

USA *Capsule*

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UNITED STAFF ASSOCIATION OF NEW JERSEY

APRIL 2008

President's message

Dear USA Members,

As another term of office draws to a close for USA officers and A/Rs, it is appropriate to review all that has been accomplished on your behalf over the past few years as well as possibilities for the future.

Your elected officials have:

- Preserved a safe and non-hostile work environment where, in times past, both have been in jeopardy.
- Established a Management Investigation Committee to meet with USA members within divisions where the labor-management relationship has been less than satisfactory.
- Protected our pension plan, a defined benefit for all USA members without regard to date of hire, one that is well-funded despite a difficult financial climate.
- Called upon retired USA members who have generously given their time and expertise to establish professional working relationships between USA members in various divisions.
- Negotiated a flex schedule for USA members who need flexibility in order to meet personal responsibilities.
- Added a third USA position to the Pension Board.
- Advocated for, and will continue to press for, position upgrades.
- Begun a practice of holding two USA Executive Committee meetings at HQ each year and providing lunch to HQ staff who can meet their officers and Executive Committee members in order to discuss current issues and concerns.
- Reached an agreement with management to prorate all time served as an OA for USA members who are hired to full-time positions. OA time will count towards tenure, seniority, longevity, and post-retirement medical benefits.



- Filed grievances and arbitrations on behalf of our members whose rights have been violated. A past arbitration established that associate staff members who are promoted from OA to full-time employment are not new hires under the contract and need not meet the probationary period negotiated into the contract by previous officers several contracts ago. A current arbitration is to establish the rights of our members to be considered for promotions before management can hire a non-member.
- Advocated for associate staff members who fill a temporary vacancy in a higher grade for an extended period of time to be paid at the higher rate.
- Arranged for associate staff to be included in Union School.

Going forward, in addition to continuing all that has been accomplished to date, we are:

- Exploring the possibility of adding a new job title to our bargaining unit.
- Exploring the possibility of adding to our current array of health benefit choices.
- Determining a training date for USA members who want to learn more about USA and their rights under the contract.

During our time in office, we have been committed to responding to all questions and concerns as they are brought to our attention.

Thank you for allowing us to serve as your advocates.

In unity,

Diane Spear

Diane Spear
USA President

Hold the date for spring meeting



Mark your calendar – the NJEA Retirement Luncheon/Spring Staff Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 28 at the Trenton Marriott. There will be an all-member USA meeting prior to lunch.

Associate staff selected for Union School

USA members Chrysty Jenkins (secretary, Region 21) and Mimi Mc Hale (administrative assistant, Communications) are heading back to school – Union School, that is. For the first time ever, two associate staff members will be attending Union School along with 22 NJEA members.



NJEA Union School was created in 1999 to provide NJEA members with an opportunity to explore careers with NJEA. Since then, NJEA has hired 19 current full-time professional staff and 29 part-time consultants (an additional six consultants have stepped down to pursue other activities) from the program. Five Union School graduates serve as members of the NJEA Executive Committee and three as County Presidents.

USA pension committee news

At the fall NJEA staff meeting, USA Treasurer Steve Swetsky reported that the Executive Committee had approved the formation of a USA Pension Committee. Steve asked for volunteers, and Colleen Patriarca, Brian Volz, Norm Danzig, Damien McKeever, Arthur Lehrhaupt, Jim Jameson, Theresa Mura, and Shirley Jones all submitted their names to serve on the committee.

The committee has met on two occasions. At the first meeting, the committee members reviewed the following information:

- Current contract language – Professional and Associate
- Employee Handbook – pension section
- Pension statements
- NJEA funding plan – as reviewed with general membership in December 2006
- Update of NJEA funding plan as reviewed with general membership in September 2007
- Pension Protection Act of 2006

The committee also discussed possible goals and what additional data/resources were needed.

At the second meeting, Steve updated the committee with information presented (by USA member Mary Ann Jandoli among others) at the recent National Staff Organization (NSO) Pension and Benefits Summit. From information reported by our colleagues in other

states, it's clear that USA members' pensions and post-retirement health benefits are among the best in the nation – and that the steps taken by NJEA and USA have served to strengthen both our pension plan and our post-retirement health benefits.

Following the presentation and discussion of the NSO issues, the committee met with Ed Richardson and Tim McGuckin. Ed and Tim spent time answering questions and reviewing the following information with the committee:

- Pension Update – NJEA present and future funding
- Addition of two new members to the Pension Board – the NJEA Vice-President and one additional member to be elected from plan participants
- Pension Board election procedures
- Pension Board member training

After Ed and Tim left, the committee wrapped up with a discussion of future activities. Some members of the committee seek additional information and training regarding pension plan investment practices, and others would like to see training for USA members on the basics of our pension plan. At the next meeting, formal plans will be developed to move forward in both areas.

Questions? Contact one of the committee members, or contact Steve to join the committee.



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*USA President
Diane Spear*

*Editors
Lisa Galley & Dawn Hiltner*