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## What's good on the bookshelves



The Tin Roof  
 Blowdown by  
 James Lee Burke

Set in the usual New Orleans, this also takes place in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. As is typical of Burke, complex characters flesh out this crime novel. The plot as well as the characters place this a cut above the usual

crime genre.

The Closers by Michael Connelly

Connelly writes interesting stories with equally interesting characters. BUT, this time seemed a disappointment. The characters were sketchy and the plot too thin. To make it worse you will probably know "who did it" way too soon.

*Charlie Donner*

We are pleased that our history dates back to 1971 when The New York State Teachers Association certified our union. Today we are proudly affiliated with The New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) and The American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

We are also honored to be a part of The American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO).

*We would love to hear from you! If you are interested in submitting an article, photo, or any other newsworthy event, please contact the Editor, Darla Bubar at dbubar@nwcsd.org.*

*\*All submissions are subject to editing for space and clarity.*

# The Agenda

Official Newsletter of Niagara Wheatfield Teachers Association

Volume 35, Issue 5



January 2009

## Keep your hopes high, our future is bright

*From the AFT  
 January 2009*

The economic crisis surrounding our island and nation has affected our lives making it difficult to live comfortably. Our public structure doesn't seem to be improving, our children are still lacking adequate education, healthcare costs are rising, etc... We can't keep our hopes down. The Inauguration of our 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States Barack Obama is just the start of improvements in our economy. Thousands of people were gathered in celebration of this historic event, showing their motivation and hopes that we will have a brighter future ahead of us. President Obama, "The state of the economy calls

for action, bold and swift, and we will act — not only to create new jobs, but to lay a new foundation for growth. We will build the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together. We will restore science to its rightful place, and wield technology's wonders to raise health care's quality and lower its cost. We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories. And we will transform our schools and colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age. All this we can do. And all this we will do."



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## Wit and wisdom... *tough times*



*Kevin Rustowicz,  
President*

As president of the union, each year you look to meet with your officers and establish goals and also have goals based on philosophical views. This year, more than ever, my goals for our union are very global: a settlement for our CBA, retention of certified staff, and the passing of the school budget. Because of the current economic issues—the state budget deficit is over \$15 billion for 09-10 year and \$47 billion over the next four years. The governor’s proposed budget is a reactive response to that. He is looking to cut 12% in state aid to education this coming year alone. Make no mistake about it, the coming year’s budget process will be one of the most grueling in recent memory. Of course, the government has an obligation to look at cost savings and better efficiency whenever possible. Our profession is often looked at as an easy target to swing the budget axe at because it is a high cost item. There are always two sides, in this case, the spending side

verses the revenue side. Because of Wall Street and federal regulations or “de-regulations”, the revenue side has collapsed. In NYSUT’s opinion, the revenue side should be addressed by lawmakers. NYSUT is being proactive in lobbying lawmakers to make changes to that end. We, as teachers in the NWCSD, need to reach out and be proactive in our own “backyards”. We need to be respectful of each other. Look to continue building bridges with communities members and recognize we are all in this together. The public and private sectors are feeling increased pressure to cut jobs and change working conditions of their employees to meet the economic downturn. As president of our union, I implore you to be part of the solution and not part of the problem. We need to be proactive in all areas because of this crisis and its far-reaching effects. Take some time out of your busy schedule to visit NYSUT.org and find ways to help be a part of the solution.

~Rusto

## Contract connection

Here’s your chance to win a \$10 gift card from your choice of either Starbucks, Tim Hortons, or Dunkin Donuts!

*An Association member told her supervisor that she was being sexually harassed by another supervisor, but nothing was done about it.*

Decide if the following scenario is **complaint** or **grievance** based on

our contract language. Cite the page and section number from our current contract that you used as evidence for your answer.



\*all members in good standing are eligible. Winner will be drawn randomly from all correct entries submitted. Include your name, building, and gift choice along with your entry! One entry per person per month.

## The lighter side



"SAY, THOSE ARE BIG FLAKES.."



## Take care of us so we can take care of the people we serve

*From the AFT  
January 2009*

Research from the Economic Policy Institute shows that Unions raise wages of unionized workers, offer better benefits such as paid leave, health insurance, and retirement plans, and most importantly protect workers and their rights in areas of safety, health, family/medical leave, etc. Having a collective bargaining agreement is so important to our working families. It enables us to perform better at our jobs therefore providing excellent service for everyone. How can



we give our students quality education if teachers are forced to work in an unsafe and unhealthy environment? How can our workers from the port do their job if they are forced to work with unsafe equipment? How can our nurses take care of their patients when they are given so many extra duties beyond the scope of their work? How can we serve our people/customers/clients if we are not treated properly or given the respect we deserve at work? Take pride in your collective bargaining agreement, it is for this reason we can better serve our people.

**BOD Meeting Schedule...** All meetings will take place on Thursdays at Edward Town Middle School in the Adult Learning Center beginning at 3:45 PM.

- February 26, 2009**
- March 19, 2009**
- April 30, 2009**
- May 21 or 28, 2009 (TBA)**
- June TBA**

## Making spirits bright

*Contributed by Tiffany Marsh,  
Colonial Village*



This holiday season will be brighter for many children and families in the NW School District. The Upsilon

Chapter of Alpha Delta Kappa, an altruistic sorority chapter comprised of current and retired female Niagara Wheatfield teachers, is brightening the spirits of families with donations of blankets, books, clothing, toys and other gifts.

Each year, the sisters of ADK choose students from all four elementary buildings in NW to receive a warm blanket and several books. The books and the blanket are geared towards the children's age, interests, reading level and favorites.

Cindi Broughton, a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher at Colonial Village started the "Bundle Up With

Books" program four years ago. In those four years, nearly 200 students have been the recipient of a blanket and books. Cindi started this program to show children that teachers care about them.

Another holiday project of the sisters of ADK is an "Adopt-A-Family" type project. Five families from around the district have received clothing, toys, books, games, gift certificates, and more to put under their trees this year. The five families have at least one student currently attending NW schools. Gifts were also purchased for younger and older siblings of students.



Members of Alpha Delta Kappa are excited and grateful to be able to reach out to our community and students to make their holidays brighter.

## Proposed education budget would spark layoffs, retrenchment

### NYSUT Press Release

In testimony to the state Legislature, NYSUT says the proposed state education budget would slash school spending by \$2.5 billion, leading to thousands of layoffs of teachers and school staff and an unprecedented retrenchment in programs that help students meet state standards and graduate from high school. ALBANY, N.Y. January 28, 2009 – The proposed state education budget would slash school spending by \$2.5 billion, leading to thousands of layoffs of teachers and school staff and an unprecedented retrenchment in programs that help students meet state standards and graduate from high school, New York State United Teachers testified today. The 600,000-member union said, however, that swift action by Congress on the federal stimulus package and a willingness by state leaders to ask the wealthiest New Yorkers to pay their fair share would save jobs and prevent widespread dismantling of school programs that help children, particularly those who live in poverty and who are at risk of dropping out. "We don't underestimate the seri-

ousness of this once-in-a-lifetime financial crisis. But we also can't discount the hard truth that the very future of a generation of students teeters on the edge," said NYSUT President Richard C. Iannuzzi. "Rather than massive cuts that would lead to layoffs; ballooning class sizes and elimination of after-school, summer school and tutoring programs – which would set schools back years – we must aggressively seek federal aid from Washington and ask the most affluent New Yorkers to pay their fair share of taxes." Iannuzzi called on state leaders to use the federal stimulus money as intended – to restore education and health care cuts; to create jobs and to re-start local economies. "The business and labor communities are united behind the goals of this federal stimulus package," he said. "Now, we call on our leaders in Albany to put in place another important piece of the puzzle." In testimony before the Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means committees, NYSUT Executive Vice President Alan B. Lubin said the devastating impact of the proposed executive budget is coming into focus as school boards begin to construct their

## Legal Service Plan helps thousands

More than 77,000 NYSUT members have coverage under a voluntary or group legal service plan endorsed by NYSUT Member Benefits Trust. If you already have coverage, this serves as a reminder to use your plan. If you do not yet have coverage, here's some information on how this voluntary plan can be of value.

When you enroll, you'll receive a toll-free number to the plan's National Legal Office, where you can call for unlimited legal advice and assistance at no charge. The NLO is staffed by attorneys with expertise in real estate, domestic relations, family law, civil litigation, foreclosure, bankruptcy, business law, criminal law, landlord/tenant situations, wills/trusts/estates, elder law, personal injury and vehicle/traffic law.

Many times, these attorneys can resolve your situation by writing a letter or making a phone call on your behalf, at no charge. If other assistance is warranted, you will be referred to a plan attorney located in your area. The plan has participating attorneys across the country who charge plan members \$175 an hour (effective with enrollments and renewals as of Sept. 1, 2008) or 40 percent off their usual hourly fee, whichever is lower.

You'll receive coupons for free office consultations and the *Preventive Law Guide*, an informative newsletter sent three times each year.

The NLO will review, at no cost to you, legal documents up to six pages in length, such as purchase agreements, loan agreements and real estate documents.

For many common personal legal matters, such as a real estate transaction, misdemeanor, traffic violation, separation and divorce, the attorneys will charge no more than the guaranteed maximum fees assigned to each matter.

Effective with enrollments and renewals as of Sept. 1, 2008, the plan provides a free health care proxy, living will, durable power of attorney and simple will each year of enrollment. And the plan includes advice on identity theft prevention and for identity theft victims, assistance with debt consolidation, and assistance with mortgage foreclosure.

In addition, optional riders can be purchased to provide legal coverage in the specialized areas of elder law and business protection.

Priced at \$85 a year (\$55 for retiree members), you can't afford not to look into this valuable benefit. For information and an enrollment form, contact Member Benefits at 800-626-8101, e-mail [benefits@nysutmail.org](mailto:benefits@nysutmail.org), or log on to [www.memberbenefits.nysut.org](http://www.memberbenefits.nysut.org) to download an enrollment form or enroll online.



**Landlord problems**  
**Noisy neighbors**  
**Purchasing a house**  
**Drawing up a Will**  
**Speeding ticket**

**These are some examples in which the Legal Service Plan can be of assistance.**

For information about this program or about contractual expense reimbursement/endorsement arrangements with providers of endorsed programs, please contact NYSUT Member Benefits Trust or refer to your NYSUT Member Benefits Trust Summary Plan Description.

Agency fee payers to NYSUT are eligible to participate in NYSUT Member Benefits Trust-endorsed programs.

## Guest viewpoint... SOS has new meaning for neighboring local

Darla Bubar, Editor

In light of what has gone in the past year, some members of the Wilson community have started a new Public Relations organization called Support Our School or SOS.

Recently, I had the opportunity to communicate with the Union President and Vice-President of the Wilson Teachers Association to find out more about this organization and its purpose. The mission of this organization and its Executive Council was shared with me by the WTA President, Meg Thompson, "At the very first Executive Council meeting, we created our mission statement: to establish a positive, proactive support system for ALL of the students, teachers, staff, administrators and Board of Education members at WCS, working together to restore a peaceful, healthy and safe environment."

Thompson went on to say, "We also decided that SOS would truly focus on the positive things happening in the school and the community, and publicize the

accomplishments of our students, faculty and staff. We are hopeful that somehow trust may be restored and a peaceful atmosphere will once again flourish here." Thompson closed by thanking me for taking the time to listen to her and stating, "I invite you to please visit the SOS website: supportourschool.webs.com. If I may leave you with one last thought, it's this... please think of Wilson Central School with an open mind... What happens in Wilson may have far-reaching repercussions in ALL schools across NYS and even the nation, so please keep us in your thoughts. Thank you."

*Feel free to check out the website from home. This website is not accessible through our District server.*

**This article is the opinion of a fellow union leader and in no way reflects the opinion of the NWTA at large.**

own budgets for the 2009-10 school year.

In addition to deep program cuts, school boards are preparing budgets containing thousands of layoffs of teachers, teaching assistants and aides. He noted 500 layoffs are being floated in Rochester, 500 in Orange County and 100 or more in Schenectady. An economist estimated Tuesday that Long Island schools, which face a \$157 million cut in state aid, would shed 3,400 teachers and staff.

"After all the progress our schools have made toward raising test scores and closing the achievement gap, budget cuts of this magnitude would set us back many, many years," Lubin said. "We cannot afford to jeopardize even a single year of a student's time in school." Lubin said NYSUT is working with New York's congressional delegation toward passage of the America Recovery and Reinvestment Act. He said the House bill would include \$17 billion in new, non-capital aid over the next two years, including billions of dollars for schools. He said the House bill, as well as the Senate package pushed by U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer - which would deliver some \$6.4 billion in education stimulus money over two years - "would go a long way toward closing the state budget deficit."

He noted NYSUT is part of a large

coalition pressing the governor and Legislature to raise the income tax on New Yorkers who earn more than \$250,000 a year - a proposal, numerous polls show, which has overwhelming state-wide support. "A reasonable increase in the personal income tax would generate up to \$6 billion annually - money that could be used to avoid cuts to education and health care and keep property tax increases to a minimum," Lubin said.

*NYSUT, the state's largest union, represents more than 600,000 classroom teachers and other school employees; faculty and other professionals at the state's community colleges, State University of New York and City University of New York, and other education and health professionals. NYSUT is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association and AFL-CIO.*



## From where I stand...two sided



*Darla Bubar, Editor*

Just as a mirror has two faces so every story has two sides; and as I pen this article I am again reminded of Mitch Albom's The Five People You Meet in Heaven. The Blue Man tells Eddie, "Take one story, viewed from two different angles. It is the same day, the same moment, but depending on which side you are on—the outcome could be totally different." From one side—a happy ending may result while from the opposite side—a tragedy. It is like being in the right place at the right time verses being in the wrong place at the wrong time. More often than not, it has been my experience that we, as humans, find it very difficult to see both sides of a story or an issue when we are directly connected to it. Human nature demands that we take sides because we grow-up doing so. We play competitive games as children, we pick teams, and we draw lines in the sand. We root for favorite sports teams or have pride in something that gives us a sense of who we are

or where we come from. We find things to be passionate about. We build our lives upon our ideals and fight to preserve what is rightfully ours. We spend our lives looking through our own eyes and walking in our own shoes; using our own experiences as our guide. Unfortunately, in doing so, it becomes difficult to separate fact from fiction when something does go awry. Right and wrong, black and white—these things become muddled at times. We become so passionate about one perspective we often leave the other perspective behind or simply refuse to accept or acknowledge it. And amidst controversy our view can easily become lopsided. As union representatives and union officers—those elected have the tough job of trying to see both sides while at the same time—remaining neutral and trying to make sure our collective bargaining agreement (or contract) has been followed. We have to keep emotions out of the way of our judgments and defend or protect our teachers as far as the

contract will allow. Not a year goes by when we don't read of a teacher being accused of something resulting in job loss or an investigation. Just this week on my way to school I heard a story of a teacher who was facing criminal charges and of another who was fired from his job after a student athlete he was coaching died from heat stroke. It is both sad and tragic when a teacher or even one of our own colleagues is placed in a problematic situation, especially when the law and media get involved. It is a reminder that we are not invincible, but instead, vulnerable to the same forces that plague the human condition. What we must do as union members is remember that our colleagues deserve the same protection afforded to us by our contract and by the justice system. Additionally, we must allow the courts to decide the fate of an individual if found in a situation that brings criminal charges. We must remember that at any given moment in time—we

might fall under the same scrutiny—and we must hope that if indeed this happens to a close colleague or even, to us—that taking sides may not be the best answer. We should instead consider looking at the whole story—keeping open minded about BOTH sides of the issue unless the evidence proves otherwise. We should listen instead of lecture. We should offer support instead of casting stones. We should never allow our emotions to cloud our judgment about what is true and what is right, even though that is often easier said than done—**for myself, included**. It is so much easier to make assumptions when you are on the outside looking in. Look at both sides with eyes wide open and allow for differing opinions. Let us make every effort to be proactive rather than reactive. *Yours in solidarity,*  
~Darla



*We should never allow our emotions to cloud our judgment about what is true and what is right, even though that is often easier said than done—for myself, included*

**Negotiations continue...**

**The membership will be updated as information becomes available.**

**The Negotiations Team is still meeting regularly with District.**