



## Black History Tribute to Nelson Mandela

The Retiree Division's Black History Month event this year was a tribute to Nelson Mandela, the South African statesman and freedom fighter who died Dec. 5, 2013, at age 95.

Mandela "was able to free his country and change the world from his prison cell, and when he was freed, was able to forgive," noted Winston George, who welcomed guests to Local 237 headquarters on Feb. 28.

Among the highlights was a video presentation of moving memorials to Mandela, including poet Maya Angelou's recitation of "His Day Is Done," and President Barack Obama's remarks at Mandela's funeral. Calling Mandela the "last great liberator of the 20th Century," Obama celebrated his "heroic life," noting that Mandela spoke "to what's best inside of us."



Actor/Vocalist Nora Cole performs a piece about Nelson Mandela's first wife, Winnie. Below, Retiree James Jeffers delivers a poetic tribute to Mandela.



George Monyemangene, consul general of South Africa, addressed guests at Local 237 and reflected on his nation's past and future. "Apartheid was very brutal," he said, crediting international activism and solidarity for South Africa's emancipation. Monyemangene emphasized that Dr. Martin Luther King and Mandela both practiced the South African philosophy of "obuntu," meaning "I am because you are." They valued humanity.

The program also included dramatic performances by Linda Sithole and Nora Cole, drumming by Don Babatunde Eaton, and a poetic tribute by James Jeffers, a Local 237 retiree.



President Gregory Floyd presents a Leadership Award to George Monyemangene, consul general, South Africa. Below, Winston George, deputy director, Retiree Division, offers a libation to the ancestors.



Don "Babatunde" Eaton opens the performance.



Retirees prepare to toast the ancestors.



## A Message From the President

Gregory Floyd

### Let's Bring Affordable Rents Back Home

Hand in hand with the War on Workers, affordable housing is under attack. When the Furman Center reported recently that 31 percent of New Yorkers pay 50 percent or more of their income in rent and utilities, this wasn't shocking. This confirmed a routine budgeting nightmare for many of us.

As president of a major public-employees union in New York City, I know first-hand the challenges workers and retirees face to make ends meet in a city where average wages and pensions — if you're fortunate to have one — lag far behind rising rents and the cost of living.

One of this city's biggest problems is properly defining "affordable housing." Right now, New York City's formula for calculating affordable housing rents is based on a family earning \$100,000 a year. That sets the bar way too high, more than double the \$30,000 to \$50,000 that many New Yorkers earn.

It's clear that we need more truly affordable housing. One way to get it is to build it, but real-estate interests are powerful and they often get their way, preferring to build new luxury towers in our neighborhoods. Don't get me wrong, we live in an old city, and if we don't grow, we deteriorate. But the city makes it all too easy for developers to tear down existing, rent-stabilized buildings to build glass-covered luxury condo towers.

Despite electing an ally in Mayor Bill de Blasio, whose campaign slogan "A Tale of Two Cities" highlighted glaring inequities between the haves and have-nots, the need for more affordable housing in our city is a tale that bears constant repeating until the crisis is relieved. The mayor has promised to create more affordable housing in our city, and I look forward to working with him in achieving this goal.

In the meantime, many residents, especially retirees, struggle to pay rent as developers build new housing to drive rents higher and price long-term tenants out of their own neighborhoods. Therefore, we must also talk about how to preserve the affordable housing we do have and keep families in their current homes.

I am horrified every time I hear about a landlord harassing tenants to get them out of their rent-stabilized apartments, or when long-time elderly residents are forced out after their new landlords decide they want to raise rents. Landlords often neglect repairs and ignore complaints until living conditions become unbearable.

We must stand together to combat abusive landlords and misguided city policies. While Local 237 provides members with a Legal Service Plan benefit, the average individual cannot hire lawyers to fight city agencies and sue landlords on their own. But if thousands of residents come together and fight, we will become a powerful and influential voice to save affordable housing in New York.



## Poetry and Unions as Agents of Change

By Nancy B. True, Director, Retiree Division

Spring has arrived and with it National Poetry Month, a time to celebrate poets and their craft of transforming feelings into words. Poetry has the power to inspire and mobilize large communities, and is a major ally in the labor movement's efforts to organize in the service of humanity.

Local 237 has an especially close relationship with poets whose voices reflect on subjects that touch our lives and work. They come from an oral tradition and their poems are songs for their communities.

The late Tato Laviera, our honorary Poetic Teamster, earned national recognition as a voice for the underprivileged in such poems as "Political" from his book "AmeRican":

*I'm being pushed, pushed,  
Into violent verbal action,  
That tells me something,  
i must do something i must  
contribute to my community*

*i must get involved.*

In their work, poets Peggy Robles-Alvarado, Chilo Cajigas and Josefina Baez have touched on solidarity and the universal feelings of sisterhood and brotherhood, but with unique perspectives.

Baez notes that poetry is "phrasing from a personal take of all things seen and unseen; but for sure felt." She adds that poetry is "that pulse on all particular angles." I feel it, too, when I read poetry that touches me. The words seem to have a heartbeat that matches my own.

"Poets are people painters," says Cajigas, adding that much like organized labor, poets are "always a voice for the marginalized." Protest-rally chants and calls for action are poetic in their own right, notes Cajigas, adding that such verses are "used as a voice for describing unfair conditions that exist and demanding fair treatment."

In her book "Homage to the Warrior Women," Robles-Alvarado's poems empower her sisterhood through sharing of information and experiences. In the poem "Where do We Belong," she addresses bi-culturalism by offering solutions:

*We educate,  
investigate,  
so that no one can intimidate,  
frustrate,  
or mistake,  
who we are here,  
today,  
or tomorrow.*

There is a rich tradition linking poets and labor as a force for social reforms and community organizing. Some of the best known poets of the 20th Century, including Carl Sandburg and Langston Hughes, made labor problems their own by writing about the harsh realities of the era: sweatshops, strikes, unemployment, women and child labor, and immigration.

"Poetry has a direct connection to the soul of a community," says Robles-Alvarado. "It speaks to its wants and needs, and the poet becomes an outlet for activism, unity and social change."

## RETIREE news&views

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GREGORY FLOYD  
President

PATRICIA STRYKER  
Recording Secretary

RICHARD HENDERSHOT  
Vice President

NANCY B. TRUE  
Managing Editor

RUBEN TORRES  
Secretary-Treasurer

TANIA M. LAMBERT  
Editor





# Warm Welcome at Florida Retiree Conference

The Retiree Division hosted its biannual Florida Retiree Conference on March 13 at the Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista where Local 237 President Gregory Floyd, Nancy B. True, director, and Winston George, deputy director, gave a warm welcome to retirees who gathered from all points in Florida, as well as snowbirds who attended. The conference strengthens the bond between retirees and their union.

Also on hand were Local 237 Recording Secretary Patricia Stryker and Welfare Fund Director Mitch Goldberg, who provided retirees with updates on politics, the economy, and benefits, and also answered questions.

Floyd urged retirees to support and vote for labor-friendly candidates in the November midterm elections, and fight to preserve hard-earned benefits.

In addition, the conference was “a time to catch up with a wealth of information, exchange stories, and network,” says Raymond Limbert, who has attended two conferences since retiring in 2006 as an assistant superintendent at Amsterdam Houses. Limbert, who moved to Claremont, near Orlando, seven years ago, notes that he was glad to hear at the conference that additional dental and optical facilities are available to Florida retirees.

“I attended all the conferences since I retired in 1987,” said former housing assistant Carmen Santos, who worked in the central office. An Orlando resident since 2005, and former vice president of NYCHA’s Hispanic Association, Santos says she enjoys the conferences. They help her keep abreast of changes to benefits and “It’s like a re-union.”

Andres Sierra, retired from NYCHA since 1983, has attended the past three conferences, but this year he was especially pleased to meet President Floyd. “He’s a man of character,” said Sierra, adding, “He has a great smile and a strong handshake.”

Photos by Marc Harmon



Nancy B. True, director, and Winston George, deputy director, standing in the second row, center, greet retirees at the Florida conference.



Welfare Fund Director Mitch Goldberg stops by a table to answer retirees' questions.

## Your Legal Benefits Follow You If You Live Outside NYC

Local 237 Retirees who live in New York City and the state counties of Nassau, Suffolk, Westchester, Rockland, Orange and Putnam are eligible for free legal services that are covered in the Legal Services Plan.

Retirees who reside outside of the areas covered by the Legal Services Plan are entitled to a legal-fee reimbursement benefit for specific services covered under the Plan. This reimbursement will be paid in accordance with a schedule of benefits available upon request. The reimbursement is not available to active members or retirees living in New York City and the covered state counties.

**Can reimbursement be provided for services rendered in New York City and the covered State Counties?**

### The Apple of Adams' Eye

Amelia Adams, daughter of Local 237 retiree Joseph Adams, was recently named a senior advisor to City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito. Adams was previously deputy director of New York Communities for Change, a group that fights for affordable housing, workplace justice and quality public school education.

No, because the Legal Services Plan represents you directly if you reside in these covered counties.

**Can reimbursement be provided if you are buying or selling a second home or investment property?**

No. The Plan can only reimburse you when you buy or sell your primary residence: a coop, condo, one- or two-family house.

**Can reimbursement be provided if you need to commence an eviction proceeding against a tenant?**

No. You are only reimbursed if you are the tenant, not the landlord.

**Can reimbursement be provided for litigation fees such as court fees, process server fees, appraisals?**

The Plan only reimburses actual fees you have paid an attorney to represent you. The schedule of benefits sets out the maximum amount that the Plan can reimburse for legal fees in a specific covered matter. If your paid bill is less than the allowable amount, you will be reimbursed for what you paid. If the bill exceeds the maximum amount, your reimbursement will be limited to what the benefit schedule provides.

**Which legal matters are covered under the Legal Services Plan?**

A wide range of civil matters are covered, including domestic relations (Family Court proceedings, divorce and separation), purchase and sale of primary residences, wills, powers of attorney, health care proxies, adoptions, credit and consumer problems, tenant rights and bankruptcies. Representation can include consultation, legal research, drafting of documents and pleadings, and negotiation on your behalf with you in court.

If you have any questions, or would like a schedule of benefits, please contact the Legal Services Plan at **212-924-1220**.

### Ahora en Español

Friday Updates, a weekly e-mail alert sent by the Alliance for Retired Americans, is now available in Spanish. To sign up for Spanish language alerts, go to [www.retiredamericans.org](http://www.retiredamericans.org), insert the word “Spanish” in the search box, and hit send to find the sign-up page.

Inscribase al [www.retiredamericans.org](http://www.retiredamericans.org), para recibir el boletín, Alerta Semanal en español.

## COMING UP

**June 6**

The annual Founders Day Program at the Hilton Hotel in Manhattan

**June 8**

The annual National Puerto Rican Day Parade

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# Celebrating Women in the Workplace

The Retiree Division's Women's History Month program focused on women in the workplace. Susan Milisits, assistant director, introduced guest speaker Stephanie Luce, associate professor at the J.S. Murphy Institute for Worker Education, who discussed the impact of the civil rights and women's movement on the lives of female workers, and how unions helped advance both movements.

This year is the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act that outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Luce highlighted workplace trends since the law passed in 1964. For example, today 75 percent of women work outside the home and 70 percent of them have children. In the 1960s, less than 50 percent of women worked outside the home.

Many women work out of economic ne-



cessity and enjoy higher wages, but a significant wage gap. Unions helped women gain access to good jobs and close the gap. Recently, women have been in the forefront of organizing low-wage workers.

Retirees shared their experiences in a panel discussion on what has changed for



working women. Panelists included retirees Helen Mashburn, senior housing teller, Carol Kover, housing manager, and Olga Perez-Vasallo, health educator.

Overall, the women reported positive experiences with supportive supervisors and good morale in their civil service positions. Kover noted that the dress code changed. "We could never wear slacks," even on the coldest days, she said.

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## On a personal note...

Sending wishes for a speedy recovery to **Robin Garfinkel**, an attorney retired from NYCHA's Law Department in 2012. Garfinkel recently underwent knee replacement surgery, and he credits his mom, who is 90 years old, for being his role model. She had her knee replaced years ago and currently takes yoga at the senior center.

### We extend our condolences to...

...**Lyle Frank**, a retired senior food service supervisor at Elmhurst Hospital in Queens, on the death of his mother, Harriet K. Frank, on Dec. 21, at age 93. Mrs. Frank had been a social worker at Louise Wise Adoption Services, and is survived by her two sons and one grandson.

...Mona Weiss, daughter of retired Elevator Mechanic **Fred Weiss**, a Florida resident, who died on March 17.

...The family of **Jonathan Joseph Prince**, a retired NYCHA superintendent, who died on Feb. 14, at age 90. Prince was also the former chair of the Long Island Chapter of Local 237 Retirees.

... the family of the late **Sgt. Griselde Camacho**, a campus peace officer at Hunter College, and the families of all the victims of the gas explosion in East Harlem in March.

## Optical Benefit Upgrade

In the ongoing effort to improve benefits, the Board of Trustees of the Teamsters Local 237 Retirees' Benefit Fund has added an optical benefit for retirees who live outside of the New York metropolitan area.

Effective April 1, these retirees will have the option of using Davis Optical Store for vision services. Davis Optical will soon send a mailing explaining the benefit being offered to retirees living outside of New York City.

The reimbursement option remains in place, as well as our New York City network of vision services providers for retirees living in the New York metropolitan area.