

RETIREE news & views

A PUBLICATION OF LOCAL 237 RETIREE DIVISION

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A Toast to the Year of Italian Culture

The Retiree Division's 2013 Italian Heritage Celebration recognized the Year of Italian Culture with an informative presentation, "Heroes of the Italian Immigrant Experience," by Mary Anne Trasciatti, associate professor, Hofstra University. Singer Maristella, back by popular demand, and a savory Italian buffet provided additional highlights of Italy's finest contributions.

Susan Milisits, assistant director, greeted the audience, noting that her Italian ancestors came to America "hoping for a better life." Milisits noted, however, that the immigrant experience "comes with challenges."

Expanding on the theme, Trasciatti emphasized that "stories of arrival are very powerful myths." She described the arrival in the 1880s of people who came from Italy. They were mostly men looking for work, though they did not intend to stay. They were called Italians in the United States, but these men did not consider themselves Italian. Instead they identified with their many communities, each with its own dialect and allegiances. Italy at the time was a young nation formed as a result of a civil war.

Once in America, Italians took the least

skilled jobs for low pay, including bridge and road construction and agricultural work. This led to exploitation, which bred activism, said Trasciatti, and in 1913, they led the Paterson Silk strike in New Jersey, and have since maintained a strong presence in the U.S. Labor Movement.

Milisits presented members of the Retiree Division's Italian Heritage Committee, which planned this year's event, with awards for their efforts. They are Frank Aiello, Vincent Aquilino, Paul Asaro, Rocco Brienza, Anthony Cottone, Richard Fischetti, and Liborio Torregiano.

Photos: Tania Lambert



Clockwise from top left: Mary Anne Trasciatti, associate professor at Hofstra University, addresses the audience; members of the Retiree Division's Italian Heritage Committee display their certificates of recognition as Assistant Director Susan Milisits looks on; Retiree Sal Conti and his dancing partner perform a tango; singer Maristella charms the audience;





A Message From the President

Gregory Floyd

NYCHA Is Key to Restoring a City for All

Mayor-Elect Bill de Blasio won the election in large part by emphasizing that New York was no longer one city but two: one where the rich use the city as their playground and another where many people are just struggling to survive.

New York is divided, and that divide is growing bigger every day. Now de Blasio is calling on us to help him build one New York, where we all rise together. Teamsters Local 237 stands with him because we know that coming together is the only way we can all succeed.

In recent weeks, as the mayor-elect has begun assembling the team that will pick the next generation of leaders at City Hall, many have asked if he can achieve the lofty goals he set out in his campaign. Yet, setting lofty goals is the right course of action, because if we don't aim high, we'll never get there.

Challenge number one is public housing. As the union representing more than 8,000 New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) employees, Local 237 Teamsters is committed to working to fix the public housing crisis that was left to fester under the Bloomberg administration.

We will work with Mayor de Blasio to carry out his campaign manifesto, to "bring NYCHA up to code with real, substantive repairs made by a dedicated workforce." And by working together, there's no problem we can't tackle successfully.

The city prosecutes landlords who don't provide heat, repair elevators and remove toxic mold, but they turn a blind eye when that neglect happens in public housing. As Public Advocate, de Blasio introduced and helped to pass the Heat Enforcement for All Tenants (HEAT) Act, strengthening penalties on slumlords trying to cut costs by cutting off tenants' heat. We will work with the de Blasio administration to ensure that those same standards are applied to NYCHA developments as well.

For those who think we can't succeed, look at what we have already done. Thanks to Local 237's work with Task Force members and other NYCHA labor unions, we have already helped to change the management structure at NYCHA by making it more inclusive of actual NYCHA tenants. We have brought the issue of public housing to the top of the agenda.

The next step is to remove NYCHA Chairman John Rhea and the rest of his top staff, which we anticipate as soon as Mayor de Blasio takes office in January. We need a chairman who treats residents and workers with the compassion and conscientiousness they deserve as the backbone of the city's middle class.

We know that Mayor de Blasio is committed to bringing back New York City's middle class, and Local 237 stands with him in that fight because the road to renewed prosperity runs right through NYCHA.



Let's Restore the Art of Conversation

By Nancy B. True, Director, Retiree Division

As we prepare to celebrate the holidays with friends and family, let's keep in mind that it's an excellent opportunity to talk about the things that matter most to us and share ideas to improve the quality of our lives. Talking as well as listening to one another is a great way to visualize and give shape to our best hopes for the New Year.

In fact, for the New Year I have resolved to take every opportunity to open discussions about issues that impact retirees, including protecting Social Security and Medicare from any cuts, and creating more affordable housing and education opportunities for workers and their families.

Our Democracy is based on the open exchange of ideas and freedom of speech. Lately, however, too many people have aban-

doned the discipline of listening well and showing respect for ideas that don't match their own. Feuding factions in Congress that keep our government from functioning properly are a case in point. Building a better future requires open minds and hearts, and open mouths and ears as well.

I'm pleased to report that such a forum took place recently in New York City, in preparation for the new mayoral administration. All New Yorkers were invited to share their opinions and expectations for the city's future. The site of this forum, known as the "Talking Transition Tent," was downtown Manhattan, as well as online. The forum was set up by city civic organizations, and it welcomed people from all walks of life to record video messages, write Post-It notes and paste them on a wall, and mingle in discussions. Mayor-Elect Bill de Blasio visited the tent, as did other elected officials.

While "Talking Transition" was temporary, Local 237's Retiree Division serves as a permanent tent where retirees come, call or write to share their concerns or seek solutions to issues that impact their quality of life, from the personal family concerns to the public welfare policies. We also engage in spreading the word.

To make serious strides, however, we need to follow our words with action. That's why I always encourage retirees to get involved politically. Sign petitions, write letters, call your representatives to tell them what you want. Attend rallies, take our politics class at the union, and always vote on Election Day.

Here's hoping that in 2014 we can all resolve to hold open discussions with family and friends. Perhaps then we can begin to reverse the widening gaps in wealth, race, and gender inequality, and in our divided Congress, by practicing good communications; talking, listening and taking action.

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Right Turn in Queens for Tuskegee Airmen

Retiree Dabney Montgomery added a feather to his cap when City Council members voted in November to memorialize the famous Tuskegee Airmen by renaming a street in Jamaica, Queens, for the World War II heroes.

The name of South Road between Merrick Boulevard and Remington Street was permanently changed to Tuskegee Airmen Way by a unanimous City Council vote on November 14.

Montgomery, a former NYCHA housing assistant, and Wilfred Defour, original crew members, attended the Council meeting. Montgomery served in the ground crew for the airmen, who were the first black military aviators in the United States Armed Forces. The famous black fighter pilots broke racial barriers and fought bravely against Nazi Germany. Of the 944 pilots, 80 were from New York and six of them were from Jamaica.

"There are so many young people who don't know the difficulties that their elders had to go through for them to be where they are today," Montgomery, 90 years old, was quoted as saying in *The Queens Courier*.

"The Tuskegee Airmen have played an extraordinary part in America's history and the Civil Rights Movement," Councilmember Leroy Comrie, was quoted as saying in *The Courier*. "By renaming part of South Road



Photo courtesy of Councilmember Ruben Wills

Retiree Dabney Montgomery addresses the City Council as members surround him at the podium.

Tuskegee Airmen Way, we are helping to ensure that future generations of Americans will remember their dedication, and look to them as examples of heroism in the face of extraordinary obstacles."

The bill, introduced by Councilmember Ruben Wills, now awaits the mayor's signature.

Personal Website for Social Security

Now you can access your personal Social Security statement online at "my Social Security." Once you create the account, you can make changes to your address, phone number, and direct deposit, or you may request a benefit verification letter.

To create your personal account, sign on to www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount and select "my Social Security." Then select "create an account," and fill in the blanks with your personal information to verify your identify. Then you will be prompted to create a username and password. After that you are one click away from having your own "my Social Security" account with instant access to benefits information.

Best Wishes for a Happy Holiday Season to all our friends and family. May 2014 be a banner year with peace and prosperity for all.

Retirees Go Salsa!

The Retiree Division's first ever Salsa Dance Class was quite a hit, judging from the great turnout of retirees who came to the sample class on Nov. 19. Instructor Franck Muhel, who had performed at the Retiree Division's recent Latino Heritage event, taught participants basic steps and led them through a few turns before encouraging them to try a few moves of their own with a partner.

"We knew we had a hit on our hands, because each time the instructor stopped the music to explain a step, the students exclaimed that they couldn't stop dancing," said Nancy B. True, director, Retiree Division.

The Salsa class offers an opportunity for low impact aerobic exercise and socializing. It will be part of the Spring Class schedule.



Salsa Instructor Franck Muhel leads retirees in making the right moves.

Tania Lambert

Report from Florida Retirees

By Walter Badyna III,
Local 237 Retiree

The Florida Alliance for Retired Americans (FLARA) conference was held September 15-16 in Lakeland, Fla., where we discussed the new health care plan, Medicare, Medicaid, prescriptions and prices, the economy and its effects on people with fixed incomes. We also discussed the need to ask for senior discounts at various businesses, and the threat posed by the chained CPI proposal in Congress.

We also covered issues of specific concern to Florida residents, including affordable housing, the need for more doctors and staff specializing in geriatric medicine to serve the increasing population of aging baby boomers who are and will be retiring in the next decade, and increasingly settling in Florida. We need more adult/senior-care facilities to provide independent and assisted-living and hospice care.

We resolved to contact Florida state representatives and elected officials in Washington, D.C., about our issues, and to make every effort to get out the vote for Election Day.

Retired Local 237 members living in Florida who want to get involved in FLARA, which meets at various locations throughout Florida, should contact Tony Fransetta, president of FLARA, 12773 West Forest Hill Blvd., Suite 211, Wellington, FL 33414; or call 561-792-8799.

I hope to see more Local 237 retirees at the next FLARA meeting. Happy Holidays to all!

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SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2013

Giving Season

The Retiree Division's Sunshine Club is conducting a food drive to collect canned goods and dry foods for City Harvest which rescues and distributes food to needy New Yorkers. Checks and money contributions are also accepted. In the past, the Sunshine Club has donated to City Meals on Wheels, Habitat for Humanity and other worthy organizations. Please help.



Pat Arnov

Local 237's friend and honorary Teamster Poet Jesus Abraham Tato Laviera died on Nov. 1 after a valiant nine-month struggle with complications from diabetes. He was 63. Born in Santurce, Puerto Rico, Laviera was an acclaimed poet and playwright who gave voice to his beloved Nuyoricans.

"For the past five years, we came to know and love Tato, who attended many events at the Union Hall," said Nancy B. True, who arranged for his first performance at the union's 2008 Latino Heritage event. In 2010, when President Gregory Floyd proclaimed Laviera an honorary Teamster and presented him with a Local 237 pin, "That pin, from that point on, became a fixture on the lapel of his jacket," said True.

Laviera was invited by Local 237 to make a premiere performance of "I Am a Wise Latina," honoring Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor at the 2009 Latino Heritage Celebration. Copies of the poem were distributed to guests, and a framed copy hangs in So-

In Memory of Poetic Teamster Tato Laviera

mayor's chambers in Washington, D.C.

In 2011, Local 237 commissioned Laviera to compose and perform "Hoops for Haiti," an original poem set to music for Local 237's fundraising event to help the earthquake victims.

"Tato and Local 237 developed a special relationship based on mutual admiration for one

another's efforts to enhance the lives of all workers, including Latinos in New York," said True, adding, "We will always remember Tato and keep him in our hearts."

Laviera is survived by his daughter Ella Laviera, sister Ruth Sanchez, nephews David Sanchez and Alexi Quiñones, and nieces Cindy Mercado and Noelia Quiñones.

On a personal note...

We extend our condolences to...

...the family of **Alfred C. Bolton**, a retired supervisor of fleet maintenance at the New York City Fire Department with 40 years of service, who died August 28. Bolton, who retired in 1988, is survived by two daughters, Eileen Marie and Maryanne, and son Alfred Jr.

...the family of retiree **Edith Cohen**, who died Sept. 19 at age 96. Cohen is survived by her daughter, Diane Long.

...the family of **Isaac Hayes**, a retired senior special officer and sergeant of hospital police at the Bronx Municipal Hospital Center, who died in early October. The octogenarian lived in Gainesville, Fla., was a jazz lover and played guitar and piano. He was an army veteran who served in the Korean War. Hayes is survived by two daughters, Darcel and Sandra, and a brother, Joseph.

...the family of **Lester Gyuro**, a retired elevator mechanic supervisor at New York City Housing Authority, who died Oct. 21 at age 85. Retired since about 1984, Gyuro lived in Brooklyn. He is survived by his wife, Josephine, their five adult children, 4 grandchildren, three sisters, and one brother, Michael G. Gyuro, a retired elevator mechanic since 2003.

...retiree **Barbara Baker**, on the death of her husband, Herbert Levan Baker, on Oct. 1, at age 83. He is survived by his wife, their son, Michael, daughter, Melinda, four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. The funeral was held in Manhattan.

...retired caretaker **Ramon Caudrado**, on the death of his wife of 50 years, Marcelina, on Nov. 12. Although the couple lived in Puerto Rico, the funeral was held in the Bronx, where the extended family resides.

...the family of the late retiree **Alice Wade**, a former shop steward.

...the family of retiree **Pearl Lillian Miller**, who died Nov. 15 at age 85. The former New York City Housing Authority worker, who retired in 1994, was proud of being a native New Yorker. She was married for 50 years and predeceased by her husband, James Miller. The couple had four children and lived in Patterson Houses in the Bronx since 1950. Miller is survived by a son, two daughters, 10 grandchildren and 11 great grandchildren.

Fringe Benefit Set

The Legal Service Fringe Benefit amount for retirees will be \$40.11 for the year 2013. The City Office of Payroll Administration will send a W-2 form to retirees for all city agencies.

If you do not receive the form, you can write to:

**W2 Adjustment Unit
Office of Payroll Operations
One Centre Street, Room 200N
New York, N.Y. 10007.**