

# RETIREE



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THE UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS RETIRED TEACHERS CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

## From the UFT Welfare Fund

BY ARTHUR PEPPER, UFT WELFARE FUND  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Our UFT retirees have always been on the front lines advocating for our members, and our vigilance paid off in the waning months of the last mayoral administration. Disrespectful and mean-spirited actions by the administration were a reminder of why we must remain vigilant.

As background, health care for members of the UFT and other municipal unions in New York City has since 1992 been subject to collective bargaining under a signed agreement between the city and the Municipal Labor Committee.

Then, suddenly last spring, the city announced without consultation with the unions that it was conducting an audit to determine whether dependents of union members were eligible for health coverage. The Municipal Labor Committee had no objection to the

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## Message from Tom

BY TOM MURPHY, UFT/RTC CHAPTER LEADER

We can remain union activists even from the comfort of our kitchen laptops as we have our morning tea and coffee and watch the great world spin.

Remember what Al Shanker said on politics: Support our friends and oppose our enemies. During my 16 years as the UFT's political and legislative director, my corollary was: Friend or foe, hold their feet to the fire.

**Email Congress.** We often call on all our retirees for whom we have email addresses to make their voices heard in federal budget negotiations. One frequent request is to email your members of Congress.

Last December, for example, we called for action as the bipartisan budget commission was negotiating and set to issue its recommendations.

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) set up an Internet link for sending emails to Congress on the issue. You simply had to go to the link, type in your zip code and send the email message to your representatives. Our voices were heard! The AFT reported that 2,838 email messages were sent by our retirees in a two-week period. And thanks to your good work, the bipartisan budget compromise did some good and little harm. Help us keep an eye on such issues.

Go to <http://www.aft.org> for information and to sign up as an AFT e-activist. We will also alert you when action is needed.

**Write letters to the editor.** Here is another easy but gratifying action. Local newspapers are often eager to publish letters from their regional reading public. You can have a big impact at the grassroots level by writing letters that respond to news articles or opinion pieces or raise progressive, labor-friendly issues. We have on our RTC website a primer on how to submit letters to the editor either

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## What Teachers and Students Mean to Each Other

Lenora Farber, a retired teacher from Junior HS 231 in Queens was thrilled to receive a message from a student she taught 48 years ago. The student, Derrick Taylor, went to John Hopkins University in Maryland and attended

medical school in Boston. He did his residency in general surgery at St. Luke's Medical Center in New York, served as a commander in the U.S. Navy Medical Corps and practiced a few years as a surgeon in Japan. Dr. Taylor is a surgeon at the Redwood City Medical Center in California.

The last time Ms. Farber saw her former student was at her daughter's graduation from John Hopkins University in 1974. Since Ms. Farber's daughter is in charge of her university class' 40th reunion in 2014, she contacted Dr. Taylor.

In response to the email, Dr. Taylor asked, "How is your mom doing? Tell her that the scared little black boy in Queens made it through Hopkins and Boston University Medical School, and I owe it to teachers like her who saw something in me."

Ms. Farber wrote, "This is truly one of the best rewards any teacher could get!"



## SUPPLEMENTAL HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM (SHIP) BENEFIT IMPROVEMENTS

In 2013, the Supplemental Health Insurance Program (SHIP) improved several benefits. This is a glimpse of some of the more commonly utilized member benefits that we have processed:

- The dental stipend has improved. You are now allowed to claim up to \$300 per year for covered, out-of-pocket dental expenses. Implants will be covered under this benefit.
- The program continues to reimburse hospital deductibles for inpatient stays and emergency room visits. The benefit for orthotics or orthopedic shoes has been combined into one benefit for a maximum of \$300 per year, with a

lifetime maximum of \$2,000.

- The cost of surgical stockings or compression hose, when recommended in writing by a physician, will be reimbursed up to \$200 per year, with a lifetime maximum of \$1,000.
- The hearing aid benefit is \$1,000 every three years. This is in addition to the Welfare Fund benefit of \$1,000 for hearing aids. The Welfare Fund will process this benefit for SHIP with the submission of the Welfare Fund claim form.
- Home health aides are covered after a hospital/rehabilitation stay, when recommended by a physician. You must have been hospital-

ized for a minimum of two days.

- Out-of-pocket expenses for ambulance or ambulette services are still covered with submission of the required documentation.

SHIP continues to look at all your benefits and we always consider improvements.

**REMEMBER:** SHIP is a separate benefit, and it is your responsibility to submit your claims with the required documentation. The claims should be filed within one year from the date of service.



### Welfare Fund *continued from page 1*

purpose of the audit as it is important for us all to ensure that only those who are eligible have access to our health plans. However, the committee had many concerns about how the audit was being conducted, specifically about the security of the information collected and the notification and appeal procedures. The administration ignored us. So, we unfortunately had to go to court. Fortunately, however, we won an injunction to stop the audit. Only after winning in court did the administration sit down and negotiate with us the protections we need for our members.

That wasn't all. Not long after the incident with the eligibility audit, the city announced that it was releasing a request for proposal (RFP) for the existing health plans, meaning it was asking for the health plans to propose changes to the coverage for us and the other unions covered by the Municipal Labor Committee agreement. The administration gave the committee a copy of a 1,000-page draft request for proposal and said we would need to meet within a week to provide our feedback. That is hardly what we would consider negotiations.

As it turned out, the committee met over several weeks to review the information. We found numerous errors, components that we felt were unlawful and new plan designs that would require lengthy and thorough investigation. As with the eligibility audit, the unions weren't opposed outright to a request for proposal of this kind. But a certain process that includes negotiations must be followed to protect our benefits.

The administration was on a mission and had to be stopped. Once again, the labor committee went to court and won an injunction to stop the request for approval process.

The last mayoral administration took other actions that have lingering effects. But I think you see the theme. As union members, we expect to be treated with the same respect that we show to others in our jobs as teachers, firefighters, police officers, sanitation workers and in all other unionized positions for the City of New York. We will always remain vigilant, but are hopeful that the new administration brings a commitment to working together rather than working against us. We are ready and willing to move forward.

### A FEW HEALTH CARE ANNOUNCEMENTS FOR 2014

The UFT Welfare Fund is pleased to continue to provide the Retiree Optional Rider reimbursement for 2013 at the rate of up to \$780 annually. Retirees in GHI will notice a decrease in their rider costs due to the many introductions of generic versions of brand drugs, which has resulted in a reduction of the rider cost.

Medicare Part D - 5% Catastrophic Reimbursement will be available to eligible retirees and spouses for calendar year 2013. The letter and application were mailed in December and are available on our website at [www.uftwf.org](http://www.uftwf.org). Completed applications must be received at the Welfare Fund by February 1, 2014.

Due to the Affordable Care Act, there may be some minor modifications to the optical and dental programs which will only affect eligible dependents under age 19. We will be sharing the information with the members in February.

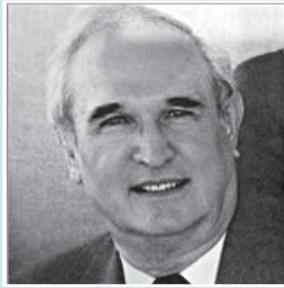
# Four union leaders that we lost this past year



**CAROLYN KING** was a school secretary and a long-time union activist. She was the chapter leader for the UFT School Secretaries Chapter, and secretaries made many gains during her years of leadership.

Ms. King was recognized for her outstanding service to the union at the UFT School Secretaries Award Luncheon in 2010, where she received the Goldie Colodny Award. She also received a 50-year member award on June 3, 2013 at the Retired Teachers Chapter 50th Annual Luncheon.

Ms. King was a UFT Retiree Executive Board member, NYSUT Retiree Council member, UFT Executive Board member from JHS 158 in District 26 in Queens, UFT delegate, AFT/NYSUT convention delegate, member of the Jewish Labor Committee and UFT representative for the Coalition of Labor Union Women. She was also a NYSUT defensive driving instructor for UFT Welfare Fund Retiree Programs and a member of the Reflections in Poetry & Prose Selection Committee.



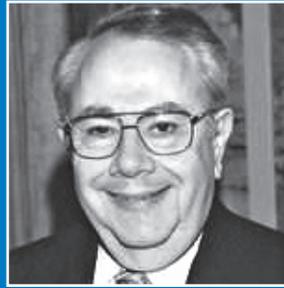
**JOSEPH SHANNON** began teaching social studies at Totenville HS in the early 1960s. He became a longtime union activist and leader, including as the first UFT Staten Island borough representative. He oversaw the development of the union in Staten Island schools and the implementation of many union benefits and programs for teachers.

He also served as the UFT's legislative representative in Albany, where he helped to secure gains for the union's membership.

Mr. Shannon also played a role at an important moment of New York City history in the mid-1970s. He was elected as a teacher trustee of the Teachers' Retirement System and during the New York City fiscal crisis he cast a critical vote authorizing the retirement system's purchase of New York City bonds. The TRS' purchase of these bonds allowed New York City to avoid declaring bankruptcy.

Mr. Shannon additionally served as board chairman of Group Health Inc. In that role he helped to ensure that New York City employees and retirees received medical coverage that they were entitled to.

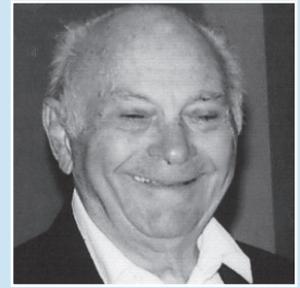
He is survived by his children - Colleen Shannon, Maureen Shannon Czajkowski, and Joseph Shannon Jr., four grandchildren and one great-grandchild.



**NICHOLAS A. SPILOTRO** was a beloved teacher, musicologist and author who died in November. He had retired in 1991.

Mr. Spilotro was the first UFT district representative for Manhattan high schools, a founding member of the UFT Italian-American Studies Committee and a member of many organizations, including: the UFT Irish-American and Hispanic American Studies committees, the Jewish Labor Committee, Sons of Italy, the American Committee on Italian Migration and the speakers bureau of the Garibaldi-Meucci Museum. He was also an Italian Opera instructor for the UFT Welfare Fund Retiree Programs Learning Centers.

Mr. Spilotro valued his family, his faith and food. He enjoyed cooking and reading history, politics, spy fiction and nonfiction. He is survived by his wife, Mary, and sister, Gloria Donnigi.



**MURRAY SUSSMAN** was a New York City police officer before he became a teacher, a UFT member and a political activist. He had many firsts as a union activist. He was the first district representative for District 21 in Brooklyn, the first Brooklyn borough representative and the first RTC West Palm Beach section coordinator. Mr. Sussman along with Bernard Silver opened a Teacher Store where teachers could buy supplies for their classrooms. It was located in a storefront at the UFT Headquarters at 260 Park Avenue South.

As a retiree working in South Florida, Mr. Sussman was very active in politics. After a Florida state senator unexpectedly passed away, he worked mostly on his own to organize a phone-bank campaign for a first-time candidate who won the election. This launched that candidate's political career, and she is now the supervisor of elections for Palm Beach County.

Mr. Sussman along with two other Florida retiree activists was elected as a delegate for Bill Clinton at the National Democratic Party Convention in 1992. He was the oldest male delegate there.

*Message from Tom continued*

by email as most news outlets prefer, or by regular mail. You can find advice there on how to improve your chances of being published, what to say and what not to say and the length and format for a letter. You can find examples of members' letters including the original versions submitted to the newspaper and the final version, after the newspaper's editing, that was published.

Go to: Resources for writing letters to the editor: <http://www.uft.org/chapters/retirees/letters-editor>

Published letters to the editor: <http://www.uft.org/chapters/retirees/published-letters>

**Join in advocacy by the Alliance for Retired Americans, AFL-CIO (ARA).** By working with the alliance, you can be proactive about advancing retiree interests and a positive social agenda instead of only playing catch-up in fighting bad policies, though that work is essential also.

You can go to the website and sign up for its Friday email alert at [www.retiredamericans.org](http://www.retiredamericans.org). The email alert is always informative and will help keep you up to date on what's going on nationally. It also often has an action you can take right there and then on your laptop as you look out at the snow or enjoy the southern clime, if

that's where you are.

Here's an example of a message that the ARA sends out:

Let's stop focusing on cutting our social safety net. Instead, let's start focusing on making it stronger. Tell Congress: Don't cut Social Security and Medicare. Expand them.

Through these programs, we have been able to lift millions out of poverty and provide affordable, high-quality health care for millions of seniors and disabled Americans.

There are many commonsense proposals that would allow us to expand benefits while extending these programs' solvency. Will you join us as we call on Congress to expand, not cut, Social Security and Medicare?

**Sign the petition to reclaim the promise of public education.** The AFT has launched a national Reclaim

the Promise campaign calling on federal, state and local officials to restore their commitment to public education. The following link enables us to sign a petition to Congress that says in part:

"We want great neighborhood schools that are safe and welcoming, are fully funded and have teachers who are well-prepared, are well-supported, and have manageable class sizes and time to collaborate."

Let's help our in-service colleagues who are building on the work that we inherited and to which we contributed. For more information and to sign the petition, go to: <http://petitions.moveon.org/sign/reclaim-the-promise-of>.

We were born to be activists and we still can be, right from our computer or laptop.

**Update your em@il addresses** with the UFT Retired Teachers Chapter at [retirees@uft.org](mailto:retirees@uft.org) or send the information below to the UFT-RTC, 52 Broadway, 17th Floor, New York, NY 10004. We need the email addresses in case we cannot reach you by phone or to send you any new information regarding chapter news and reminders for meetings and luncheons or anything that is cancelled.

NAME .....

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EMAIL ADDRESS.....



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