



# Union Messenger

November-December 2008

## Local 571 Member Named 2008-2009 Illinois Teacher of the Year

**L**inda Smerge, a Cicero Council member and second grade teacher at Woodrow Wilson Elementary School, has been named 2008-2009 Illinois Teacher of the Year by the Illinois State Board of Education.

A former lawyer, Smerge felt something was missing in her life. After a period of what she describes as intensive self-evaluation, she realized her true calling was in the classroom. The first assignment at Wilson was a first and second grade special education classroom.

In addition to a law degree from Northern Illinois University, Smerge holds an elementary education degree and a master's degree in early childhood education.

Smerge's selection from 9 finalists was announced at the 34th annual *Those Who Excel/Illinois Teacher of the Year* banquet. She will spend the spring 2009 semester speaking at teacher workshops, educational conferences, and civic/community meetings. In addition, she will represent Illinois in the National Teacher of the Year program and at the NASA Space Camp in Huntsville, Alabama.

Ruth Meissen, the 2008 Illinois Teacher of the Year, is an art teacher and IFT member at Harlem Middle School in Loves Park, Illinois.

## AFT President Weingarten Urges 'Reinvest, Don't Disinvest'

**S**peaking at the National Press Club on November 17 in her first major speech since being elected AFT president in July, Randi Weingarten outlined both provocative and proven approaches to improve public education and thereby make a long-term investment in the country's lagging economy. Weingarten expressed her desire to seek common ground on various contentious issues often thought to be off-limits for teachers unions.

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, introducing Weingarten, praised her vision and called the educational accomplishments in New York City "a model of what can be achieved by working together," Bloomberg continued on, saying that "While the interests of school management and teachers unions won't always be the same, we always need to find ways to work together."

In a message to AFT leaders about the speech, Weingarten said she feels "a special responsibility to advance solutions to the problems confronting public schools. The AFT, as a union of public school professionals and with a proud tradition of taking on tough issues, is uniquely prepared to do so... The alternative to advancing solutions too often is fending off bad ideas," she added, "and we've all seen enough of that." AFT Leadernet

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**2008 Local 571 Holiday Office Hours:**  
Closed Wednesday, December 24, returning Friday, January 2. Staff voice mail will be checked on December 26, 29, and 30.

### Negotiations Update

**C**ouncils with contracts to expire this year include: Argo-Summit, District 88 PSRP, Indian Springs Teachers, Indian Springs PSRP, Indian Springs Custodians, Leyden Teachers, Leyden PSRP, and Proviso Teachers.

The Morton Council contract was ratified by each party last month after talks that extended through the summer and into the fall semester. DuPage 88 Teachers Council and Elmhurst Teachers Council ratified three-year and two-year agreements at the end of the 2007-2008 school year.

### Pride of the Union

**L**ocal 571 and all of its councils recently received Pride of the Union awards for union building efforts related to membership growth.



West Suburban Teachers Union president Jane Russell (photo above) accepts Local 571's award from outgoing AFT president Ed McElroy at the AFT Convention in Chicago.

## We did it! from your president

You, your family, friends and neighbors voted NO on Con Con, helping to reject the Illinois referendum by a 3-1 margin. Were it not for the help of Illinois labor and other organizations that joined together as the Alliance to Protect the Illinois Constitution, the measure might well have passed.

Thanks for wearing "Vote No" buttons, writing postcards, telling everyone to vote "no" and, thank you for voting. We may now look forward to working with many incumbents as well as a number of new legislators in the Congress and the Illinois General Assembly.

We can't help but feel both pride and joy, and revel in the historic election of Barack Obama as 44<sup>th</sup> president of the U. S. Without your sincere conviction and hard work this might not have happened.

AFT President Randi Weingarten reminded us, "This is a tremendous victory, but it is a beginning, not an end. President-elect Obama inherits considerable challenges—a severe economic crisis, a broken healthcare system, the need to revamp federal education law once and for all to address the unacceptable achievement gap between students from different backgrounds, enormous infrastructure strains, and American troops engaged in two wars... Our elected officials have huge tasks ahead of them, and our continued civic engagement will be crucial. We must continue to be heard. We must remain active participants in our great democracy."

I encourage you to call, write, e-mail, or visit your local state representative and/or senator about issues important to us in education, our families and working people in general. Information technology has made this easier for us. With a quick internet search (use the IFT website, [www.ift-aft.org](http://www.ift-aft.org)), it is easy to locate your local legislator, the local office address, e-mail address, and/or phone number. The questions, conversations or discussions don't need to be long, only to the point. I have often called or e-mailed Illinois legislators asking,

*"This is Jane Russell from West Suburban Teachers Union, Local 571, Illinois Federation of Teachers. How are you planning to vote on the \_\_\_\_\_ bill? It would be*

*great if you voted "Yes." Or, sometimes saying, "I understand you voted "no" on the \_\_\_\_\_ bill. Please share your reasons for voting "no."*

That's all it takes to start a dialogue. If more members take a few minutes to make such contacts our elected officials will know that their work is reviewed regularly. Although legislators may feel they make informed decisions before voting an issue, they are not in our schools or our classrooms on a daily basis. They need to hear our stories, both good and not so good, and learn our point of view.

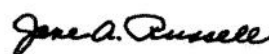
We may need to keep a better record of the 'bad votes' of some legislators. We can continue to reach out to legislators with whom we disagree, but there may eventually come a need to vote a legislator out of office, replacing that legislator with someone more willing to work with us and our issues.

I often hear in legislative campaigns that everyone loves to have education workers with them. We can't make the monetary contributions that other organizations may provide, but we do have the collective numbers, the work ethic, the spirit, and the understanding for what needs to be done to make things better.

Campaigns organizations are always appreciative of our help. So, our foot is already in the proverbial door. Just take the next step *through* the doorway by contacting your legislators.

We look forward to the renewed enthusiasm brought about by President-elect Obama's campaign. We helped elect him, and many others who promise to move the country down a different path. You agreed "Yes we can!" You voted. You did it. Continue to put your enthusiasm to good use, making the changes we need in education, for our students, our schools, and our families.

In unity,



Local 571 President

*Seasons Greetings to the  
West Suburban Teachers Union  
To you and your family. In this  
time of thanksgiving and hope, may  
your holidays be joyous.  
from the Officers and Staff*



*Illinois Senator Kirk Dillard, (R) District 24, addresses Local 571 members at the Legislative Breakfast. Senator Dillard is one of more than one hundred eleven IFT-endorsed candidates winning election or re-election to state and federal offices.*

# Fourth Annual Local 571 Legislative Breakfast

by *Bonnie Saracco*

Nearly two hundred Local 571 members heard from candidates, officials, and labor leaders at our fourth annual Legislative Breakfast.

IFT President Ed Geppert began the morning noting the need to resolve the gridlock that has tied up school funding and capital bills in Springfield.

Geppert called the proposed constitutional convention a “classic Trojan horse” that, while dressed as a solution to Illinois’ problems, has hidden dangers.

Urging Local 571 members to support Obama by voting, volunteering, and communicating with friends and family here and in neighboring battleground states, Geppert remarked that he has been very impressed with Barack Obama ever since the IFT Executive Board interviewed him for his state senate race.

Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan also spoke in support of Obama, complimenting their work together in the Illinois Senate. Madigan noted that Obama has the experience and ability to work with others and bring people together.

Thanking the IFT for its support, Illinois Comptroller Dan Hynes spoke

of the need to clean up the “mess” in Springfield. Hynes said that although Illinois doesn’t have the revenue to pay its bills or balance its budget, a silver lining may be that when Illinois hits rock bottom it can’t avoid restructuring the tax code to fund social services and pensions. Hynes stressed how we all need to work together for budget reform.



*Local 571 President Jane Russell welcomes members, candidates, officials and guests to the fourth Legislative Breakfast. IFT Legislative Director Nick Yelverton served as master-of-ceremonies for the annual event., held October 18 at the Oak Brook Doubletree Hotel.*

Congresswoman Judy Biggert (R-13th District), a member of the Education and Labor Committee, spoke of the pending reauthorization of NCLB. Biggert reported that the status of the bill has not changed since last year, and that testing requirements for English language learners and special education students need to be

modified if the bill is reauthorized. Biggert also explained that Congress has passed a higher education bill which includes increased accountability for student loan providers.

An award of Local 571’s appreciation was presented to retiring Illinois State Representative Jim Meyer (R-District 48), for his fifteen years of service in the General Assembly and his continuous support for teachers and students. Meyer told us about his career and the teachers in his family, and restated his support for teachers on key issues.

Other legislators and candidates spoke (see box below) on many topics, including increasing education funding, opposing vouchers, improving access to higher education, properly funding pensions, getting Illinois’ financial house in order, and the importance of teachers.

Thanks to members of the Legislative Breakfast Committee for their hard work and dedication, and to each of our councils for providing baskets for the raffle which raised \$2000 for the Local 571 scholarship fund.

The fifth annual Legislative Breakfast is planned for November 7, 2009.

## 2008 Legislative Breakfast Candidates, Officials, and Guests

Ed Geppert, President, Illinois Federation of Teachers  
 Marilyn Stewart, IFT Secretary-Treasurer, Chicago Teachers’ Union President  
 Tim Drea, Illinois AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer  
 Dr. Darlene Ruscitti, DuPage Regional Superintendent of Education  
 Congresswoman **Judy Biggert**, (R), 13th Congressional District  
 Candidate for U.S. House of Representatives, District 6, **Jill Morgenthaler** (D)  
 Illinois Attorney General, **Lisa Madigan**, (D)  
 Illinois Comptroller, **Dan Hynes**, (D)  
 Illinois Senator **Dan Cronin** (R), District 21  
 Illinois Senator **Carol Pankau** (R), District 23  
 Illinois Senator **Kirk Dillard** (R), District 24

Illinois Senator **Dan Kotowski** (D), District 33  
 Illinois Senator **Kimberly Lightford** (R), District 43  
 Illinois Representative **Kevin Joyce** (D), District 35  
 Illinois Representative **Dennis Reboletti** (R), District 46  
 Illinois Representative **Patricia Bellock** (R), District 47  
 Illinois Representative **Bob Biggins** (R), District 41  
 Illinois Representative **Jim Meyer** (R), District 48  
 Illinois Representative **Paul Froehlich** (R), District 56  
 Illinois Representative-Elect **Mark Walker** (R), District 66  
 Illinois Representative **Deborah Graham** (D), District 78  
 Illinois Representative **Mike Fortner** (D), District 95

## 2009 Scholarship & Grant Deadlines... Closer than you think!

West Suburban Teachers Union members, dependents, and grandchildren are eligible for a number of union-funded college scholarship and grant programs. The winter holiday break is a great opportunity for college-bound seniors to write thoughtful essays. Crafting a competitive application takes time. Although filing deadlines may seem distant, first semester's finals and second semester's start are always competing priorities.

Review each program's eligibility requirements. January 31 and March 1 postmark deadlines fall on a Saturday and Sunday. Most post offices close early on Saturdays and are closed on Sundays. Contact the Local 571 office on or before Friday, December 19 for Wheeler and Horowitz forms, or other related help if you need assistance before the holidays.

Program	Eligibility*	Amount	Deadline
<b>AFT Union Plus Scholarship</b> One-time cash awards for undergraduate or graduate study starting or continuing in the Fall, 2009	AFT member, spouse, or dependent child or step child	\$500- \$4000	January 31
<b>WSTU Local 571 Mary Wheeler Scholarship</b> Six one-time awards for undergraduate study starting fall 2009	High school senior who is a child of a Local 571 member*	\$1000	March 1
<b>WSTU Local 571 Jo Ann Horowitz Scholarship</b> One award, limited to students pursuing a career in teaching or Women's Studies	Local 571 member, child or grandchild who is a current college or university student*	\$1000	March 1
<b>CFL William A. Lee Scholarships</b> (Chicago Federation of Labor) Ten one-time cash awards: five by random drawing, five based on academic merit	Chicago area high school seniors graduating in 2009. Applicants or immediate family member must be affiliated with the Chicago Federation of Labor*	\$2000	March 2
<b>AFT Robert G. Porter Scholarships</b> 1) Four four-year (\$2000 per year) post-secondary scholarships 2) Ten one-time grants	1) Dependents of AFT members 2) AFT members, to assist with continuing professional education	\$8000 \$1000	March 31 March 31
<b>IFT Thomas H. Reece Scholarship</b> A one-time scholarship	IFT member, or member's child, currently enrolled in a public university with a declared education major or enrolled in a Master of Education program*	Up to \$2000	TBA Spring 2009

\*Local 571 members are eligible for IFT, AFT, CFL and AFL-CIO opportunities, as noted. Former members, retired but not continuing active membership, are not eligible for IFT and Local 571 scholarships. Current IFT Retirees membership *in good standing* is required.

### Related Links and Contact Information

<b>AFT Union Plus Scholarship</b>	<a href="http://www.aft.org/aftplus/scholarships/unionplus.htm">www.aft.org/aftplus/scholarships/unionplus.htm</a>
<b>WSTU Local 571 Mary Wheeler Scholarship</b>	E-mail Judy Jennings at <a href="mailto:jjennings@ift-aft.org">jjennings@ift-aft.org</a> or phone 630-468-4098
<b>WSTU Local 571 Jo Ann Horowitz Scholarship</b>	E-mail Judy Jennings at <a href="mailto:jjennings@ift-aft.org">jjennings@ift-aft.org</a> or phone 630-468-4098
<b>Chicago Federation of Labor William A. Lee Scholarship</b>	Write to: William A. Lee Scholarship Committee Chicago Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO 130 E Randolph Street, Suite 2600 Chicago, IL 60601
<b>AFT Robert G. Porter Scholarship</b>	<a href="http://www.aft.org/aftplus/scholarships/index.htm">www.aft.org/aftplus/scholarships/index.htm</a> or write to: Porter Scholars 555 New Jersey Avenue NW Washington, DC 20001
<b>IFT Thomas H. Reece Scholarship</b>	<a href="http://www.ift-aft.org">www.ift-aft.org</a>
<b>Union-related scholarship database</b>	<a href="http://www.unionplus.org/benefits/education/scholarships">http://www.unionplus.org/benefits/education/scholarships</a>



## Silent Protest Draws Attention to Low PSRP Salaries

**Y**ou don't always have to be loud to attract attention, as members of the Caddo (La.) Federation of Teachers and Support Personnel showed during a silent protest at a local school board meeting in October. Wearing shirts that read "Wall of Shame" across the front, members of the AFT affiliate customized the backs of their shirts with information about their jobs, the number of years they have worked for the district and their monthly net pay.

A typical example read, "I am a paraprofessional. I've worked for the Caddo Parish School Board for 8 years. My take-home monthly pay is \$817. Could you live on this?"

The silent protest is part of a campaign that the local union, representing more than 2,000 teachers and support staff, has mounted to bring attention, not only to low pay, but also to working conditions in schools. While Caddo federation president Jackie Lansdale addressed the school board, the members in attendance, who included bus drivers, paraprofessionals and cafeteria workers, stood to face the audience, with their backs to the board. They then walked in a line to the back of the room.

During the meeting, the school board voted to give support-staff employees a \$500-a-year pay increase. Teachers will receive raises, based on their level of education, ranging from \$750 to \$1,100.

While Lansdale said the union appreciates the raises, they are still not adequate to compete with neighboring districts or to compensate employees for the extra duties they are asked to take on. "Make no mistake," she told the board, "every single bit of this is about children. We should never forget that the employees' working conditions are in fact the learning conditions of our students."

The weekend before the meeting, the union conducted a "virtual rally," encouraging members to send e-mails to school board members. That effort generated almost 4,500 e-mails. The messages clearly made an impact, as even before the silent protest at the school board meeting took place, the superintendent said he planned to address issues related to salary and working conditions. *AFT Leadernet*

## Union Members Encouraged to Support United Way

**T**he annual United Way campaigns are under way across the country. The United Way and the AFL-CIO have a long tradition of working together to provide services to members of organized labor, their families and communities, and other working people.

AFT Secretary-Treasurer Antonia Cortese serves on the United Way of America's board of trustees. "The AFT is proud to continue its support of United Way," said Cortese, "and I hope all of our members will make an extra effort this year to support community agencies during these tough fiscal times." For information about your local United Way and how to donate or get involved visit the Live United Web site, <http://www.liveunited.org>.

## See's Candies, AMC Loews & Marcus Theatre Benefits

**D**iscounted See's Candies, Marcus and Loews Theatre movie ticket prices have increased slightly this year. Please use the new order form, online at [www.wstu571.org](http://www.wstu571.org), available from

designated Council officers or from the Local 571 office. Members may phone requests to 630-468-4098 or e-mail a request to Judy Jennings at [jjennings@ift-aft.org](mailto:jjennings@ift-aft.org).

*Happy Holidays*



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Member Benefits

AFT has an expense reimbursement and/or endorsement arrangement for marketing this program. For more information, please contact AFT Financial Services at 800/238-1133, ext. 4493; send an e-mail to [disclosureinfo@aft.org](mailto:disclosureinfo@aft.org); or visit [www.aftplus.org/disclosure](http://www.aftplus.org/disclosure).

## New-educator Resources: *t*-Source

The AFT provides web-based resources to help new teachers address many of today's challenges. Current topics include student and classroom management, working on teacher teams, and creating partnerships with parents.

A classroom materials section has information about recognizing and teaching Asian/Pacific American heritage, Black history, Hispanic heritage, Women's history, as well as several other topics.

Articles on how to find classroom donation programs and how to write

grant and award applications provide funding options outside of one's own school district.

A section on continuing professional education includes summer studies programs, exchange programs, and information about the National Board Certification program.

A link to teacher tips published in *American Educator* offers practical advice from veteran educators.

*t*-Source is found on the AFT home page <http://www.aft.org>, or directly at <http://www.t-source.org>.

## Know Your "Weingarten" Rights

"If this discussion could in any way lead to my being disciplined or terminated, or affect my personal working conditions, I respectfully request that my union representative, officer, or steward be present at this meeting. Without representation present, then... I choose not to participate in this discussion."

The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) gives employees the right to assistance from union representation during investigatory interviews. Although not explicit in the Act, the right was declared by the US Supreme Court in 1975 in NLRB vs. J. Weingarten, Inc. The rules established by the court are commonly known as "Weingarten" rights.

## Winter ER&D Course Registration Opens

A registration flyer for Reading Comprehension Instruction and Thinking Mathematics for Middle School courses is now available. Each course involves eight after-noon/evening sessions in February and March.

"Reading Comprehension Instruction" is based on current research and exemplary practices proven to help students acquire strong reading comprehension skills. Participants examine, discuss, and evaluate a range of appropriate instructional strategies for teaching comprehension skills.

"Thinking Mathematics," for grades 5-9 educators, is built on the premise that students who struggle with math when they get to middle school have

missed some fundamental concepts that must be learned before they can be successful.

These courses are scheduled for 4:30-8:30 p.m., February 5, 12, 19, 26, March 5, 12, 19, and 26 at the Robert M. Healey Center in Westmont.

A \$50 registration cost includes materials and a light dinner each evening. An option for two graduate credits from Governors State University or Prairie State College for an additional fee is available.

Contact your Local 571 representative or Council president for additional details and registration forms, or Local 571 office manager Judy Jennings at [jjennings@ift-aft.org](mailto:jjennings@ift-aft.org) or by phone at 630-468-4098.

## WSTU Calendar

### December

12/8—571 EB Meeting - Westmont - 5:30 p.m.  
12/8—571 HOR Meeting-Westmont - 6:45 p.m.

### January

1/12—571 EB Meeting - Westmont - 5:30 p.m.  
1/12—571 HOR Meeting-Westmont - 6:45 p.m.  
1/26—Grievance Training Workshop -Westmont

### February

2/7-8—IFT ULI - Westmont  
2/9—571 EB Meeting - Westmont - 5:30 p.m.  
2/9—571 HOR Meeting - Westmont - 6:45 p.m.  
2/21—TRS/Social Security Seminar (for teachers retiring within 2-3 years) Westmont - 6:45 p.m.

### WSTU OFFICE HOURS

MONDAY-FRIDAY 9:00 AM—5:00 PM  
THE LOCAL 571 OFFICE MAY BE CLOSED ON SCHOOL HOLIDAYS, PLEASE CALL AHEAD.

### Reminders...

**571 ER&D Course Registration**  
*Reservation deadline January 9*

**571 Grievance Training Workshop**  
*Reservation deadline January 16*

**571 TRS/Social Security Seminar**  
*Reservation deadline February 13*

### Union Messenger

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