

The Rochester Teacher

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Rochester Teachers Association NYSUT, AFT, AFL-CIO - 30 North Union St., Rochester, NY 14607
Representing teachers • retirees • school instructors • substitute teachers • home/hospital teachers

Vol. 33, No. 3 January 2009



Winner of NYSUT Journalism Awards and the Ted Bleecker Award as "BEST OF THE BEST"

Retirement Incentive Proposed

Early in Superintendent Brizard's term, President **Adam Urbanski** introduced to the District a retirement incentive proposal that mirrored the one offered to Rochester administrators. While declining to work through such a proposal because he was so new to the job, the Superintendent committed to negotiate for a possible incentive for the 2008-2009 school year. On Thursday, January 8, the Joint Living Contract Committee (LCC) met to take up, among other issues, the matter of retirement incentive. Using financial data prepared by RTA Treasurer **John Pavone** and RTA Labor Relations Specialist **Jonathon Hickey**, the union made a strong case for significant savings over the next three years.

The proposal, prepared by RTA First Vice President **Martha Keating**, was presented and explained to the District's LCC members. Under our plan, teachers retiring between June 26, 2009 and August 31st would receive \$25,000 within 30 days of the retirement date. The deadline for irrevocable notification of retirement would be no later than March 31st. For those members who could retire within the specified time frame, but become eligible after August 31st and the end of the 2009-2010 school year, a teacher may take an unpaid leave of absence until eligible to retire.

To be eligible, a member must have ten continuous years of employment with the District and be qualified to collect a pension. The District's contribution of \$25,000 would be paid into a 403(b) plan.

Because there are rumors that New York State may be readying a retirement incentive, there is a provision in our proposed language that individual teachers would have the choice between a local and a State incentive.

In comparing Rochester to its surrounding suburbs, we found that the Rochester City School District is one of only two districts that do not include some type of retirement settlement for qualified veteran teachers. While many plans are based on the number of unused sick days, others provide a set amount, and still others offer a combination of a set amount plus unused sick days. We expect a response to our proposal within the next several weeks.



The newly announced NBCT from the RCSD are from left to right: **Melissa Anzalone-Haywood** (Generalist/Middle Childhood), **Kyle Crandall** (Mathematics/Adolescence and Young Adulthood), and **Miriam Santana Valadez** (Mathematics/Adolescence and Young Adulthood). Not pictured is **Elizabeth Foran** (Social Studies - History Adolescence and Young Adulthood) because she was unable to attend the December RA at East High.

RTA Dinner Seminars a Huge Success

RTA has launched another successful year of dinner seminars. The first seminar "Lessons from Abroad: How Other Countries Educate Their Children" was presented by RTA President Urbanski and a panel of students representing China, India, Africa and Germany. One comment about this presentation was, "This presentation was one of the most enjoyable, interesting, and well organized PD's I have attended." Our second seminar was "Through the Eye of the Learner: Teaching Children of Color". Dr. Adelaide L. Sanford, former Vice-Chancellor of the New York State Board of Regents presented a rich and inspiring program that participants said was, "powerful, informative, excellent". The seminar held in December, "Partnering with Community Organization to Improve Schools - The Los Angeles Parents Union: Parents United to Improve Schools" was also well received by participants who shared similar comments about how much they enjoyed the seminar and found these professional development opportunities to be thought provoking and beneficial.

There are five more dinner seminars scheduled for this school year. On January 26th, Superintendent Brizard will engage teachers in an open forum to discuss school safety and student discipline. On March 2nd Dr. William Purkey, along with a panel of educators from the Fairport Teacher Center, will discuss Invitational Education and Leadership; how to make schools safer and more welcoming for students and adults. On March 23rd, Dr. William Schmidt, from Michigan State University, will present "Why Schools Matter" a book coauthored by him. The book looks at math and science achievement in forty countries. It analyzes information from teachers and discusses how cultural context affects instruction and learning. Jonathan Kozol will present on April 6th. He will discuss the challenges that face public education and how teachers can promote student centered learning while opposing the pressures of standardization. Sheryl Nussbaum-Beach will present on May 18th. Her presentation will discuss how education may look like in ten or twenty years.

Registration for the dinner seminars is available through AVATAR. All RTA Dinner Seminars are held at the B'Rith Kodesh Temple, 2131 Elmwood Avenue, from 4 - 6 p.m. If you have any questions or need more information, please contact **Margaret Sergent** or **John Pavone** at the RTA office.

Rochester Teachers Association Negotiations Survey 2009

In the context of the Living Contract, we address issues as they come up. However, there is now an opportunity to begin formal negotiations and to negotiate salary using the benchmarking formula. In addition to improvements in salaries, what other priorities would you like addressed during these negotiations?

Please rank (using #1 as you highest priority) which issues you feel should be addressed in this round of negotiations and write any comments in the space provided:

- Professional and instruction-related issues _____
- School safety _____
- Student discipline _____
- Conditions for teaching and learning _____
- Class size and teaching loads _____
- Benefits _____
- Job security _____
- Transfers _____
- Other (also write on back, if needed) _____

Please return this survey to your RTA Faculty Rep. or to the RTA Office, via courier, by
January 26, 2009.



by Adam Urbanski



Tough Negotiations Ahead

The current collective bargaining agreement between the RTA and the Rochester City School District will expire on June 30th of this year. Between now and then, we will be surveying teachers, holding open forums and preparing a proposal for changes in our existing contract. At a recent Living Contract Committee meeting, the District indicated a desire to begin negotiations as soon as possible and to try to reach an agreement before July 1st. We share that goal.

We have already had some hints from the District as to issues that they plan to raise in the upcoming negotiations. And we do realize that these are tough economic times. Nonetheless, we are determined to make progress on economic and educational issues alike.

Because it's a matter of timelines, we will first try to negotiate an Early Retirement Incentive – even before we begin formal negotiations on all other issues. We sought such an agreement last year, but Superintendent Brizard committed to defer it 'til this year. In times of fiscal scarcity, such an agreement could lead to substantial savings for the District and therefore greater affordability for funding future needs. We presented an Early Retirement Incentive proposal to the District on January 8th - along with data projecting savings over the next three years.

We need to know your ideas and suggestions for the next contract. I urge you to fill out the Members' Negotiations Survey, attend the open forums and stay informed about the progress of negotiations. If you have not completed a survey, one is available on page 1 of this paper. Your RTA Negotiations Team will meet separately with each Teacher Advisory Team. Additionally, two Open Forums for RTA members will be held in the East High Forum Room. The dates for the Open Forums are as follows:

- Elementary Faculty – Monday, February 9th from 4 – 6 pm
- Secondary Faculty – Wednesday, February 11th from 3 – 5 pm

We've had tough negotiations before, but this year's promise to be the toughest. We see it as an opportunity to make continued progress. We are determined to persuade the District that hard economic conditions call for reassessment of business as usual, streamlining excessive administrative costs, abandoning unnecessary or ineffective practices, and investing in what matters most: classrooms, students and teachers. We will strive to negotiate the kind of provisions that will make our teachers' collective wisdom more respected. And our success, as always, will hinge on your continued support.

Are We There Yet? A reflective essay on teaching

In December, the RTA rep assembly recognized new National Board Certified teachers. This advanced certification is valid for ten years, upon which teachers have the opportunity to submit a written portfolio for recertification. I renewed my certification, and celebrated the results with our newest board certified teachers. Standing in front of my colleagues for achieving board certification for the second time, made me reflect on my twenty-two years in the RCSD. (I started teaching when I was ten!) I find it incredible that this much time has passed. After years of teaching, people sometimes make comments about how our students have changed over the years, but I feel like I am the one who has had a greater change.

The seeds planted many years ago by our union leaders, influenced my decision to seek advanced certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. I am a product of an education reform movement started over twenty years ago. Our union leaders negotiated an historic contract that included many reforms, including a Career in Teaching (CIT) plan and a dramatic salary increase. CIT designed the new teacher mentor program, and peer review (PART/Summative Appraisal) as the teacher evaluation system. We know the average life span of most educational reforms is 3 to 5 years-how did the components of Career in Teaching survive 20 plus years? The answer is quite simple-it was designed by teachers.

My first year teaching was also the first year the CIT plan started. I have moved through the career in teaching ladder: intern, resident, professional, and lead teacher, having many opportunities to create and collaborate on union and district initiatives. My career really started when I read and listened to speakers about reflective practice and teacher leadership. Our union leaders have strived to have teachers treated like professionals, not only with salary increases but teacher empowerment and accountability.

The National Board certification process required me to take a hard look at what I was doing in the classroom. What am I teaching? Why am I teaching it? How would I do it differently next time?

Teachers can answer these questions without being told the answer from an administrator, designing new curriculum, or standardized test data analysis. These can influence our answer, but we have a brain; we have upper level college degrees; we are professionals. Most importantly, we love to learn. National Board certification requires a teacher to think deeply about students, parents, colleagues, methods, resources and self.

Continued on page 4

Special Education Matters

Happy New Year and thank you to all the members who participated in our fall picnic at Ellison Park. We had a day with unexpected lovely weather and plenty of fine food and collegial social time. Look forward to more special education get together in the near future.

The RTA Special Education Committee met in mid December to plan activities for the remainder of the instructional year.

Highlights of the brainstorming session follow below:

- Continue holding monthly forums and periodic networking social events for friends of special education.
- Communicate updates regarding special education issues to advisory teams in a timely manner.
- Continue to be a liaison to RTA leadership concerning special education concerns.
- Plan a workshop for interested participants concerning annual reviews and transition planning.
- Design an informational pamphlet related to special education deadlines, protocols, and paperwork.
- Encourage members to participate in various special education initiatives such as the national CEC convention in April 2009. The convention will be held in Seattle, Washington.
- Continue to be available and willing to voice concerns for special education teachers.

If you would like further information or a special education concern, feel free to contact Jeff Feinberg at cafewine@aol.com

Masters Transcripts Deadline: August 28, 2009

The Rochester Teacher

Rochester Teachers Association NYSUT-AFT, AFL-CIO

Official publication of the Rochester Teachers Association Affiliated with the New York State United Teachers, the American Federation of Teachers (Local 616), AFL-CIO, and the Greater Rochester Labor Council.

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Deadlines

Voluntary Transfers

Voluntary transfer deadline is the end of January. Elementary teachers may apply to seven schools, secondary to three and K-12 tenure areas to ten. Remember that transfers do not actually occur until Placement Days occur and a transfer is offered and accepted by the teacher.

It is suggested that those filing applications take one extra copy listing all schools and ask the receptionist to date stamp that one copy.

Sabbaticals

The deadline for filing for a sabbatical for school year 2009/2010 is February 2.

Questions about sabbaticals may be asked of Dan Dunne, Monroe. He is the co-chair of the Joint Sabbatical committee.

Masters Update

Work continues on the more than 3,000 claims. Friends of former District teachers should ask them to contact me at the RTA Office for information.

Debbi Jackett
2nd Vice President

Rochester Teachers Tutoring Helps Our Students Succeed

Rochester Teachers Tutoring (RTT) has started its sixth year of tutoring district students. Required under No Child Left Behind and paid for by Title 1 funds, tutoring is available in schools identified by the state as in need of improvement. This year RTT is providing tutoring at East, Jefferson, Wilson Commencement, Wilson Foundation, Monroe, Marshall, Freddie Thomas, #45, and #42. There are currently about 15 profit and non-profit businesses that have contracts with the district to provide tutoring services. Rochester Teachers Tutoring, a division of Dial-A-Teacher, Inc., continues to be the largest provider in the district.

Students who qualify for free or reduced lunch at eligible schools are eligible for free tutoring – their parents choose the provider for their child. RTT hires teachers from eligible schools to provide tutoring. Each teacher is paid \$33/hour to tutor a group of 4-5 students in math and ELA. Tutoring is offered twice weekly in 80 minute sessions. Most students will receive 40 to 45 hours of tutoring between November and late April. Each student has an individual learning plan and regular progress reports are given to parents and made available to students' classroom teachers.

Currently there are about 150 tutors working with approximately 550 students at these 9 schools. Tutors, classroom teachers, and parents report that students have made notable academic gains. Many of our students have been with us for several years.

Rochester was the first union in the country to be approved as an SES (Supplemental Education Services) provider via our not-for-profit Dial-A-Teacher. In the past couple of years several other unions have started SES tutoring programs after hearing about our program. Kristen Betzenhauser, Pam McMIndes, and I have met with several unions to explain our program and help them get started. Most districts have paid millions of dollars to out-of-state profit companies to provide SES services. RTA has given our district another option with Rochester Teacher Tutoring. And best of all, it's our students who benefit. Once again, our union helps our kids succeed. And that's a wonderful thing.



CONTRACT AND BUILDING ISSUES



Margaret Sergent,
Secretary

The RTA office frequently receives inquiries about teacher absences and what is allowed in the contract. Section 41 addresses a variety of absences for teachers and how they can be accessed. Teachers are allocated 10 sick days and 2 personal days a year. Unused personal days convert or "rollover" to sick days the next school year. Up to ten of sick days per year can be used for family illness of a spouse, a parent, or a child. Teachers should report their absences on the PeopleSoft system or to their school secretary if that is the method of reporting agreed to in their building. The Superintendent or his designee, for any absence, may require a Certificate of Personal Illness (CPI), at any time. Teachers using an illness day (or a personal business day) before or after a vacation or a recess (example: Memorial Day) should be prepared to provide a CPI within five (5) calendar days of the return date.

Another part of Section 41 that generates questions is Section 41.9a. This provision discusses absences where no deductions are taken from teachers' absence accumulations. The contract specifies that for this section of the contract, "For the purposes of determining eligibility the "immediate family" is defined as a spouse (as defined by state and federal law), parent, child, grandchild, brother, sister, grandparents, by blood, marriage, or legal adoption but excluding uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces who are blood relatives unless they are living in the same house." A total of eight (8) days per year are allowed under the following conditions:

- **Five (5) consecutive days per incident for the death of an immediate family member. The five days must include the day of death or the day of the funeral.**
- **Three (3) days per request (or incident) for the death of uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews or cousins living in the same household.**
- **One (1) day per request for the death of uncles aunts, nieces, nephews or cousins not living in the same household.**
- **Two (2) days if there are educational examinations conducted by the State of New York, the Board of Education, by a college or university, or for attendance to receive a degree.**
- **Two (2) days for each incident due to a summons by the Selective Service Board or other military organization having the authority due to military obligation or national security.**
- **One (1) day, including travel time to receive an earned degree by a teacher, spouse, or child of a teacher.**
- **Two days (2) days for the father for the birth of a child, or for either parent for the legal adoption of infant children.**

Section 41 encompasses much more detail and discusses other types of absences such as Catastrophic Illness Leave, the Family Medical Leave Act and the RTA Paid Absence Bank. If members have specific questions about any of these absence provisions, they may call me, **Martha Keating** or **Jon Hickey** at RTA.



MONEY MATTERS

by John Pavone, Treasurer

While we all recognize that the darkening economy will require difficult decisions, we are determined to ensure that the state's economic crisis will not result in increased class sizes and cuts in academic services.

Using the latest District aid projections from the New York State Education Department, the Rochester City School District will receive \$6, 840,206 less in state aid in 2009-2010 than it received in the 2008-2009 school year, which represents a 1.58% reduction. The Rochester City School District's Budget Department is estimating a total budget deficit for 2009-2010 in excess of \$50 million dollars. How can we close the budget gap?

NYSUT is pushing a state measure that would increase personal income tax on those making more than \$1 million. This increase would go directly for education. It is clear that the state cannot cut its way out of this fiscal downturn. We must look for ways to increase revenues. Restructuring the state income tax to shift more of the burden to those who can most afford to pay would actually reduce the tax burden for lower-income and middle-class families while ensuring everyone pays their fair share.

In addition, U.S. Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY) has stated a plan being pushed by several governors as well as members of Congress - to allocate stimulus money to local school systems, including the Rochester City School District.

If approved as part of President Barack Obama's \$750 billion package, New York could get an extra \$6.4 billion in local school aid over the next two years. This would put less stress on the RCSD's budget.

The combination of the tax increase and stimulus money could stave off any potential layoffs of teachers and save vital programs.

Job Share Information

If you are interested in Job Sharing for the 2009-10 school year, but have not found a partner, please contact Jon Hickey at **jhickey@rochesterteachers.com** or call him at the RTA office (546-2681). We can help. More information is available in the Job Sharing section of the RTA website **www.rochesterteachers.com**.

Nominations Open for All Offices: Deadline is February 6, 2009

This is official notification that nominations are now open for the RTA offices of: **President, 1st Vice President, 2nd Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer.** Also offices are open for: **the Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, Representative, and Alternate for all RTA Departments.** The RTA departments consist of Primary, (PreK-3), Intermediate (4-6), Junior High, Senior High, Special Services, Special Education, School Instructors, Per Diem Substitute Teachers, Home/Hospital Teachers, Rochester Retired Teachers and the Pre School Parent Program.

The term of office for all positions shall be a two-year term beginning July 1, 2009, according to a provision of the Bylaws, Article III, Section 6b, for Officers and Article VI, Section 5c for Department Officers. The following is the criteria necessary for holding an officer position:

All Offices

A candidate must have been a member of the RTA for one year (or a major portion of the school year) prior to the election.

Executive Council Officers

An individual may be a candidate for, or serve in, only one Executive Council position (President, 1st Vice President, 2nd Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, & Department Chairperson) at one time.

Special Cases

Candidates for Department Offices must be a member of that Department at the time of the nomination.

Pre-Elections Procedures

Methods of Nomination

Nominations in writing (i.e.: form below) must be submitted to the Nominating and Elections Committee (NEC), Attention: Kim Evans, at the RTA Office, no later than **February 6, 2009, by 4 p.m.** Any RTA member may nominate another RTA member for an Association office. Only members of a department may nominate officers for their department.

Candidates may be nominated by **submitting a petition** signed by 50 RTA members to the Nominating and Elections Committee, Attention: Kim Evans, at the RTA Office, **by 4 p.m., March 2, 2009.**

Candidates may be nominated **from the floor of the Representative Assembly meeting on March 17, 2009.**

Prior to the meeting, the nominating Representative must obtain the consent of the person being nominated.

Nomination Acceptance Procedure

Acceptance letters will be sent out by the Nominating and Elections Committee, to the candidates, for whom the NEC received written nominations (i.e.: form below). The acceptance letters must be returned to the NEC, Attention: Kim Evans, at the RTA Office, **by 4 p.m. on March 2, 2009.**

Acceptance letters will be sent out by the Nominating and Elections Committee, to the candidates, for which the NEC received nominations at the March 17th Representative Assembly and for the petition nominees. The acceptance letters must be returned to the NEC, Attention: Kim Evans, at the RTA Office, **by 4 p.m., on March 26, 2009.**

Voting

In compliance with the Landrum/Griffin Act, a notice of election, ballots, and other election material will be mailed to the last known address of each member of the RTA in good standing, not less than 15 days prior to the election. In this election the mailing will take place no later than April 17, 2009.

NOMINATIONS FORM FOR RTA OFFICES

Nominee _____

School _____ RTA Department* _____

Nominated for office of _____

Person Nominating _____

School _____ RTA Department* _____

*As identified at the beginning of this notice

**Please return form to the Nominating and Elections Committee,
Attention: Kim Evans, at the RTA office
(30 N. Union Street, Suite 301, Rochester, NY 14607),
no later than 4 p.m., February 6, 2009.**

Are We There Yet?

cont. from pg. 2

Consider going through the PART/Summative teacher evaluation process as a precursor to the board certification process, and as a way to reflect on your teaching practice.

National Board certification validates one's knowledge of teaching and pedagogy. However, it does not solve all classroom problems nor does it eliminate stress. Teachers currently face overwhelming challenges in the classroom. It is time to go back to the basics; as Rochester's history proves we do our best when collaborative work directly reflects teacher input. We have plenty of research available on how to teach, and we certainly do not need to keep reinventing the wheel with new programs. Ask a teacher what works and you'll get plenty of answers. Teacher voice in policy making decisions is critical now more than ever.

My journey continues, but I never would be where I am today if it were not for the colleagues (yes, even a couple administrators) that were so willing to help me along the way. Very often I will say, "My best ideas were stolen from someone else," but what I mean by that is I learned this strategy, method, bulletin board or experiment from someone else's accomplished practice. I have had the good fortune of working with hundreds of teachers throughout the district. I know first hand the amazing work that is being done in classrooms every day, and I am grateful for the opportunities given to learn from others. I embrace the future, as the possibilities are endless for what the career in teaching plan and our profession could become. I encourage you to participate in the various building and district opportunities available, become involved in the union or become nationally board certified teacher. My career validates the cliché: the more you put into it, the more you get out of it.

(Jennifer Tomm currently is a lead mentor teacher and teaches third grade at School #39). For more information on achieving national board certification, go to www.nbpts.org.



Dial-a-Teacher

Call 262-5000

Phone hours-

3:30-7:00 PM

Mon-Thurs.

HOMEWORK HOTLINE-WXXI-TV

Mon-Thurs. 5:30-6:00 PM



FULLBRIGHT EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE

The Fulbright Center in The Netherlands announces a great opportunity for high school teachers in the USA who want to set up a high school educational exchange with a Dutch high school. In The Netherlands there is a lot of interest in cooperation with an American high school, but most teachers find it difficult to find a partner school. The Fulbright Center wants to mediate in these contacts. The Fulbright Center created an online community that helps you to find a Dutch partner school. In 2006 and 2007 the Fulbright Center established more than ten partnerships between Dutch and US high schools through its extensive network. Through these contacts more than 100 students traveled to the US in 2008 and about 60 students visited Europe. You will find a list of partnerships on: <http://highschoolpartnerprogram.ning.com/>

How does it work?

1. Go to <http://highschoolpartnerprogram.ning.com/> and become a member (free of charge)
2. Read the information that is available there on setting up a partnership and how the Dutch educational system works. You will also find that information on: <http://www.fulbright.nl/?menu-tree=51114200>
3. Post a Message in which you explain where you teach, in what field and grade. Describe your school and what kind of exchange you are looking for. (Because of visa restrictions long term teacher exchange is not possible, most Dutch teachers are interested in group student exchange, online projects or short term visits for curriculum development)
4. Sit back and wait until a Dutch teacher has responded to your message and who knows a wonderful partnership may start.

If you want more information, please send an e-mail to Marlies Eijnsink, Program Coordinator of the High School Partnership Program m.eijnsink@fulbright.nl.

RETIREE CORNER

Katherine Barkley

For the second year, the RRTA Holiday Luncheon was held at Golden Ponds on Long Pond Road. This year the weather cooperated! There was a wonderful turnout of eighty retirees. The Precious Few (who missed because of the snowstorm last year) were back, in great form, and provided their traditional accompaniment to the festivities. Santa and his elves took time off from their North Pole preparations to hand out gifts to one and all. The music, the food, and the company combined to provide a grand time. Thanks to June Ivanick for making the arrangements, to **Mary Barnum** for her computer expertise, to Barb Buckingham for making the party favors, and to **Dick and Sue Raymond** and **Carol Giunta** for their North Pole capers. Great job, everyone! Great party!

The annual cabin party is scheduled on Abe Lincoln's 200th birthday. It will be held at Veteran's Memorial Park in Henrietta (complete with indoor plumbing, according to **Dick Raymond**). Details will be available soon for two upcoming trips to Niagara on the Lake. And, of course, the Books for Kids committee has been busy as usual. On January 27th, they will take books to kids at School 34.

If you have questions about your health insurance coverage, be sure to talk to **John Pavone** at the RTA office. He has been dealing with the district for us. In these difficult financial times, we need to guard against the erosion of our benefits. Thanks to John for his vigilance on our behalf.

I'm still looking for input on volunteer work by retired teachers. If you are volunteering, talk to me about it. Other retirees are interested in hearing about your experiences. Call me at 442-8865.

Linda Kotwas knew before she retired that, when she did, she would volunteer in a classroom, because teachers have so much work to do and so little assistance with it. Since retiring from #33, she has volunteered one morning each week in a classroom there. She does a variety of things...whatever the teacher needs...from working one-on-one, with small groups, or (occasionally) with the whole class, or doing paperwork, filing, or bulletin boards. She lends that proverbial helping hand. I'll bet that teacher is thanking her lucky stars every time Linda walks through the door!

Several other retirees sub or do occasional volunteer work at #33, and Linda says that it is great to stay in touch with former colleagues, and great to get to know the kids in a class and follow them as they go through all that first grade learning. She loves the relationships that develop over a year's work with individual students. I guess it's true that "once a teacher, always a teacher".

MEDIA REVIEW

Media Review is devoted to the discussion of books, movies and television presentations that have interest for teachers. *The Rochester Teacher* hopes these reviews will encourage debate and reviews by any member. Send your comments or reviews through the courier to RTA office.



Mary Barnum

THREE CUPS OF TEA

One Man's Mission to Promote Peace ...
One School at a Time

by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin

2006 Viking Penguin
331 pages

THREE CUPS OF TEA describes Greg Mortenson's efforts to build schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan. David Relin is a free lance journalist who helped Mortenson write his story.

Before he started building schools in the Taliban back yard, Mortenson was a U.S. Army medic and emergency room nurse. His parents were Lutheran ministers in Tanzania, where he grew up in a third world culture and in the shadow of Kilimanjaro. Therefore, as an adult, Mortenson was at ease in different cultures and liked to climb mountains.

In 1993, he came to Pakistan to climb K2, the second highest mountain in the world. In the same range as Everest, K2 is more difficult to ascend. Mortenson was sure he could reach K2's summit, but within 600 feet of the top, he had to turn back after he helped rescue a climber in distress. On his way back to a town, Mortenson wandered away from his party. After days, he came to Korphe, a village he remembered seeing on no map. The people of Korphe welcomed him, fed him, gave him shelter, and nursed him back to strength. Mortenson wanted to repay their generosity. He asked to see Korphe's school, thinking he would buy books and supplies. "Haji Ali, the nur-maddhar or chief of korphe, led Mortenson up a steep path to a vast open ledge eight hundred feet above the Braldu (a roaring tributary of the Indus formed by glacier melt). The view was exquisite, with the ice giants of the upper Baltoro razored into the blue far from Korphe's gray rock walls. But Mortenson was not admiring the scenery. He was appalled to see eighty-two children, seventy-eight boys, and the four girls who had the pluck to join them, kneeling on the frosty ground, in the open. ...The village had no school, and the Pakistani government didn't provide a teacher. A teacher cost the equivalent of one dollar a day, which was more than the village could afford. So they shared a teacher with the neighboring village and he taught in Korphe three days a week. ...The children sat in a neat circle and copied their multiplication tables. Most scratched in the dirt with sticks they'd brought for that purpose. The more fortunate had slate boards they wrote on with sticks dipped in a mixture of mud and water."

Mortenson was outraged. He impulsively promised, "I'm going to build you a school."

THREE CUPS OF TEA describes his three year struggle to keep his promise. He went back to America and begged for money and slept in his car to save money on rent for an apartment. He returned to Pakistan with \$12,000, purchased the building supplies and rented a truck to take them up the mountain to Korphe, only to be stopped along the way by people from other villages who wanted him to build a school for them. One of his local helpers made the supplies disappear but assured Mortenson they had disappeared so they could be kept safe from thieves. When he reached korphe, the people were overjoyed to see him, but they were also surprised; they were accustomed to mountain climbers promising them all sorts of things and then never returning. So now they told him the supplies could not be brought to their village without a bridge being built. Actually, Mortenson should have realized that, since the only way to reach Korphe across that enormous river gorge from the only road into this mountainous terrain was in a homemade box large enough for one person, strung on a cable 200 feet above the river.

Mortenson returned to America to beg more money to build a bridge. He found or was found by a rather eccentric but very rich old computer geek who gave him enough money for the bridge. He went back to Pakistan and built the bridge. And then a four room school. When the school in korphe was ready to open, a mullah from another village came to korphe with men carrying clubs and demanded that the school not admit girls. korphe had to give him 10 rams to make him go away. Now, Mortenson insists that each of the school's supported by the Central Asia Institute every year increase their enrollment of girls or lose the support of CAI.

The rich, old computer geek died and left a million dollars to the Central Asia Institute, i.e. Greg Mortenson. Mortenson returned again and again to Pakistan to build dozens of schools. He was also kidnapped and had a fatwa issued against him.

In addition to the remarkable story of Greg Mortenson, this book gives a look into a place and people that are very remote to Americans. Now, American troops are in this area, searching for Taliban and Osama Bin Laden. Now, India and Pakistan are heating up their own war. The poor children for whom Mortenson is building schools suffer the most from these conflicts.

I recommend **THREE CUPS OF TEA**. It is appropriate for high school students.