

RETIREE news & views

A PUBLICATION OF LOCAL 237 RETIREE DIVISION

VOL. 20, NO. 1, JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2014



Remembering Martin Luther King, Jr.



Actors in a theatrical performance about the historic march on Washington sing "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands."

The Retiree Division's annual celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s legacy, highlighted his place as "an American hero of our lifetime," noted Nancy B. True, director. The celebration took place at Local 237 on Jan. 16, one day after King's birthday. If he were alive to celebrate his birthday he would have been 85, like many retirees attending the event.

"Everyone here has a memory of King," said True, who recalled being 15 years old when he was assassinated. At the



Retiree
Bernice Judge

time, King was supporting striking Teamster sanitation workers in Memphis, Tenn. More than 50 years later, Bernice Judge shared her memories of King delivering his historic "I Have a Dream" speech when she participated in the 1963 March on Washington.

Judge said she boarded a bus in New York City "filled to capacity." She said the roads to Washington, D.C. were jammed. When they couldn't drive any further, "We walked, with the crowds, singing, waving, clapping. We were very tired people, but we were there. It was so hot, but we were there. We were all there to fight for freedom."

A performance of "Women and the March," directed by Imani Douglas, was the main event. The presentation focused on female civil rights activists who were instrumental to the success of the March on Washington — yet were not represented as speakers at the march — including Anne Moody, Daisy Bates, Gloria Richardson and Ella Baker.

Actor Barbara Clarke, speaking for Richardson, noted that even the great Rosa Parks, "who launched Martin Luther King in Montgomery, Ala., did not speak."

Retiree Doris Cotto read a letter she wrote to wish King a Happy Birthday and express her



Susan Milisits, assistant director, Retiree Division, and organizer of the event, welcomes guests before the performance.

gratitude for the many victories he won in the fight for freedom. Cotto's letter, a creative writing assignment, included a litany of heartbreaking and triumphant milestones from the Civil Rights Era.



Retiree Doris Cotto reads her letter to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

A Tribute to Mandela

The Retiree Division's upcoming Black History Month Celebration, on Feb. 28, at 11 a.m., will highlight the life and achievements of Nelson Mandela, the late South African President, freedom fighter and world hero. Our special guest will be Consul General George Monyemangene of the South African Consulate General New York City. Please RSVP if you plan to attend.





A Message From the President

Gregory Floyd

Welcoming an Era of Shared Visions

The start of a New Year is always an exciting time. It prompts change and renewal for many of us, and for New York City this New Year also ushered in a new era.

Two events occurred on Dec. 31 that had tremendous significance for this city and this union. First, John Rhea, the chairman of New York City Housing Authority, handed in his resignation, ending a disastrous tenure in which buildings fell further into disrepair and NYCHA workers became further alienated. Rhea decided to quit ahead of being fired by the incoming Mayor Bill de Blasio, who vowed to let him go.

Second, before taking his oath of office, de Blasio named the team that would handle the upcoming labor negotiations, Robert Linn and Stan Brezenoff, two respected labor negotiators. These appointments, two of the first for the new administration, signal that the mayor gives high priority to restoring fairness to the negotiation process and getting city workers contracts that value their labor.

Local 237 has long been critical of John Rhea and called for his removal more than once. Now that he is officially gone, it is a new era at NYCHA for its 400,000 tenants and its 8,000 employees. We are awaiting new leadership for the agency, and we are confident that de Blasio will pick someone with strong experience running a large housing organization.

It will not be an easy task. NYCHA could be managed much better, but it is still facing huge budget shortfalls and backlogged repairs. We have faith that the right leader can accomplish great things, and do it in the right way by bringing the city's labor partners to the table and having a discussion that will seek solutions using our current workforce. It will take time and effort, but if we work side by side — labor and management — over the long haul, we can make public housing all it was meant to be.

At the same time, every single public sector worker has been working under an expired contract for years, waiting for the city to bargain in good faith. It is a difficult situation. While the city reportedly has a surplus, the budget is still tight and the cost of retroactive raises is high. Despite these challenges, giving workers what they deserve remains my top priority.

Similar to the situation at NYCHA, we are confident that open discussions, hard work and good faith will lead to a fair contract. Under the last administration, the leadership was more interested in following its own agenda than achieving real consensus and results. Under de Blasio's leadership, labor has been invited to join the administration in productive conversations. While we are bound to disagree at times, it will be refreshing to sit down to make plans with a group of people who share a progressive vision for New York City.



A Toast to Renewed Humanity

By Nancy B. True, Director, Retiree Division

We began the New Year honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who would have been 85 on January 15, and Nelson Mandela, the late South African president, whom the Retiree Division will honor with a trib-

ute at the Black History Month Celebration on February 28. As icons of the Civil Rights Movement, these two freedom fighters embraced all of humanity in their mission for justice.

King and Mandela would be proud of New York City if they were alive to witness our new administration, the most progressive in half a century. An overwhelming number of New Yorkers voted for leaders who vowed to put the city on a path forged by King and Mandela, activists and organizers in the name of human rights.

Local 237 and the Labor Movement were instrumental in getting out the votes and advancing a progressive agenda that we hope will protect pensions, health care benefits, and affordable housing for retirees, and provide fair wages, jobs and educational opportunities for all workers.

We will continue to stand with elected officials who carry out their mandate to work on behalf of all New Yorkers and correct injustices that have weakened the backbone of this city: its workers and middle-class families.

Leading the march into a more humane, progressive era, Mayor Bill de Blasio is joined by an ally, City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, who won the second most powerful position in New York City government and made history as the first Latina, a Puerto Rican, to become speaker. Public Advocate Letitia James, a former city councilwoman, also made history as the first black woman elected to a city-wide office in New York. James would be de Blasio's successor if he were unable to carry out his duties as mayor.

King and Mandela, renowned for having made an impact felt around the world with their vision and activism, rejected resentment and hatred despite facing violence and incarceration for their commitment to peace and understanding. "I have decided to stick to love...Hate is too great a burden to bear," said King. "No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

A renewed interest in elevating the human condition is long overdue. Widening income inequality has brought progress to a standstill in most of the world's nations, although not for everyone. According to a recent report, "Working for the Few," by Oxfam, an international confederation of 17 organizations that work together to seek solutions to injustice and poverty, nearly half of the world's wealth is concentrated in the hands of just 1 percent of the population. In the United States, the wealthiest 1 percent captured 95 percent of the growth since 2009, following the financial crisis, while the bottom 90 percent became poorer.

As we begin the New Year and hopefully a new, improved era, let us toast to our humanity, our shared experiences of the past and present as well as our diversity, and cultivate those ideals that connect us more deeply and promote progress for all levels of society.

RETIREE news&views

Published bi-monthly by the Retiree Division of Local 237, International Brotherhood of Teamsters (USPS 013028). Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY.
Postmaster: Send address changes to: RETIREE News & Views, 216 West 14 Street, New York, NY 10011 212-807-0555, retirees@local237.org, www.local237.org

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Retirees' Holiday Party Is an Annual Hit

The Retiree Division hosted its annual Holiday Party on Dec. 13. Revelers filled the union hall to dine and dance under star-studded garlands. The Cameo Band played one great hit after the other, and a delicious hot buffet was served.

Nancy B. True, director, Retiree Division, provided a preview of events for 2014 telling guests that "Local 237 celebrates many different holidays and ethnic backgrounds, starting the New Year with a commemoration of Martin Luther King Day in January and the Black History Celebration in February."

True encouraged retirees to come to every special event, but urged them to make reservations early; seats fill up fast.

The Cameo Band plays favorite songs.



Above, retirees and guests enjoy line dancing. Below, retiree José Alicea, in a Santa hat, and fellow revelers are ready to party.



Sherman Eng: Retired NYCHA Caretaker

Intro to Medicare Part B

Medicare Part B is the primary medical insurance for retirees age 65 and over, and for those who at any age have been receiving Social Security Disability retirement for 24 months. An exception applies to retirees covered by the health insurance plan of a spouse who is still employed. If a retiree does not enroll for Medicare part B when eligible, a 10 percent penalty will be assessed to their monthly premium for each 12-month period that they are not enrolled.

If you are retired and receiving Social Security payments, a Medicare card (with red, white and blue stripes) will be sent to you automatically approximately three months before your 65th birthday. It will have the dates that you become eligible for Medicare Part A (hospital coverage) and Medicare Part B (medical coverage). You need only to sign it, put it in your wallet, and show it to doctors and other healthcare providers, along with your other health insurance card.

Medicare is the primary (80 percent)

coverage for Local 237 retirees enrolled in GHI, which picks up the remaining 20 percent of costs. All other plans (HMO's such as HIP, AETNA, CIGNA, HUMANA) are linked to Medicare, and provide all services, including prescription coverage.

The retiree's secondary insurance (GHI or HMO) remains the primary (100 percent) insurance for spouses and dependent children. If a retiree's spouse is Medicare eligible, he or she will also have Medicare as primary coverage. Retirees are strongly urged not to sign up for any health plan that is not approved by the New York City Employee's Benefits Office.

Medicare Premiums and Deductibles

All Medicare beneficiaries are assessed a monthly premium of \$104.90, which is automatically deducted from your Social Security check. Retirees with higher incomes in the range of \$200,000 per year may pay a surcharge. In either case, the monthly pre-

mium is reimbursed to public employees by the City of New York in August each year. To obtain the reimbursement, retirees must register by sending a copy of their Medicare card (by Certified Mail) to the **New York City Employee's Benefits Office, 40 Rector Street, 3rd Fl., New York, NY 10006.**

An annual Medicare deductible of \$147 will apply for retirees enrolled in GHI as their supplement to Medicare. GHI also has an annual deductible of \$50. These deductibles are paid directly to the doctor or healthcare provider, who in turn must report any money received to Medicare. Medicare then issues a "statement" which summarizes the transactions: what was charged, what Medicare allows, what Medicare paid, the balance to be paid by the supplemental insurance and/or the patient. The statement will also give the amount of deductible paid. Once all annual deductibles are met (Medicare \$147 and GHI \$50) retirees will be fully covered.

COMING UP



- Black History Celebration – Feb. 28
- Women's History Celebration – March 13
- Irish Heritage Celebration – March 28
- Florida Retiree Conference – March 13*

*At Lake Buena Vista. Florida residents will receive a mailing. Snowbirds planning to be in Florida at that time can contact the Retiree Division for more information.

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New York, NY 10011



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JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2014

The Thanksgiving Luncheon – A Success, As Expected



NYCHA Retirees held their Thanksgiving Luncheon on Nov. 21 at Li Greci's catering hall on Staten Island. The event was a great success, said Retiree Anthony Cottone, who organizes the luncheons.

Among those who attended, pictured from left, are Teddy Smieya, Norman Bachtler, Bob Goff, Sal Imuzzi, and Michal Gray; from right are Sal Montalbano, Joe DiBenedetto, Tony Min-

cielli and Casare Lucido.

The next luncheon will be April 24 at the same location. For more information contact Cottone at 718-745-7565 or send an e-mail to navydude64@aol.com

110 Years Old and Still Counting

Retiree Anthony Cottone joins his aunt, Calogera Nicolosi, in Italy on her 110th birthday. Nearly everyone in her hometown of Caltabellota, Sicily, along with relatives from Milan, Rome, Chicago and New York, attended a feast held in her honor on Dec. 4, 2013. Even the mayor of the medieval city where Cottone was born attended.

The celebration "was a lifetime experi-

ence," says Cottone, whose aunt is the oldest female living in Sicily. "I am glad to say that her memory is as good as when I made my promise to her in 1999." That year Cottone promised his 96-year-old aunt to return for her 100th birthday, which he did in 2003.



On a personal note...

We extend our condolences to...

...**Alfonza Loftin**, a retired school safety agent who worked at the West Bronx Command for 30 years, on the death of his mother, Willie B. Loftin, on Nov. 20. The late Loftin, 89 years old, is survived by 6 of her 8 children. She was buried in Wilmington, N.C.

...the family of **Maude O. Stewart Savage**, a former Level 3 school safety agent who died Nov. 29 at the age of 72. Retired in 2004, Stewart Savage is survived by son, Robby; brother, Vincent Stewart; sister, Elizabeth Williams; four grandchildren and a great grandson. She was preceded in death by her husband, Riley, and youngest son, Jarrett. The funeral service was held in Brooklyn. She was buried in New Jersey.

...the family of **Edris Madison Sparrow**, a retired clerical worker and housing assistant at the New York City Housing Authority, who died Dec. 16 at age 91. Sparrow is succeeded by her brother, John Dumcombe, two grandsons and a great grandchild. She was preceded in death by her husband, Leroy. The funeral service was held at St. Luke A.M.E. Church in Manhattan.

Bragging Rights

The Retiree Division's secretary, **Shavon Banks**, gave birth to a baby girl, Riley Summer Banks-Harris, on Dec. 12. "It's been a long time since the Retiree Division had a baby," said Director Nancy B. True, announcing the birth at the annual Holiday party. "The last baby was my son, and he's a college graduate."

Riley weighed 6 pounds 6 ounces at birth. Her mom, who is home on maternity leave, says, "All she does is eat... and all I do is sleep" — given the chance. She says that Riley's dad, Gary Harris, "helps out a lot." Her hope for Riley? "That she grows up to be a beautiful, well-educated young woman who has many good job opportunities."



Classes to Begin

The Retiree Division's spring class schedule has a new treat for dance lovers: Salsa! Following a successful sample class last November with instructor Franck Muhel, the class is set to begin in March. If you are interested, sign up pronto! Available spots are going fast. Regularly scheduled classes also begin in March, including jazz journey, photography, painting, Tai Chi, politics and theater.