith Lawson
Betty K Lee
Victor Lee
Tony Lee
Rev. Kaye Lee
Gerald Lee
Barbara LeGoff
david a. lehmann
Henry H. Lenz
Thomas Leonard
Donald Lepore
Sidney Lerner
Nicholas Lesanti
Lorna Lettman
Gloria Levan
Stephen Levine
Fred Levine
Morton Levine
Yury Levit
Rosanne Levitt
Barry Levy
Lewis Levy
Michael Lewis
Janet Liberman
Fred Lieber
John Liebmann
Joyce Liechenstein
Michael Light
Laura Limuli
Maria Linares
Jayne Lindberg
Barbara Linder
Marilyn Liveric
Joyce D. Livingston
Moon-Chuen Lo
Lillie R. Lockhart
Leopold Loher
Brenda Lomax
Lucille Long
Christopher F. Longueira
Jesus Lopez
Nicholas Loretto
Irene Louie
Rosa Lovejoy
Chien Sau Lu
Hattie Lucas
Joseph Lucas
Grace Lucas
Flora Lucchese
Mary Ludwigsen