

RETIREE news&views

A PUBLICATION OF LOCAL 237 RETIREE DIVISION

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Celebrating 12,000 Retirees and counting

We have reached a milestone — we now have 12,000 active retirees.
WELCOME TO ALL NEW RETIREES!

The Retiree Division staff are here to assist, support, and guide you through this new chapter of your life.

Please stay connected with us. We like to know what retirees are doing during retirement.

Feel free to stop by the office at 216 West 14th Street 6th floor or via telephone 212-807-0555 and a Retiree Division staff member will review benefits and provide you with information.

LOCAL 237 VETERANS PAYING HOMAGE TO ALL VETERANS



Greetings from Executive Board
(l-r) Ruben Torres, Jeanette Taveras and Donald Arnold.



Retirees in attendance



Retiree and Veteran
Wilfredo Velez with
Luz Carty, Retiree Division
Assistant to the Director



Edith Johnston, Retiree
Division Deputy Director



Retiree and Veteran
Anthony Cottone



Dignity Memorial
representatives



Greetings from U.S. Marines



Retirees participated in the Toys for Tots Campaign.
Toys are distributed to children in need across the five boroughs.

In honor of Veteran's day, the retiree division presented an informative and inspiring program that included a presentation from the Veteran's Affairs, U.S. Marines, Dignity Memorial, and beautiful song selections to tribute to this special program. Perhaps the most integral component of the program was personal remembrance of military service, led by Staff Facilitator Luz Carty and members of the Retiree Division Veteran Committee Army: Anthony Cottone, Wilfredo Velez and Leroy Nias.

Our veteran retirees shared their own experiences and what it meant to serve in the military as a young adult as well being the parent of a Veteran. The sacrifices, the challenges, and great pride could be felt in the room. Members of the Veteran's Committee: Rocco Brienza, Anthony Cottone, Richard Fischetti, Betty Willis-Harris, Angel Sanchez, Anthony Cottone, Wilfredo Velez and Harry Booker.

In addition to the lovely tribute to all Veterans, Local 237 participated in the U. S. Marines Toys for Tots Campaign that provides toys to children in need across the five boroughs. What a great way to start the holiday season.

*Sending you our warmest thoughts
and best wishes for a wonderful
holiday season.*

*We hope 2024 brings
good health, joy, and laughter.*

From the Local 237 Retiree Division

Julie Kobi Director
Edith Johnston Deputy Director
Elaine Williams Assistant Director
Luz Carty Assistant to the Director
Shavon Banks Secretary
Noelia Quinones Assistant Secretary



by Gregory Floyd

President, Teamsters Local 237 and Vice President-at-Large on the General Board of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters

The Amsterdam News recently reported that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has released a comprehensive report on hate crime statistics for 2022. The data contained in the report is the result of compiling submissions from 13,293 law enforcement agencies, covering over 256 million U.S. inhabitants, 93.5% of the total population.

The findings are troubling.

They reveal a surge in hate-fueled incidents across the United States. In 2022, law enforcement agencies reported 11,634 criminal incidents involving 13,337 offenses, motivated by bias toward race, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender, and gender identity.

This should come as no surprise to most Americans, especially many New Yorkers. It's hard to ignore the headlines.

With African Americans and Muslims continuing to be overrepresented among the victims, there was a 25% increase in anti-Semitic incidents, and anti-LGBTQ crimes rose by 16%; exacerbated by the current chaos in the Middle East, the FBI's next hate crime report is likely to contain statistics that pale by comparison.

A Message From The President

HATING HATE



Not long ago, I was awarded the World Peace Prize and named: "Roving Ambassador for Peace". This prestigious award was bestowed upon me by an organization dedicated to social and labor justice, founded by Father Sean McManus. At the awards ceremony, their two main objectives were described: "To assert the basic principle that peace is the fruit of justice and that working for peace means, in fact, working for social justice". The American Labor Movement was cited as the body that has ceaselessly worked on behalf of these principles since the late 1800s. Fr. McManus talked about great labor leaders such as Richard Trumka, the deceased President of the AFL-CIO, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who both believed that labor justice and social justice are forever intertwined. You can't have one without the other. Dr. King's words were cited as summing up the sentiment best: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." And, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." Sage advice.

But now that I was entrusted with a mighty title and lofty assignment, the questions remain: How does one "rove for peace"? Is it something you actively look for like a missing puzzle piece? Is it

even a job that one person alone can accomplish? And, perhaps the biggest question — especially in light of the times: Will peace eliminate hate OR is it the other way around? Work on getting rid of hate and peace will follow.

For our own country, I may not be one hundred percent sure of the correct answer, but think a good place to start — is voting. We need to elect leaders focused on one thing, and one thing only: Us, the American people. No distractions. No eye toward personal gains — you won the prize, now prove your worth! We need laws and policies that make our citizens feel protected; make them feel they matter; make them feel "at home" in their own nation. We need a show of strength from our leaders that is both reassuring to us and fear-provoking to others. The net result will be a sense of fairness; a unity based on common interests; peace of mind and a feeling of hope that leaves hate with no room to infiltrate. Voting is the best tool for any and all "Roving Ambassadors for Peace". Peace and hate are inextricably bound. Voting and voting wisely is the best way to pull them apart: leaving the latter in tatters and the former the foundation for the future, a legacy for our children. ■

A Message From The Director

Retiree Division A Year in Review: 2023

by Julie Kobi LMSW

Director of the Retiree Division



As we close this year, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all the Local 237 retirees for entrusting the Retiree Division staff with your important matters. Many retirees have reached out on matters of benefits as well as some delicate situations along the way. We have learned so much from all of you and are looking forward to building connections with you in the new year.

Here's a review of what we have accomplished together this year:

- The Retiree Division answered several hundred calls and emails from retirees with an array of inquiries about benefits, Medicare eligibility, caregiver support, community referrals, and much more.
- The pre-retirement seminar was held twice this year. The first session was held virtually, which allowed active members to access the information from the comfort of their own home. The second meeting was held in person. Nearly 500 pre-retirees joined the meetings.

▪ The Retiree Division held a trip in October, retirees attended City Experience Lunch Cruise. It was a great opportunity to connect, catch up with former co-workers and make new friends. It was a beautiful time while exploring the wonderful sights of New York City.

▪ The Retiree Division held classes for the first-time post pandemic. Classes included Introduction to Drawing, Community Crochet, Tai Chi, Afro Fit, and Salsa.

We received positive feedback from retirees. Here are a few comments:

"The exercise strengthened my legs and ankles. I walk much better. I would love the class to go all year round"

— Retiree Iris Rivera

"I appreciate the opportunity to interact with fellow retirees in a pleasant atmosphere. I learned quite a bit about my body's physical capabilities. The instructor was helpful and fully engaged in making the session enjoyable."

— Retiree Forest Hamlor

"Excellent. I became a senior and finally learned to dance."

— Retiree Sheilah Campbell

*"All around wonderful experience each and every class.
Full effort given."*

— Retiree Marvis Andrews

*We are truly honored and proud to have worked with many retirees and their families this year.
Wishing you and your families a happy and healthy holiday season. Cheers to 2024!*



Navidades en Puerto Rico

Por Néstor Murray-Irizarry

Historiador y gestor cultural

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*Oigan mis pobres cantares
Los hombres más instruidos
Para ver si lo que digo
Es verdad dentro de verdades;
Yo trataré de pintarles
En todita su expansión
Y si acaso hay error
En todito lo que pienso
Para que diga lo cierto
Necesito un versador.*

— Décima popular recogida en Morovis, Puerto Rico, 1970

En el pasado y en el presente

Una de las costumbres más populares, según Pedro Carlos Escabi Agostini, durante las navidades en Puerto Rico y en otros países del Caribe hispano, fueron las parrandas. Pedro Carlos Escabi explica que las faenas agrícolas en un país tropical no tienen, como en los templados, el invierno que por fuerza limita las actividades de la siembra y la cosecha, en cuyo caso obliga al agricultor a encerrarse bajo techo por largos períodos debido al mal tiempo. En Puerto Rico, República Dominicana, Cuba y Haití, por ejemplo, siempre es época de siembra y de cosecha. La cosecha del café se terminaba a fines de noviembre o a principios de diciembre. La zafra de la caña de azúcar empezaba a principios de enero. Esto dejaba un lapso de tres semanas entre estas dos grandes cosechas. Las implicaciones religiosas de estas dos fechas son obvias: las fiestas de adviento, Navidad y Epifanía. Algunas de nuestras celebraciones del Ciclo de navidad son: las misas de Aguinaldo, nueve misas que empiezan el 16 de diciembre y terminan el 24 de ese mes; la nochebuena, los Santos inocentes, el Año Nuevo y los Santos Reyes, que terminan con la octava y la octavita. Estas celebraciones son de carácter socioreligioso: parte de ellas se celebran en la Iglesia y parte en la comunidad.

Las parrandas de Navidad se llevan a cabo desde el 15 de diciembre hasta el 15 de enero aproximadamente, representan la costumbre de nuestro pueblo de saludar y compartir con familias, vecinos y amigos durante las noches de la celebración del Ciclo de Navidad. Se toca música y se cantan aguinaldos de salutación y felicitación. Entre otras cosas, estos aguinaldos cantan en las festividades religiosas, saludan a los amigos y piden el uso de hogar para festejar la estación.

Es también costumbre, que después de haber estado un buen rato en la casa que se visita, los miembros de esa familia se unen en parranda y así crece el grupo de personas que alegra la Navidad. Al igual que en la promesa, se cantan décimas y decimillas como medio de presentar, recordar y meditar los temas religiosos y las costumbres tradicionales; también se felicita y se desea salud y prosperidad a familiares y amigos. Es la oportunidad para que algunos miembros del grupo improvisen sus creaciones.

Esta última oración nos recuerda la conocida columna de Nemesio R. Canales que publicó en sus famosos Paliques, Sonata de diciembre que decía: *Majarete, arroz con dulce, almojábanas... Yo voy diciéndome estas palabras muy despacio y muy sosegada y recónditamente, y siento que al decirla se me llena el corazón de cosas de la infancia que cantan y lloran.*

Majarete, arroz con dulce, almojábanas...

¿Dónde estarán aquellas manos resplandecientes de blancura de carne y de alma, que, para estos días de diciembre, tan suaves, tan azules, tan amables, se complacen en recrear mis ojos de niño con las tres exquisitas golosinas que he nombrado, puestas sobre el mantel?

En la actualidad, las circunstancias sociales y religiosas han cambiado el panorama en Puerto Rico. Ya no somos nosotros. Lo que se mantiene bastante intacto es la alegría y las felicidades de vivir la música y las cosas bellas de la vida.

¡Felizidades! ■



Relax, Reflect, and Make a 2024 Financial Resolution!

by David Bonington, CFP®

Financial Planner, Stacey Braun Associates, Inc.



Happy Holidays – and, yes, it's that wonderful time of year again! Chilly – maybe even some flurries in the forecast. Short days, but lights and seasonal music everywhere. Office parties. Candles in windows. Friends and family get-togethers. Gift giving. A month for joy, celebration, and renewal.

But January will be here soon – and with it, the time for resolutions. Many revolve around personal health and well-being: I will exercise more and lose weight. I will eat only heart-healthy food. I will spend more time outside. I will not run late.

One extremely healthy financial resolution to make in 2024 is to take advantage of the counseling benefit offered by Stacey Braun Associates. The benefit includes up to six hours of individual consultation time on almost any financial topic. Meetings are strictly confidential, and because nothing is sold there is never any pressure to buy anything.

A resolution to use this benefit in 2024 will allow you to focus on and get better, higher “resolution” (to use another definition of the word) on matters which are causing confusion or anxiety. Your retirement is supposed to be a time for relaxation and enjoyment. If something of a financial nature is troubling, what could be better than a meeting to address this concern – especially if helpful information and professional suggestions can be obtained. A solution to even a difficult matter might even be developed in a session or two.

Meetings are yours, and you get to select the topic(s), but see if any of these questions spark interest:

1. I haven't drawn Social Security yet – when should I take it?
2. What's the benefit of waiting to draw Social Security?
3. Someone said that if I draw Social Security and take a job I will have to send back some of my Social Security. Is this true?
4. The stock market is making me anxious - should I change my retirement plan holdings?
5. Okay, even if nothing should be done now, when should I make changes?
6. What year must I start to take money from a retirement account? And how much?
7. Every year I pay taxes with money I would rather save – am I overlooking anything which would reduce taxes?

There are sometimes general answers to these kinds of questions, but the best answers are ones which are developed in the context of a client's own unique and personal circumstances. A meeting can bring important facts and details into focus, and help a planner help you make progress toward – what else? – resolution of any pressing financial issues.

Make a resolution to meet in 2024, or (better yet) get a head start on the new year by scheduling a meeting today! ■

A free, confidential session with a Stacey Braun planner can be arranged by calling 1-888-949-1925. No financial products are sold and there is no sales pressure.



The Diabetes Grinch



by **Luz Nieves-Carty MPA**
Assistant to the Director, Retiree Division

It's the time of year for family, food and fun. Sometimes this is dampened by a "Grinch" named DIABETES. While others indulge in egg nog, ham, cookies and pie, people with diabetes stress about the effect consumption will have on their sugar levels. Diabetes is a deadly disease that kills more than 350,000 people each year. Over 2 million New Yorkers are affected by diabetes, and over 500,000 don't even know they have it. Uncontrolled diabetes can lead to long term complications such as blindness, heart attacks, strokes and amputations. It is important to learn the facts and live a lifestyle that is healthy and active. This sounds easy, right? Wrong! It's not easy. Especially during the holidays.

This is why the Retiree Division has developed a relationship with the American Diabetes Association to share important resources and events to help you manage your diabetes. Here are a few tips for the holidays:

- ✓ PLAN FOR THE "cheats". Try to eat a minimum of carbohydrates, drink lots of water and choose just 1 special cheat.

- ✓ SMALLER PORTIONS taste just as good as BIG ones. Use smaller plates, thin glasses for the "coquito", and enjoy the conversation so you will eat slower and feel full.

- ✓ USE ALTERNATIVE SWEETENERS in pies, baked goods and sweet foods. (My daughter made a cream cheese pie with Splenda. No one knew, and it was delicious!)

- ✓ While cooking, nibble on vegetables, nuts or pieces of protein. It will keep you from overloading on breads, rice, yams, and stuffing until it's dinner time.

- ✓ STAY ACTIVE by playing with the grandkids, taking a walk, or exercising before the event.

- ✓ FORGIVE YOURSELF because diabetes is a daily struggle and this season will soon be over. Keep in mind that every little step you take to stay in control will strengthen your discipline for the rest of the year.

The American Diabetes Association is the largest and oldest organization leading the research, education and advocacy for people affected by diabetes. You can visit them online at www.diabetes.org or call 1-800-DIABETES (1-800-342-2383) Monday–Friday for information, recipes and additional resources. ■



Holidays the World Celebrates in December

by **Elaine Williams, LMSW**
Assistant Director, Retiree Division

Local 237 retirees come from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds and celebrate several holidays during the month of December. While Christmas is an annual sacred Christian holiday that commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ, it's not the only holiday celebrated in the month of December. Here is a list of some of the other important holidays celebrated in the month of December. Whatever you celebrate, let this time be one filled with joy, peace and happiness.

St. Nicholas Day (Dec. 5 or 6) Also known as the Feast of Saint Nicholas, Christians honor the birthday of Saint Nicholas — the inspiration behind Santa Claus, given his proclivity toward gift-giving.

Immaculate Conception Day (Dec. 8) Catholics celebrate the day of Immaculate Conception to honor the Virgin Mary, who is believed to have been born without original sin. The day is often celebrated by going to church and feasting.

Bodhi Day (Dec. 8) Also Known as Rohatsu, this Buddhist tradition honors the day in which the Buddha Siddartha Gautama is said to have achieved enlightenment. Many Buddhists celebrate it through meditation.

Feast Day of Our Lady Guadalupe (Dec. 12) Mexicans and Mexican Americans often celebrate the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe in December which marks one of several apparitions of the Virgin Mary that Catholic believers say was witnessed by an indigenous Mexican man in 1531.

Hanukkah (Dec. 7-15) The eight-day Hebrew holiday of Hanukkah this year begins sundown Dec. 7. A central part of the Jewish Festival of Lights entails the lighting of nine branched menorah each night. (The ninth candle is used to light the others.) The ritual symbolizes how one day's worth of oil miraculously lasted for eight days in 165 B.C.E.

Christmas (Dec. 25) Christmas is an annual sacred Christian holiday that commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ, the spiritual leader and founder of Christianity. While many people celebrate Christmas to honor Jesus' birth, it's also celebrated as a cultural holiday across the globe.

Boxing Day (Dec. 26) A British tradition that occurs the day after Christmas, dates to the 1800s when Queen Victoria ruled the throne. At the time, it was a day to ensure that upper class Britons gave servants and workers a day off, in addition to giving them a present.

Kwanzaa (Dec. 26 - Jan. 1) The weeklong holiday of Kwanzaa honors African American heritage. Created by black Nationalist Maulana Karena in 1966 to unite the African American community, Kwanzaa celebrates history, values, family, community and culture.

New Year's Eve (Dec. 31)

The day every new year that is met with anticipation around the world, as revelers party, set off fireworks, set resolutions and count down the midnight to welcome a new beginning and the end of the current year. ■



Social Security Benefits Increase in 2024

by **Ravi Gopaul**
Social Security Public Affairs Specialist

More than 71 million Americans will see a 3.2% increase in their Social Security benefits and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments in 2024. On average, Social Security retirement benefits will increase by more than \$50 per month starting in January.

Federal benefit rates increase when the cost-of-living rises, as measured by the Department of Labor's Consumer Price Index (CPI-W). The CPI-W rises when inflation increases, leading to a higher cost-of-living. This change means prices for goods and services, on average, are higher. The cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) helps to offset these costs.

We will mail COLA notices throughout the month of December to retirement, survivors, and disability beneficiaries, SSI recipients, and representative payees. But if you want to know your new benefit amount sooner, you can securely obtain your Social Security COLA notice online using the Message Center in your personal my Social Security account at www.ssa.gov/myaccount. You can access this information in early December, prior to receiving the mailed notice. Benefit amounts will not be available before December. Since you will receive the COLA notice online or in the mail, you

don't need to contact us to get your new benefit amount.

If you prefer to access your COLA notice online and not receive the mailed notice, you can log in to your personal *my Social Security* account at www.ssa.gov/myaccount to opt out by changing your preferences in the Message Center. You can update your preferences to opt out of the mailed COLA notice, and any other notices that are available online.

"Social Security and SSI benefits will increase in 2024, and this will help millions of people keep up with expenses," said Kilolo Kijakazi, Acting Commissioner of Social Security.

Beginning January 2024 other changes will happen based on the increase in the national average wage index. For example, the maximum amount of earnings subject to Social Security payroll tax in 2024 will be higher. The retirement earnings test exempt amount will also change. Learn more at www.ssa.gov/news/press/factsheets/colafacts2024.pdf.

Be among the first to know! Sign up for or log in to your personal *my Social Security* account today at www.ssa.gov/myaccount. Choose email or text under "Message Center Preferences" to receive courtesy notifications.

You can find more information about the 2024 COLA at www.ssa.gov/cola. ■

RETIREE news & views

In Memoriam

We pause to honor retirees
we have lost this year.
Our thoughts and prayers
are with all families and friends.
Gone but never forgotten.



**PLEASE BE SURE TO
CALL 212-807-0555
IF YOUR PHONE NUMBER OR
ADDRESS HAS CHANGED.**

In addition to notifying the union, please contact the Social Security Administration, your pension system, and the Office of Labor Relations. You do not want to miss important information.

RETIREES CORNER



New Retiree

Mark Reid, retired NYCHA Supervisor Of Grounds, received his retirement plaque after 33 years of service. Mark said, "It's been a beautiful ride."

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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2023

Are you moving?

To change your address, fill in the form below, cut it out, and mail it back to *Retiree News & Views* at the above address.

Name _____ ID# _____

New Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

New Telephone Number: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

CSI/CUNY Retiree is still working with school kids



John Garcia, pictured far right, one of our retirees from CUNY Public Safety, is still working with children to spruce up their school community. As the president of the Serpentine, Art & Nature Commons Inc., and the president of Roots of Peace Community Garden, he and his grandkids participated in the Hiking Club's beautification project. The kids and John had a great time.

LOCAL 237 RETIREES:



Retired from Work, Not from the Union

