

RETIREE

# news & views

A PUBLICATION OF LOCAL 237 RETIREE DIVISION

VOL 23, NO. 5, NOV./DEC. 2017



## We Weren't Conned

Over two million New Yorkers can't be wrong; they saw Con Con as a con. The Constitutional Convention, Proposition #1 on the recent election ballot, was resoundingly rejected, with 83% voting against it. Had the question—which comes up every 20 years—been approved, there would have been a multi-year, multi-million dollar process put in place to convene a convention of delegates from throughout New York State to review and reshape New York's constitution.

Supporters argued that it was way back in 1938 when a major re-write of the 60,000 word document took place and that it is in dire need of an update today. Opponents argued that there is a legislative process that provides for amendments and revisions to the constitution, which has been used successfully 222 times since the original constitution was enacted in 1777. The opposition, which brought together diverse groups rarely joined for a single cause—from environmentalists, to educators, to planned parenthood and gun lobbyists—viewed a constitutional convention as merely a ploy by well-heeled special interests and political insiders to put their interests first.

Labor took a leadership role in defeating the proposition. Unions throughout the state pooled more than three million dollars to get the message across: "A wholesale revision of New York's constitution would be disastrous for union households. Vote No." And we did. As **Gregory Floyd**, President of Teamsters Local 237—the

largest public employees Local in the IBT—explained to his members at a Shop Stewards meeting he held prior to the vote: *"The idea of a Constitutional Convention may sound innocent enough, but it's not. For municipal employees in particular, it could be deadly. Our pensions and other benefits are guaranteed in the current state constitution. A Convention would give the union-bashers and union-busters what they want: the chance to do us in. Especially in the political climate we live in—with 28 Right-to-Work states already in place, it is imperative that we in New York State, with the highest number of union members, and with 70% of them public sector workers, remain the number one state to safeguard its workers."*

Part of the strategy that led to this huge victory was to appeal to all voters—Democrats and Republicans, retirees, millennials, union members, non-union workers and every racial group — convincing them that a Constitutional Convention was a misguided waste of time and money that could bring unintended results. President Floyd hit the airwaves to make his argument on his radio show, "Reaching Out With Gregory Floyd" in addition to writing several newspaper articles. **Patricia Strkyer**, Recording-Secretary of Local 237's Executive Board and Director of Legislation and Political Action, spoke at a Town Hall Meeting in Staten Island. And Local 237 retirees hit the "campaign trail" to inform, educate and persuade people to get out the vote. And it worked. ■



Retirees and members of the Retirees Division show their support for a "NO" vote to the proposed Constitutional Convention at this year's Labor Day Parade.



Mario Cilento, President of NYS AFL-CIO and Vincent Alvarez, President of NYC Central Labor Council appeared on "Reaching Out With Gregory Floyd" to discuss why a "NO" vote on the Constitutional Convention was essential to all union members, especially retirees of the public sector.



Patricia Strkyer visited a Town Hall meeting sponsored by the South Shore Democratic Club of Staten Island urging voters to vote "NO" on Proposition #1.

## Local 237 Retirees Join Rally in Support of Local 3

IBEW Local 3 has been on strike against the corporate giant, Charter/Spectrum for more than 8 months. Without a contract since 2013, negotiations broke down when, as Chris Erikson, Local 3 Business Manager told thousands of union supporters at one rally: *"They basically said that until we agree that they won't have to contribute to our pension and health plan, they won't talk about anything else."* AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, New State Governor Cuomo, NYS AFL-CIO President, Mario Cilento, Mayor deBlasio, several elected officials and members of other unions

have all shown solidarity with the strikers by attending two massive rallies, one in October and the other in November. Retirees and active members of Local 237 joined the strikers at the November rally. As Local 237 President Gregory Floyd said: *"We're here to support our brothers and sisters fighting against corporate greed. Spectrum's CEO is among the highest paid in the nation. At a salary of \$98 million, perhaps it's hard to understand how devastating a doctor's bill or hospital stay could be to a working family or how easily one's "Golden Years" can become tarnished without an adequate pension."* ■



Local 237 Retirees with Nancy True, Director of the Retiree Division (center) and Hector Cotto, Deputy Director, (right) at the rally at Times Square in November.



by **Gregory Floyd**

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

It's traditional that, at the end of the year, we reflect on the year that passed and start to think about the year to come. For some, the conclusion is like a Sinatra song or two: "Yes, it was a very good year" or "I have a regret or two, but did it my way." Another part of the year-end traditions is that we make New Year's resolutions, including the usual ones: "I'll go on a strict diet" or "I'll stop smoking" or "I'll be more patient with my spouse." Part of this tradition is the understanding that the resolution will not last past February.

When I think about 2017, I have bitter-sweet feelings. Our union has had several very proud moments during the year, but unfortu-

## a message from the president

# A Season and Reason to Give Thanks

nately they were necessitated by serious issues. On October 31, when New York City experienced the worst terrorist attack since 9-11, it was our School Safety Agents who were first on the scene and acted with calm and compassion. They helped to save lives. They have a tough job every day protecting nearly 1 million public school students—including many of your grandchildren—but on that day, they were among the City's heroes. Then, on November 7th, Election Day, for us, probably the most important item on the ballot was Proposition 1, for voters to decide whether or not to have a Constitutional Convention. Union-busters and wealthy power brokers all came together to try to convince New York voters that the only way to improve State government was to make wholesale changes to the Constitution. Especially as public employees, your pension and many other labor safeguards and benefits for which you worked long and hard were in jeopardy. But, we came together too! Retirees and active members hit the streets. They got out the word. Armed with information and the best methods of persuasion, Proposition 1 was defeated by a whopping 83% and the labor movement showed that it is still a force in this State. Retirees also joined

our active members in rallies to right other wrongs: Local 3 members have been working without a contract with Spectrum for years and have been on strike for 6 months with the sticking point for any negotiations being health benefits; Governor Cuomo and Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi urging New Yorkers to "take back Congress" protesting the Administration's legislative proposals that jeopardize the quality of life for all New Yorkers. Again, Local 237 showed its solidarity and commitment to fairness, but it is regrettable that those circumstances required it.

As for 2018, I am cautiously hopeful. Certainly, unions in our State have flexed their muscle and demonstrated that we are an important political, social and economic force. Nationally, however, with the Janus case in front of the Supreme Court and some of the Administration's proposed policies and appointees putting a strain on union membership and working families, the challenges are great. But what I observed over this last year is that when the challenges are great, the greater the push we mount to meet those challenges. We did it in 2017. We'll do it in 2018. Happy holidays! *Now is the season and reason to give thanks.* ■



by **Nancy B. True**

Director of the  
Retiree Division

## Retired from work, Not from the Union

Throughout 2017, we celebrated Local 237's 65th birthday. We took time to reflect on our relationship with the union and to celebrate the longstanding connections we have within our union family.

Through the Oral History Project (and in Retiree News & Views), retired member Steven Cawley spoke of his first day on the job at NYCHA. In his words, "When I walked in I was met...by a firm handshake and a smile that truly made me feel welcomed." To this day, Mr. Cawley feels grateful for the day in 1979 when Mr. Egan in Personnel sent him to work in the Bronx.

When our union brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico suffered the effects of Hurricane Maria – retirees living on the Island reached out to each other – Julio

Gonzalez from Fajardo, while checking on his daughter in Patillas, stopped by to see if a fellow retiree was alright. Gloria and Jose Melendez, reached out to retirees on the west coast. Ramiro Alvarez of Moca, once the roads were (somewhat) clear, drove to Aguada to visit the Melendez' and discuss how to proceed with an upcoming reunion of retired members. Bernardino Diaz and Anibal Matos made contact. The list goes on. Retired members who temporarily left the island after weeks of no electricity and water, called and came to the union to let us know that they were safe. We were happy to embrace Milagros and Jose Santos, Luz and Miguel Matos and to speak with Margarita Rodriguez and Babel and Elba Ruiz as they temporarily stayed with relatives and friends in New York and New Jersey. Retirees in New York contributed to the Teamsters Disaster Fund to assist Teamsters in Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico affected by hurricanes. No matter how far afield our union family lives – we all feel the need to connect and to care for each other.

In early November, we lost Carmen Rodriguez, the first retiree coordinator for the Puerto Rico Community Group. The foundation that she laid for this group becomes stronger every day. Her legacy lives on. Our profound sympathy goes to her husband Victor and the entire Rodriguez family.

When the possibility of a NYS Constitutional Convention posed a threat to public employee pensions, retired members moved into action. They distributed literature, wore pins that said "Vote No" to the constitutional convention resolution. They participated in a training session with Recording Secretary Patricia Stryker to develop strategies for

educating and activating retirees and other members of the community to "Vote No." They used these strategies to speak at retiree community group meetings, community organizations and with their family and friends. These efforts paid off when the resolution (Prop.1) to hold a NYS Constitutional Convention was defeated on Election Day.

At community meetings, membership meetings and classes at the union hall, record numbers of recent retirees have participated in these programs. We marched in parades and participated in rallies.

In 2017, we welcomed Winston George into the Retiree Division, as a new retiree! True to our slogan, Winston retired from work, but not from the union. He has been seen at neighborhood meetings and Retiree Division events. We also welcomed Hector Cotto to the Retiree Division staff as our new Deputy Director. Many of you have spoken with him since he joined us in May. Your Retiree Division team, Hector Cotto, Susan Milisits, Luz Carty and I continue to work in partnership with all of our retired members as well as active members who are making the transition from work to retirement.

As we approach 2018, plans are underway to hold meetings for retired members residing in Florida and at the end of the year, in Puerto Rico. Neighborhood meetings in the boroughs and Long Island, classes and membership meetings will continue to provide opportunities to maintain a connection to the union.

There is no doubt that the coming year will present both challenges and joys. Together, as Teamsters, we are a strong and loving family. We will meet the challenges and celebrate the joys together. ■

### 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

GREGORY FLOYD  
President

PATRICIA STRYKER  
Recording Secretary

RICHARD HENDERSHOT  
Vice President

NANCY B. TRUE  
Managing Editor

RUBEN TORRES  
Secretary-Treasurer

PHYLLIS SHAFRAN  
Editor





## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT IN PUERTO RICO-en Español

### José Antonio (Tony) Meléndez Vázquez y Gloria Cordero Mejías: homenaje a su bondad y trabajo – 1

Por Profesor Néstor Murray-Irizarry | historiador y gestor cultural

En el artículo anterior hice un recuento de la importancia del Proyecto de Historia Oral que bajo mi dirección el Local 237 está llevando a cabo en Puerto Rico. También simbólicamente inicie un diálogo con algunos de los entrevistados. Este nuevo trabajo escrito se lo dedico a dos seres humanos extraordinarios que conocí en Aguada y que ya forman parte de la gran familia de retirados de sus trabajos pero no de la unión. Me refiero a José Antonio (Tony) Meléndez Vázquez (n. 13 de junio de 1940 hijo de José Meléndez Sullivan y Ramona Vázquez López) y a su querida esposa Gloria Cordero Mejías (n.27 de abril de 1947, hija de Antonio Cordero y Celina Mejías.) José Antonio y Gloria son los líderes del grupo de jubilados que forman, lo que se podría llamar, el Capítulo de Jubilados del Local 237 en Puerto Rico. José Antonio, a quien entrevisté en dos ocasiones, es el Coordinador /Voluntario en Puerto Rico de los jubilados del Local 237 de Nueva York. Además, por qué negarlo: detrás de un hombre exitoso casi siempre tiene una mujer de frente. (y no detrás) Las entrevistas se realizaron el 27 de marzo y el 15 de abril de 2015.

Viven en el sector Montemar del barrio Guaniquilla de Aguada. Gloria es oriunda de Aguada. Se conocieron y se casaron en Nueva York. Tienen tres hijos, seis nietos y dos biznietos. Rodeados de una reverdeciente vegetación (hasta que el huracán María, recientemente, los azotara fuertemente) mantienen una hermosa residencia en cemento digna de un jubilado del Local 237 de Nueva York. Un nieto y una nieta y sus dos hijos acompañan a la pareja en su lecho de ensueño. En su hogar se respira un aire puro propicio para el amor y el buen vivir. En las paredes de las diversas dependencias de su casa se exponen una considerable e interesante cantidad de fotografías de la familia. En ese ambiente familiar y de sano entretenimiento José Antonio y Gloria organizan y celebran cada dos años la Fiesta de Navidad de la División de Retirados del Local 237 de Puerto Rico. **Después de servir seis meses en el Ejército de los EE.UU., destacado en Salinas, Puerto Rico, en 1961 José decidió trasladarse a vivir a Nueva York:**

- “Yo soy de Guayama. En una ocasión visitaron a mi pueblo un grupo de puertorriqueños que vivían y trabajaban en Nueva York. Ellos querían pasar esas navidades en nuestra isla. Uno de ellos, Pedro Román, simpatizó mucho conmigo. En esos días nació una buena amistad entre Pedro y yo después de sostener por muchas horas un intenso diálogo. Comenzamos a hablar... él me hablaba de Nueva York y yo le hablaba de Puerto Rico. El había nacido en Nueva York de padres puertorriqueños y venía a conocer a Puerto Rico por primera vez. Continuamos nuestra amistad y mantuvimos una gran correspondencia por escrito. Cuando yo tuve el deseo de emigrar a Nueva York le escribí una carta pidiéndole orientación y ayuda. En ese momento las cosas en Puerto Rico estaban malas y él me dio la ayuda y me recibió en su casa donde vivía con sus padres. Era un edificio del barrio latino en Manhattán. Así comencé mi vida en la Ciudad de los Rascacielos.” Allí José estuvo trabajando desde 1961 hasta 1967 en diversas fábricas: de sobres, de carteras, de bates de beisbol, de tacos de billar, de recipientes para basura y de muñecas. Recuerda con mucho cariño sus experiencias de trabajo en esas industrias:
- “Tengo muy buenos recuerdos. Un grupo de puertorriqueños nos uníamos y hablábamos de nuestra isla, se escuchaba buena música de Puerto Rico, hablábamos de las cosas que pasaban en la isla y la pasábamos bien. Si había un cumpleaños ese era un motivo para reunirnos y hacer una fiesta. Un aniversario de casados o un bautizo también eran buenos estímulos para formar una fiesta. Siempre buscábamos un motivo para celebrar y eso nos hacía sentir bien. Habían latinos sí,

pero la mayoría de los que nos juntábamos eran puertorriqueños y algún mexicano o un dominicano. Pero la fiesta siempre era puertorriqueña.” **Al paso de los años José comenzó a trabajar en el mantenimiento de los edificios de los residentes de la Autoridad de Hogares de Nueva York en el 1968. Se hizo miembro del Local 237 en 1970. Tenía 28 años. Señala con orgullo que todos los Proyectos tienen un representante del Local 237 quien le explica a cada uno de los futuros miembros todos los beneficios (los aumentos de salario, protección del propio trabajo, beneficios de salud: dentista, óptica, otros) que ofrece el Local y que motiva a entrar al Sindicato; además, es obligatorio ingresar a la Unión. Relata como con la ayuda de un amigo consiguió ingresar a trabajar en la Autoridad:**

- “Mientras yo trabajaba en la fábrica de sobres, se me acerco un compañero de trabajo, llamado Wilson, y me pregunto si me interesaba trabajar en el Departamento de Hogares de Nueva York. El me indico que muy pronto él iba a empezar a trabajar allí. Le dije que me gustaría también laborar en ese lugar, pero que no sabía cómo realizar esas gestiones. Yo sabía que en los residenciales vivían una mezcla de nacionalidades: latinos, irlandeses, negros americanos, italianos. A los pocos días ese querido compañero pasó por mi residencia y me tocó la puerta: me dijo que él había anotado mi nombre en una lista que estaba disponible en las oficinas centrales de la Autoridad ubicadas en el 250 de la Avenida Broadway. En esa lista se registraban las personas interesadas en trabajar en ese lugar. Al otro día me presente en esas oficinas y se iniciaron los trámites de mi futuro trabajo; al poco tiempo me aceptaron y comencé a trabajar en agosto de 1968. Estuve dos años a prueba en lo que tomaba el examen necesario para conseguir una plaza permanente en el trabajo. Otro aspecto muy importante de mi vida residiendo y trabajando en uno de estos residenciales en el Bronx conocí a mi querida esposa. Ella vivía con los padres. Todas las mañanas yo la veía salir. Simpatizamos desde el primer momento en que nos vimos. Nos conocimos en 1968 y comenzamos una hermosa amistad. Ella tenía 21 años de edad. Nos casamos en 1976. Y seguimos enamorados como el primer día...”

#### Sobre esa época recuerda:

- “Fueron tiempos muy difíciles porque en aquel momento había mucho racismo, se discriminaba mucho. Se me negaba la entrada a varios restaurantes. No nos querían reconocer como ciudadanos americanos, siempre nos trataban como de segunda categoría. A pesar de que eso me hacía sentir mal, adoro haber vivido en Nueva York. Viví unos buenos años allá. Allí me casé con Gloria, nacieron mis hijos y nacieron mis nietos.” Tuvo que tomar diferentes tipos de exámenes que correspondían al tipo de trabajo que desempeñaba cada uno... el mío era el más bajo “caretaker” ... aunque también existen otras plazas como “fireman” y “handyman”, por ejemplo”. Era exámenes de sentido común. Los pasó y lo hicieron permanente.

**Vivió en tres de los Condados de Nueva York: Brooklyn, Manhattan y el Bronx. En este último lugar un buen día compro una casa en la parte este del Bronx. El progreso material, la tranquilidad emocional y la riqueza espiritual de él y su familia comenzaban a florecer. “Logré el sueño americano: tuve propiedades, tuve edificios de apartamentos para alquiler, tuve un negocio que administraba mi esposa. Además, los contratos de la 237 eran por periodos de 4 años. El Local 237 conseguía los aumentos con los funcionarios de la Ciudad, porque los salarios en la Autoridad eran muy bajos. Me retiré con un salario alto gracias a el Local 237. Me quedé en la Autoridad hasta que me jubilé. Esa dependencia del gobierno municipal se interesa por dar promociones a sus empleados dando prioridad**

**a los de mayor antigüedad. Pero yo no las acepté porque me sentía cómodo con lo que tenía. Además, mi esposa tenía un negocio, un Salón de Belleza que compramos en 1978; y yo me movía al trabajo de ella cuando salía del mío.”**

**José Antonio trabajo muy duro en Nueva York – al igual que Gloria para levantar a su familia y comprar varias propiedades. Como trabajador incansable y gran planificador de su propio futuro llevo ahorrar lo suficiente para hoy disfrutar de lo cosechado:**

- “Me levantaba a las cinco de la mañana y a las seis ya estaba en el trabajo. Comenzábamos a trabajar a las ocho. En mis últimos cinco años entraba a las cinco para salir a las cuatro y treinta de la tarde. Me correspondía hacer un chequeo de los elevadores. A las ocho de la mañana yo tenía que llevar un informe de mis hallazgos a los técnicos. Si yo encontraba algún problema ellos iban a arreglarlo. Esto lo hice para aumentar mi pensión trabajando horas extras. Trabajaba toda la semana hasta sábados y domingos. Solamente tenía un fin de semana libre. Además, durante catorce me hice cargo del “nursery home” donde cuidan los niños, dentro del proyecto, dando mantenimiento de cinco de la tarde a once de la noche.”

**La vida le brindaba tantas esperanzas y energías que un día decidió correr y correr como un sincero homenaje a su propia vida y a su propia suerte:**

- “Ahorré... y compré mis propiedades. Luego que trabajé esos catorce años me sentía tan bien y con mucha energía, que un domingo me paro frente a la oficina a ver el maratón de Nueva York. Los corredores pasaban por donde yo trabajaba y me llamó la atención una señora y un señor mayores que venían corriendo, yo calculo que tendrían como ochenta años, después me enteré que habían corredores de noventa años. Y pensé que me gustaría probar correr también y a la edad de 42 años me dio por irme a correr. Y seguí corriendo y mi sueño era correr en el maratón de Nueva York y lo hice seis veces. Todas las hice y gané medallas en mi categoría de “senior”, porque hice bien tiempo.”

**Siempre fue un miembro muy activo del Local 237. Cuenta que en una ocasión**

- “Participé en una huelga cuando se estaba pidiendo aumento de sueldo a los oficiales de la Ciudad... creo que fue en 1974; y también acudí a una protesta en 1983 cuando un adicto atacó y tiró a un compañero desde lo alto de un edificio. Inmediatamente la Unión se levantó en protesta exigiendo mayor protección a los trabajadores.”

**¿Qué significa para ti ser miembro de un sindicato?**

- “Lo máximo, si no hubieran los sindicatos se cometerían muchas injusticias para el trabajador. En el 1990 con 50 años de edad me jubilé. Ahora tengo 74 años. Me vine para Puerto Rico a los 50 años y vivíamos con lo que yo ganaba de los apartamentos y negocio, hasta que me dieron la pensión.”

**¿Tienes algo que añadir que no hayamos hablado?**

- “Bueno quiero decir que después de jubilado lo mejor que puedo hablar de la Local 237 son los seguros médicos. A los trabajadores aquí en Puerto Rico no se les dan los mismos beneficios que se les da a los trabajadores en Nueva York, no teníamos las mismas ventajas. Gracias al Local 237 hoy día tenemos esos beneficios en Puerto Rico. El Local 237 obligó a nuestro plan médico a darnos los mismos beneficios que tienen los compañeros en Nueva York, como los médicos especialistas.”

**¿Recomendarías que todo empleado debe pertenecer a la Unión?**

- “Sí, cien por ciento.”
- Gracias por tu tiempo. ■



Jose and Gloria Melendez

# Italian Heritage Celebration

*On October 26, the Retiree Division held a celebration of Italian heritage, with an abundance of cultural pride on full display.*



**Frank Aiello:**

*“My fondest memories of my youth were when my father and I would go to the movies. It was Father and Son time. We bonded as movie partners. When I became a father, I took my kids to the movies.”*



**Tony Cottone:**

*“Growing up in a small town in Sicily, we only had one movie theater and it was an important part of my life. In my home, we didn’t have a television or even a radio. All of the movies were spoken in Italian, mostly in black and white, but for me, they were always, magic on the screen.”*



**Rocco Brienza:**

*“When I was a teenager in my hometown of Monteleone, the movie house was located in the basement of the church and was controlled by the Pastor. I was always pestering my mother for money to go to the movies. Sometimes she found ways to give it to me, other times I found ways to sneak in. I liked to go to the movies to learn and experience how life was outside my small town.”*



**Vincent Aquilino:**

*“Mom and Pop were always fighting and hollering. On Sunday afternoon they would give me and my sister \$1 to go to the movies. We would come back at 6:30 -7:00 in the evening and everybody was happy. I don’t know what was going on but something happened.” Mr. Aquilino, in addition to being a retired NYCHA Superintendent, had a career with the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) and performed in movies such as “A Bronx Tale.”*



Asaro Family, Susan Milisits, Joanne Asaro, Anthony Cottone, Frank Aiello, Rocco Brienza, Linda Tavoraro, Rosario Lamberti, Vincent Aquilino, Paul DeRosa, Richard Fischetti, Nancy True.



Anthony Tamburri, Dean, Calandra Italian American Institute, Queens College



The family of Paul Asaro being presented with the “Award of Excellence” by Retiree Division Director Nancy True and members of the Italian Heritage Committee, Anthony Cottone and Linda Tavoraro.



A display featuring a photo of Paul Asaro and of Italian memorabilia.



Rosario Lamberti, Paul DeRosa, Anthony Cottone, Frank Aiello, Vincent Aquilino



Food, glorious (Italian) food, enjoyed by all.

The program featured a presentation on Italian cinema, exploring how it reflects the values and traditions of the Italian culture. Anthony Julian Tamburi, Ph.D, Dean and Distinguished Professor at the Calandra Italian American Institute of Queens College discussed the movie, “The Big Night” to illustrate key components of classic Italian movie-making that embodies those cultural traits. The question: “What the movies meant to me” was addressed by retirees Vincent Aquilino, NYCHA Assistant Resident Building Supervisor; Frank Aiello, NYCHA Resident Building Superintendent; Rocco Brienza, Department of Health Services Maintenance Worker and Anthony Cottone, NYCHA Building Superintendent, who all gave their recollections of going to the movies in their youth.

The Italian heritage celebration also included a tribute in honor Paul Asaro, a retired NYCHA Housing Manager and longtime office assistant and volunteer in the Retiree Division who passed away in March, 2017. Paul had a lifelong connection with Local 237, first as a NYCHA employee and immediately upon retirement, becoming involved with the Division’s Brooklyn Community Group – where he was the onetime chair. Recognized for his activism, he was invited to assist with the union’s Retirement Planning Program and shortly thereafter, he became a part-time office assistant in the Retiree Division. In addition to his part-time work, he was a founding member of the Retiree Division’s Italian Heritage Committee. His family was presented with the “Award of Excellence” by Director, Nancy B. True, to commemorate Paul’s invaluable service to the Retiree Division and his dedication to the Italian Heritage Committee. ■

# Coser y Cantar

*(Sew and Sing)*



by **Susan Milisits**  
Assistant Director  
Retiree Division

You might ask, “What do singing and sewing have in common?” In a new class offered by the Retiree Division, retired members can tell you that it means learning a new language while learning a new skill.

**Rocio Salceda**, Madrid born fashion designer, is the class instructor. A lifelong artist Ms. Salceda began studying, at the age of 8, at the Royal Academy, where she chose fine arts as her specialty. Her focus was on oil painting and sculpture. Eleven years ago she came to the United States to study for her Master’s Degree at the School of Visual Arts. It was there that her work was “discovered” by a representative of a local art gallery. She learned from this experience that she did not like being a part of the “art market.” For her, it was the business of selling 20 paintings, not art. In her words, “as an artist you follow a path.” She closed the door on pursuing a professional career as an artist and began teaching art.

Ms. Salceda’s early experience as a teacher began 17 years ago and in 2009 she became a Spanish instructor at the Instituto Cervantes in New York.



Retirees are enjoying “singing and sewing” in Spanish in *Coser y Cantar*, a new class offered by the Retiree Division.

While teaching, she began studying, 12 hours a day, how to sew. She found that the work she created resembled her paintings. She would “wear her art.” She enjoyed the tactile work of sewing and felt that it was an exercise in humility. She knew she needed to find her audience. Eventually, her audience was discovered as she worked one on one with others custom designing clothes. This evolved into a new career in couture.

The skills that Ms. Salceda has as an artist, a fashion designer and in teaching Spanish made an ideal combination for designing the Retiree Division’s newest class. Through the class, retired members are learning new languages in sewing and Spanish. Rocio observes that class participants are “teaching one another” as they help each other master the use of a sewing machine, while guided by Rocio.

The popular class has an enthusiastic group of retirees who enjoy the challenge of learning something new. Retiree, **Thelma Johnson** describes the class as “everything I expected and then some.” Maria Journet is very clear that she “wants more classes!” ■



# The Diabetes Grinch



by **Luz Carty**  
Retiree Assistance  
Coordinator of the  
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 these treats 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 are unaware that they have it. Uncontrolled diabetes can lead to long term complications such as blindness, heart attacks, strokes and amputations. That’s why it is important to learn the facts and live a lifestyle that is healthy and active. This is especially difficult during the holidays.

This is why the Retiree Division has developed a relationship with the American Diabetes Association. This partnership allows us to share important resources and events that can 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 more slowly 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 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](http://www.diabetes.org) or call 1-800-DIABETES (1-800-342-2383) Monday–Friday for information, recipes and additional resources.

*Happy Holidays!*

from the Director, **Nancy B. True** and staff of the  
Retiree Division — **Hector Cotto, Susan Milisits,  
Luz Carty, Shavon Banks and Noelia Quinones**

## on a personal note... Congratulations...



To NYCHA retiree, **Jose Santos**, who is celebrating the retirement of his son, Petty Officer Jose Santos Jr., having served 24 years in the Navy.



To the family of retired NYCHA Housing Assistant, **Dabney Montgomery**, who will be honored with a street naming on West 138 Street in April, 2018.

Montgomery, who died at the age of 93 in September of 2016 at his Harlem home, was a famed Tuskegee Airman---the legendary black Army Air Corps. The World War II hero, who served in Southern Italy from 1943 to 1945 was a Congressional Gold Medal recipient. Montgomery was also one of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s bodyguards in the historic Civil Rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. His tie and shoes from the march are on display in the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC.

## Condolences...



To **William Martinez**, Supervisor of Caretakers at South Beach Houses on Staten Island, on the death of his father, retiree, Rafael Martinez, a Local 237 member for 26 years. Before retiring to Puerto Rico, Rafael was a NYCHA Supervisor of Caretakers at Glenwood Houses. His son notes that Rafael's death was related to the devastation the Island sustained due to Hurricane Maria.

To the family of **Vincenza Dilella**, retired Manager of NYCHA. Vincenza started working at the Central Office as a Housing Assistant. She was a member of the Retiree Division's Italian Heritage Committee, before retiring as a Manager in the Department of Housing Applications in the Central Office.

To the family of **Joseph Drgan**, who retired in 1993 as a Superintendent of Mott Haven Houses. Joseph leaves behind his wife of nearly 60 years, Frances, his son, Stephen, a Maintenance Worker at Pelham Houses, and daughters JoAnn and Donna, 4 grandchildren and 1 great granddaughter.

The staff of the Retiree Division and the members of the Puerto Rico Community Group mourn the loss of **Carmen Rodriguez**, a retired NYCHA housing assistant. She was the founding "Coordinadora" of the Puerto Rico Retiree Group, building a strong foundation for her successor, Jose Melendez. Condolences to her husband Victor and their children.

## RETIREE news & views

216 West 14th Street  
New York, NY 10011



Affiliate of



NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2017



## Optical Plan Changes

by **Mitch Goldberg**

Director of the  
Retiree Benefit Fund

As you may be aware by now, on October 15, 2017, the Retirees' Benefit Fund eliminated the need to request optical vouchers for optical benefits. Instead, a claim form is obtained at the participating vendor who is affiliated with Comprehensive Professional Systems (CPS) in their PPO Network. Optical vendors in the network can be located in several ways. One option is to go to the CPS website @ [www.cpsoptical.com](http://www.cpsoptical.com). Once on the website, choose "Find a Provider." Another option is to go to the Teamsters Local 237 website @ [www.local237.org](http://www.local237.org). Under the Benefits tab choose NYC Agencies then scroll down to Welfare Fund Optical Plan. If you do not have internet access or want to speak to a CPS representative to find a location, you may call CPS at (212) 675-5745.

CPS maintains records regarding your eligibility for Optical Benefits. Eligibility can now be verified at the participating vendor location you choose for services. The Fund office will have the same eligibility information as CPS, therefore you may still call the Fund Office at (212) 924-7220 to verify your eligibility. The benefit frequency will remain the same as before. Retirees are eligible once every two years for the Optical Benefit.

Covered services include an eye exam & tonometry (Including Glaucoma testing), single vision glass or plastic lenses, TK, FT 25/28, executive or blended invisible glass or plastic bifocal lenses, trifocal glass or plastic lenses, standard progressive lenses (Non-Varilux), frames, extended wear contact lenses, Bausch & Lomb or Amsoft Clear Hard or Soft daily wear contact lenses.

Other options available which require an out of pocket expense include, PGX lenses \$20.00, standard reflection free coating \$25.00, Polarized lenses \$60.00, polycarbonate lenses (SV only) \$20.00, high index lenses (1.60) \$40.00, transition lenses \$60.00, gas permeable contact lenses \$100.00, toric soft daily wear contact lenses \$100.00, standard disposable contact lenses (1 year supply) \$250.00.

The Trustees hope that by eliminating the need for a voucher accessing your benefits will be easier and more convenient. ■



## Retirees and the Legal Services Benefit

by **Mary E. Sheridan, Esq.**

Director of Local 237  
Legal Services Plan

With retirement, often comes relocation. Have you left New York for a warmer climate? Or maybe for a less hectic life outside of the New York City metropolitan area? Many retirees believe such a move means they no longer have a Local 237 Legal Services benefit. Wrong. Although the Legal Services Plan can only represent you in covered matters in covered New York counties, there is a retiree reimbursement benefit available for retirees living outside of the covered area.

Your Legal Services Plan represents you in the following New York counties: New York, Kings, Bronx, Queens, Richmond, Nassau, Suffolk, Westchester, Rockland, Orange and Putnam. The biggest concentration of cases involve Family Law, including divorce, custody, visitation, orders of protection, abuse and neglect and some child support cases. Other covered legal matters include: tenant representation; buying and selling primary residence coop, condominium and one and two family homes; consumer and bankruptcy matters; and, drafting Wills, health care proxies and powers of attorney.

If you do not live in a covered New York county and have a covered legal matter, you are eligible to submit for reimbursement toward some of your legal fees. Although your reimbursement benefit may not cover all of your legal costs, it is money in your pocket helping to defray expensive legal fees. Remember — you retire from work, but never from the Union! Contact the Legal Services Plan at (212) 924-1220 for assistance. ■

PERIODICALS  
POSTAGE  
PAID AT  
NEW YORK,  
NY