

WGTA History from 2000 - 2005

By Lynn Davis

History from 2000 - 2005

Nearly 50 West Genesee Teachers volunteered to participate in the Adopt-a-Highway program. The WGTA will have the responsibility to clean a 1.1-mile stretch of Route 690 near the Camillus Exit. John Lazarski, a high school social studies teacher, is the organizer.



Adopt A Highway cleanup volunteers.

In response to an increase number of bomb threats, the Onondaga County Teachers' Association offered a \$1,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of any person or persons responsible for making a bomb threat against any school district in Onondaga County.

The total 1999 union dues for the WGTA, NYSUT, AFT and AFL-CIO were \$503.04. Mike Cost, the WGTA Vice President for Negotiations, presented an academic calendar proposal to the West Genesee Board of Education at their March 1, 2000, meeting. Speaking before a standing room only crowd Mike discussed the strengths of the WGTA proposal. The suggested calendar would help student instruction by:

- * Providing teachers with more 5-day weeks
- * Reducing the number of long weekends
- * Scheduling more days to prepare for state tests
- * Giving Special Area and BOCES students the maximum amount of instruction

- * Providing breaks to maintain positive student attitudes
- * Allowing for personal growth in areas outside of school
- * Making decisions based on data not opinions

At the Board of Education Meeting held on Wednesday, March 15, 2000, the Board rejected the WGTA proposal and voted 6-3 to accept the Districts proposed calendar (Board members Crumb, Brogan, and Lum voted against the Superintendent's calendar). In response to this vote the WGTA released a statement which read, in part: "We agree with Board of Education member Dr. Crumb's assessment that there was no apparent criteria upon which the Superintendent's calendar was based other than possibly not to have a February break. On the other hand, the WGTA proposed calendar was based on five educationally based criteria and we supplied the school board with data to support those criteria. "

The WGTA Cabinet donated \$250 to the 16th annual West Genesee "All Night / After the Ball Party." The parents of WG Seniors and the local chapter of SADD (Students Against Drunk Driving) sponsored the event along with the help and financial support of the community.

A WGTA Spring Fling Social was held on Friday, May 19, 2000, at the Camillus Elks Club.

Jennifer Dee, a reading teacher at West Genesee Middle School, was one of three Central New York Teacher recipients of the 2000 Golden Apple Award. The award recognizes educators for creative and effective use of the newspaper as a learning resource.

Lorraine Bedy and Michael Cost, teachers at West Genesee High School, completed work on their doctoral degrees, both at Syracuse University.

During the March 24, 2000, Jean Day in Support of the American Heart Association, WGTA teachers and staff members donated a total of \$1,060.00.

Joyce Backus, an art teacher at the High School, was recently notified that she won the third place award in the 45th Annual Poetry / Art Contest. Joyce's winning entry, titled "Clown Fish," won the award in the adult art division of the competition.

The 2000 WGTA Executive Officer election results were:

Jim Ridgeway, WGTA President, 2 year term
Ray Fuller, WGTA Vice President, 2 year term
Marcia Schwartz, WGTA Treasurer, 1 year term
Lynn Davis, WGTA Secretary, 1 year term
Mel Taber, NYSUT Delegate, 3 year term
Dominic Fruscello, NYSUT Alternate, a 3 year term.

Mark Sunheimer was the 2000 winner of the WGTA Scholarship. The scholarship amount was for \$2000 divided over 4 years. Mark was planning to be an education major at SUNY Geneseo.

On July 1, 2000, the WGTA was informed that their web site won the 2000 American Federation of Teachers' Communication Association First Place Award for Best Web Site in Class IV (locals with less than 500 members). This is the second year in a row that the web site has won this award.

New York Gov. George Pataki on July 11 signed a bill providing a long-awaited, permanent, pension cost-of-living adjustment for New York public employees.

Both the AFT and NYSUT endorse Al Gore for U.S. President and Hilary Clinton for U.S. Senator from New York. Hilary Clinton wins -- Al Gore carries NYS but loses in "Flori-dah."

In December, 2000, the WGTA web site was informed that it had won a Second Place Award for best use of a union web site for promoting Union Plus Programs in the Union Privilege Annual Promotion Contest. The contest prize for second place was a cash award of \$500 and a certificate.

2001 - 2002

Starting January 19, 2001, the WGTA web site will changed its domain name and web address. The "old address" was: <http://www.dreamscape.com/wgtaweb>. The new web address and domain name will be: <http://www.wgta.net>. The new name more clearly identifies the WGTA as the sponsor and will be easier for users to remember.

The company that hosts the web site will continue to be Dreamscape. This company, a division of Northland Communications, has hosted the WGTA site since 1998. Prior to that the web site was hosted on America On-Line, starting over the summer of 1997.

The 2001 - 2004 Tentative Agreement between the WGTA and the District was ratified in March 2001, by the membership. The official vote was:

YES - 311

NO - 14

VOID - 1

Tom Hobart, Chairman of VOTE/COPE and President of the New York State United Teachers, sent a thank you note to the WGTA in appreciation for money donated to the 2000 VOTE/COPE campaign. The WGTA membership had a 97% participation rate in VOTE/COPE fund-raising, donating over \$3,500 from individuals in the local.

A letter was received from Tom Hobart, NYSUT President, informing President Ridgeway that the WGTA and its membership is a recipient of NYSUT's 2001 Local Community Service Award. This award recognizes a local's collective and sustained contribution to community service during the last calendar year.

To receive this award the WGTA and its members sponsored educational newspaper ads, participated in the Adopt-A-Highway Program, provided scholarships to students majoring in education, invited BOCES employees that work in the West Genesee District to WGTA sponsored social events, cosponsored the Retirement Reception, participated in the new teacher orientation, donated sick days to fellow teachers, raised money for the United Way, sponsored Denim Days for the American Heart Association and the American Cancer Association, donated funds to the WG After-The-Ball Party, and made donations in memory of staff and families. In his letter Mr. Hobart stated, "Please extend congratulations to the members of your local for their dedicated effort. Their work in enriching the lives of community members is laudatory and worthy of this award." President Hobart will present an award to the WGTA at the upcoming Representative Assembly on May 5, 2001. In addition, NYSUT will highlight the WGTA's involvement in a New York Teacher issue following the convention.

The WGTA raised \$1,243.00 in a Denim Day event with the money earmarked for the American Cancer Society's "Making Strides Against Breast Cancer" event. The WGTA also raised \$3,500 for Vote/Cope.

In recognition of the time and effort teachers have made meeting the educational goals of the district, the West Genesee School Board voted to give checks for \$250 to teachers with the last paycheck in June 2001. Checks will be prorated based on the employment status of the individual teacher.

In response to the terrorist attack in NYC the WGTA Cabinet, at their September 18, 2001, meeting voted unanimously to donate \$2,500 to the NYC Firemen's Benevolent Association and another \$2,500 to the NYC Police Benevolent Association.

The WGTA dues for the 2001 - 2002 school year are \$496.95. The increase is due to an increase for NYSUT and AFT dues.

The web site of the West Genesee Teachers' Association won the American Federation of Teachers Communication Association (AFTCA) "2001 Journalism Award for Best Web Site" for locals with less than 500 members. AFTCA is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers and sponsors a yearly national journalism competition for AFT locals across the country. This is the third year in a row that the West Genesee Web Site has won this award.

2002 - 2003

Throughout the 2002 year the WGTA raised \$1,235 for Dollars for Denim fight against breast cancer, \$1,430 for the American Heart Association, and \$1,885 in the WG Scholarship Drive. The WGTA membership also donated thousands of dollars to such causes as the West Genesee Senior After the Ball Party Fund, the WGTA / District Retirement Party, memorials, and Vote/Cope. The Adopt-A Highway committee cleaned a one mile stretch of the Route 5 By-pass three times during the year, and WGTA representatives attended hundreds of meetings including the Committee of 100, Building Shared Decision Making, the Teaching Center, the Educational Development Committee, Superintendent's Liaison, the WGTA Cabinet, grievance hearings and arbitrations -- to name a few.

On April 7, 2002, the Onondaga County Teacher's Association honored staff from around the county with a dinner and a plaque given to teacher union members "who have given so unselfishly of their time and energy to further the causes of our profession." The following WGTA members were honored: Bill Baldwin (High School), Michael Cost (High School), Lynn Davis (CMS), Ray Fuller (Onondaga Road), John Lazarski (High School), Marcia Schwartz (Stonehedge), Kathryn Smith-Lance (WGMS) and Mel Taber (Stonehedge).

The full February break was finally reinstated in 2002 after the WGTA exerted considerable and sustained political pressure. In 1996 the West Genesee School Board unilaterally shortened the February break under the guise that children lose educational focus over extended vacations.

The end of the 2002 school year saw Jim Ridgeway, current President of the WGTA, and Vice President for Grievances Mel Taber, both retire -- taking with them a combined 70 years of experience working for the West Genesee Teachers' Association. Also retiring was Tom Clerkin who had been the WGTA's NYSUT Field Representative for the past 26 years. Tom's replacement is Sue DeCarlo.

Effective on July 1, 2002, the newly elected 2002-2003 WGTA Officers were:
Mike Cost (High School) - WGTA President
Dave Smithson (Stonehedge) - Vice President
Lynn Davis (CMS) - WGTA Secretary
Marcia Schwartz (Stonehedge) - WGTA Treasurer.

In addition, Ray Fuller (Onondaga Road) was appointed to the position of Vice President for Grievances

The WGTA won the 2002 Partnership in American Education Award from the American Federation of Teachers for increased participation in Vote/Cope and the 2002 Pride of the Union Award from the American Federation of Teachers for its consistent "hard work and success."

The WGTA web site won the 2002 American Federation of Teachers Communication Association Award for best union internet site in its class. This is the FOURTH year in a row the web site has taken the top honors. The award was presented to Lynn Davis, web master, at the July 13, 2002, AFTCA Convention in Las Vegas. The web site also won 3rd place, and a check for \$250, in an AFT Union Plus competition.

The WGTA / NYSUT / AFT dues for the 2002- 2003 school year were \$522.95/year.

The WGTA Cabinet voted to endorse Clyde Ohl in the 124th Assembly race for New York State Assemblyman. Clyde has served 31 years as a principal and teacher at the West Genesee High School, and at one time served as president of the WGTA. In addition he has served two terms as Camillus Supervisor and four terms in the Onondaga County Legislature from Camillus. Clyde lost in this race for an Assembly seat.

The WGTA continued to argue multiple contract violations brought against the district. At the end of 2002 the status of active grievances included:

1. Termination Grievance - 2 more days of hearings are scheduled.
2. Early Literacy I - still in court.
3. Board Attachment Grievance - awaiting decision.
4. Sick Bank Grievance - an arbitrator ruled there was no contract violation.
5. Early Literacy II - in court.
6. Early Literacy III - Board Hearing is scheduled for January 2, 2003.
7. Part-time Stipend - settled.
8. Early Literacy IV - the district failed to abide by binding arbitration decision. The WGTA withdrew the grievance pending a court hearing.

2003 - 2004

The WGTA chartered a bus so that members could attend the May 3, 2003, "March for Public Education" in Albany, NY.

Grievance Report as of April 2003:

1. Unfair Dismissal - the arbitrator has rescheduled the next day of the hearing for May 13, 2003.
2. Early Literacy I - the appeal will be heard May 27, 2003, in Rochester.
3. Early Literacy II - the judge's order was confirmed; appeal continues.
4. Early Literacy III - the District still wants to talk; meeting set for April 8, 2003. In spite of the two arbitration rulings and two court rulings, the district still feels that it has the right to schedule training for any teacher at any time.

5. Board Attachments - we requested the District to follow the award of the arbitrator; Sally Romany said she had turned it all over to Rudy. Requested that Rudy follow the award of the arbitrator. We received a letter from the District's lawyer telling us that he is evaluating "the District's options regarding this most recent decision. Thus, any assumption that the District is ignoring the decision is erroneous." It has been two months since the award required the District to turn over Rudy's contract "forthwith." This could possibly be the third "binding" arbitration in a row that the District has decided not to be bound by. Obviously, the contract, and agreement as to how we will work together, continues to have little meaning to the District and its lawyers.

The following people were elected / appointed to WGTA Executive Officer positions for the 2003 school year:

Mike Cost
WGTA President

Dave Smithson
Vice President

Ray Fuller
VP - Grievances

Marcia Schwartz
Treasurer

Lynn Davis
Secretary

The WGTA membership ratified a new agreement on October 5, 2003, by a vote of 321 to 5 (with 1 void vote and 4 unverified votes). The three-year contract was the result of informal negotiations. Involved in the negotiations were Mike Cost (WGTA President), Dave Smithson (WGTA Vice President) and Ray Fuller (Vice President for Grievances).

The new agreement calls for a 4% increase on all money amounts described within the agreement, including salaries, over each of the three years. The retirement award as specified in Article V, Section S3 will be offered in 2005 and 2007 as per the existing language with the award being placed into a member's 403b account. In addition, an award of \$2,000 will be granted for teachers achieving the National Board Certification and / or a doctorate degree.

The recipient of the 2003 WGTA Scholarship is Korrie Marie Murphy. She is attending St. John Fisher College and is pursuing a Secondary Education Mathematics Degree. Korrie was the WG president of SADD, member of National

Honor Society and on the High Honor Roll. Korrie enjoys arts & crafts, sports and travel.

A WGTA Fall Fling was held Friday, October 17th, 2003, at the Elks Club.

The WGTA institutes the "YPO! Your Professional Opinion" surveys in which the union attempts to determine what our members think about the issues facing them in their jobs.

The October workshop WGTA sponsored Denim Day raised \$1,170 for the Susan G. Komen Foundation.

Lisa Tamiso, a foreign language teacher at Camillus Middle School, is one of New York's 107 new nationally certified teachers.

Receiving the 2003 Joseph A. Witowski Teacher of the Year Awards were Onodaga Road fifth grade teacher Kristin Lockwood, West Genesee Middle School mathematics teacher Kathy Smith- Lance, and High School English teacher Geoffrey Bender.

Bob Deegan, science teacher at the West Genesee High School, participated with an international team of scientists this summer in Ireland. The scientists are analyzing sediment, tree and water samples attempting to put together a climatic record of the last 10,000 years.

2004 - 2005

WGTA Executive Officers for 2004 were Mike Cost (President), Dave Smithson (Vice President), Lynn Davis (Secretary) and Andrea Moore (Treasurer). Ray Fuller was appointed as Vice President for Grievances and John Christian was appointed as Vice President for Negotiations.

Stephanie Sauda was awarded the WGTA Scholarship for 2004 - 2008. She will be attending Le Moyne College.

The WGTA newsletter, The MemberShip, won the NYSUT journalism "First Award" for the 3-part article titled "Elder Care" written by Lynn Davis (CMS). According to the NYSUT notification letter, "All the judges remarked on the unusually high quality of this years entries, making your achievement even more noteworthy." The award was presented to the WGTA on March 27th at the NYSUT Representative Assembly at the New York Hilton.



WGTA President Mike Cost (center) accepting the NYSUT First Award presented to The MemberShip for winning the "Best Article on Health Issues," written by Lynn Davis (CMS). On Mike's left is NYSUT Vice President Antonia Cortese and on his right is NYSUT President Tom Hobart.

The WGTA Web Site also won an "Award of Merit" in the NYSUT Journalism Competition. The web master is Lynn Davis, CMS

The WGTA web site also won first place in the American Federation of Teachers Communication Association Journalism Competition. This is the fifth win out in the last 6 years for the web site.

The WGTA Office has moved to the Village of Camillus, at the corner of Main and South Street, on the second floor of the GB Lax Building.



President Cost in the new WGTA Office

The West Genesee staff raised \$947 in the October 2004, Susan B. Komen Breast Cancer Denim Day.

Thomas Y. Hobart Jr., president of the AFT's largest state affiliate, the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), announced Nov. 1 that he would not seek re-election as the union's president. The newly elected NYSUT President was Dick Iannuzzi.

Stonehedge kindergarten teacher Ann Barlow, WGMS mathematics teacher Sue Nicholson Bingham, and High School French teacher Melissa Brown received the 2004 Joseph A. Witowski Teacher of the Year Awards.

The results of the West Genesee United Way Drive are in and 157 staff members pledged a total of \$7,451.

Negotiations Update -- The WGTA was able to get the new mentoring program up and running. Mentors made \$500 this year, \$750 next year, and will make \$1,000 in 2006 - 2007. Second, the first snow day give back day was moved from the Thursday before Easter to the Monday after Easter. Third, the 2005 - 2006 school year will begin the Thursday before Labor day allowing us to have off Friday, December 23rd.

Negotiations Update part II. In June it was announced that the WGTA negotiated the new summer school hours and a Memorandum of Agreement to enter those new hours into the contract.

There was a successful Adopt A Highway clean up in May 2005.

Kristin Brown was the winner of the \$2,000 WGTA Scholarship for 2005.

Newsweek magazine ranked the West Genesee High School as the 828th best in the nation, putting them in the top 3% of schools across the country

The WGTA web site won a First Place Award for its class in a national competition sponsored by the AFT Communications Association. This is the 6th win in 7 years for the web site.

The August WGTA Cabinet meeting was held at the West Hill Golf Course. Some of the cabinet members played 9 holes of golf prior to participating in the dinner meeting. Sue DeCarlo, our NYSUT Field Representative, played golf and also participated in the dinner meeting.