



## NYSUT elects first woman to lead the union

**K**aren Magee, a veteran elementary and special education teacher from Harrison, is the new president of the 600,000-member NYSUT. Magee and her slate of officers were elected by a majority of the nearly 3,000 NYSUT delegates who voted April 5 at the union's annual Representative Assembly in New York City.



Magee

as executive vice president and voted for two new vice presidents: Catalina Fortino, United Federation of Teachers (UFT) vice president for education and director of the UFT's Teacher Center, and Paul Pecorale, a special education teacher and president of the Patchogue-Medford Congress of Teachers. Martin Messner, a health and physical education teacher and president of the Schoharie

Teachers' Association, was elected secretary-treasurer.

"This slate of officers brings a renewed commitment to fight for public education and the hard-working members who deliver it, from pre-K to Ph.D.," said Kowal. "I look forward to working with Karen Magee and the rest of her team in building that future, together."

### UUP resolutions gain support

Delegates to the NYSUT Representative Assembly overwhelmingly adopted UUP-sponsored resolutions to defend SUNY Downstate Medical Center and remove the edTPA as a requirement for initial teacher certification.

Downstate delegates stood at the micro-

UUP delegates re-elected statewide Treasurer Rowena Blackman-Stroud and voted three new members to the NYSUT Board of Directors at the 42nd annual convention, April 4-6. UUP President Fred Kowal, Vice President for Academics Jamie Dangler, and UUP Outreach Committee Co-chair Tom Tucker of Buffalo Center were elected to three-year terms.

Magee is the first woman to serve as NYSUT president, succeeding Dick Iannuzzi, the union's president since April 2005. A teacher for nearly 30 years and a longtime leader of the Harrison Association of Teachers, Magee was elected to a three-year term to lead the state's largest union.

RA delegates re-elected Andrew Pallotta

### Weingarten meets with UUP

AFT President Randi Weingarten praised the hard work of UUP and pledged continued support for UUP's ongoing effort to protect high-quality public higher education and health care.

"Wherever the fight is, we are there with you, shoulder to shoulder," Weingarten told more than 100 UUP delegates at a breakfast meeting during the RA, April 4-6 in New York City.

UUP President Fred Kowal, who introduced Weingarten, said NYSUT and the AFT's help "has been critical in the fights we have been raising in Brooklyn and with edTPA, as well."

see **AFT**, page 5

phone with UUP officers and successfully convinced their K-12 colleagues to support SUNY Downstate's fight against privatization or closure.

"NYSUT (will) continue to bring its political resources to bear in advocating the Legislature and the governor to keep SUNY Downstate Medical Center open to maintain access to quality health care services for the residents of Central

see **NYSUT**, page 5

## Advocacy works!

By **Judy Wishnia**  
COARM Chair

**I**n the current political climate, we in the U.S. are faced with right-wing, anti-government forces that want to gut public education, Social Security and Medicare, and unions.

We cannot sit back and lament. We must actively engage in the fight for public higher ed, and for the financial and health benefits that will allow retirees to live in dignity. We cannot allow New York state to become Wisconsin, where public workers have lost many of their union rights and benefits.

This year, UUP reorganized its outreach efforts into 13 districts. Several hundred members, including retirees, carried the union's legislative program to Albany and into their home districts. The result of this political activity was a series of victories over a very onerous Executive Budget proposal.

For retirees, all money paid for Part B of Medicare will be reimbursed. A civil service contract mandates that reimbursement; however, several years ago, the state introduced a means test (IRMAA) that required those earning more than \$80,000 a year to pay more. For many UUP retiree members in TIAA/CREF—who must take out a certain percentage of their retirement each year—the income limit could be reached quickly. Two years ago, retirees were told that this extra payment would not be reimbursed. UUP and NYSUT fought this and the reimbursement was restored. This year, the Executive Budget again rejected reimbursement; but the legislators listened and all payments will be reimbursed.

As for the SUNY budget, which has faced years of deep budget cuts, there were some substantial victories. The Executive

see **ADVOCACY**, page 9

## The Active Retiree

### UUP Officers

Frederick E. Kowal/President  
 J. Philippe Abraham/VP for Professionals  
 Jamie F. Dangler/VP for Academics  
 Eileen Landy/Secretary  
 Rowena J. Blackman-Stroud/Treasurer  
 Edison Bond Jr./Membership Dev. Officer

### Elected COARM Members (2013-2015)

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*The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and not necessarily the opinions of United University Professions.*

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## Life as I see it ...

# One foot in heaven

By Henry Geerken  
 Cobleskill

I like to make slogans for each year of my birth. For example when I was 75 I was “still alive.” When I was 76, I was “learning new tricks.” And this year, on turning 77, I have “One foot in heaven.” (With the other one on the “slippery slope.”)

As I was writing this, my TV was yammering about “identity theft.” This got me thinking about what my liability would be to someone who stole mine. I mean someone might steal my identity thinking they were getting easy street or the world famous writer for *The Daily Star* when, in truth, they’d be getting an identity rife with problems.

First, my plumbing leaks—sometimes badly—in the middle of the night, while still in bed. Nothing kills a restful sleep than waking in a shallow pond of ... ?

With the ingestion of two 80 mg Lasix tablets each day, you are not the master of all you survey. Instead, your first observation is the location of the men’s room—no matter where you are. Distance is a critical issue because after five steps all bets are off. After five steps you’ve gone from “gotta go” to “already gone.”

Second, I have neuropathy in both my feet. The bottom of my feet feel like I’m walking on hot coals, while the calf pain resembles thousands of needles in my leg. When seated, the pain in both my legs is so severe I cannot keep them still; they are either twitching or almost spinning around on my ankle axis. I have little control over them. If the TV was broken I could watch them for hours. I take pills to “quiet things down” but the things that cause this problem only sneer and laugh at my miniscule efforts and in fact I think they welcome them by serving them as the entree’.

Third, Mr. Thief, you should know about the “twitch” that has developed—an involuntary jerk of my hands. If seated, relaxed and reading, my hands will twitch—and my eyes will jump move with them. This makes it difficult to



Geerken

read—instead of seeing the line, “Mary had a little lamb,” I might eye-track “Mary had a colonoscopy.” (Atta-girl Mary, grit those teeth!)

In an effort to tell you everything before you steal my identity, I must warn you that my teeth are like stars—they come out at night.

Have I told you about my knees? They are in bad shape with no chance of an operation in sight. My knees grind so badly I can only move five feet with a walker with wheels (or a 5’ 8” blonde anatomically correct female nurse’s aide). The bone grinding is quite audible and, on occasion, will make a resounding pop that causes people to jump. Or maybe it’s when I scream in pain that they jump. Either way, the worst part is when my left knee joint locks. Diane has to slowly flex the joint open. I try not to scream.

Sixth, I can’t read small print anymore, not even with a magnifying glass. This is embarrassing because I can’t read the fine print on the pre-nup I signed 32 years ago. I vaguely recall “worship,” “obey,” “hand over your paycheck” and “clean the windows,” but I don’t know if that applies to Diane or to me.

As you can see, if you steal my identity you are really getting damaged goods. In this case, the grass is greener on the other side of the fence.

Finally, Mr. Thief, you should know that I’m a package deal—wife, daughter and dog. The dog Benji has to go for “walks” frequently. This means that he wants to go when he has to go and it doesn’t matter if it is 9 at night or 2:30 in the morning.

Remember this as you start your search: You get the whole gang.

Henny Youngman made people laugh by telling them “Take my wife ———. Please.”

Well I will tell you “Take my wife, daughter, dog and me. Please!”

What can I say? I’m 77 with one foot in heaven.

*From the COARM chair*

# Medicare for all

Since the introduction of Medicare, there has been an enormous improvement in the lives of senior citizens. Senior poverty rates have decreased markedly (no more big medical bills), and people are living longer and healthier lives. Yes, Medicare is effective and immensely popular.

But what about Americans who are not over 65. The Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) is certainly a big step toward improving health coverage for many Americans, but it not a complete solution to ensuring good health care coverage for all. Insurance companies still drain money from the system with huge overhead costs, including high salaries for administrators and, of course, profit. In addition, people have to choose from complicated competing plans and levels of coverage. So why don't we support a single payer system, such as Medicare for All?

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) permits states to implement their own plans (by 2017) and Assemblyman Richard Gottfried, a long-time supporter of a single payer system, has introduced a bill, co-sponsored by Bill Perkins in the Senate, to establish such a system in New York state; it would cover everything, with no co-payments or deductibles. It would be paid for by a combination of payroll taxes and a surcharge on nonpayroll income, adjusted for income levels. By eliminating private insurance costs of 20 percent to 30 percent, much money could be saved. Gottfried believes that we are at a point where, with Obamacare being implemented in New York, it is becoming very clear to people that—even with the improvements to the ACA—the insurance system still has profound flaws that are not easily fixed.

The bill has been endorsed by the Working Families Party, the New York



“Perhaps it’s time for retirees who know the benefits of Medicare to become advocates for ‘Medicare for All.’”

— Judy Wishnia

State Academy of Family Physicians, and by numerous unions, among them, the state AFL-CIO, the Communications Workers of America, various health care unions (state nurses, 1199 SEIU, Committee of Interns and Residents), and UUP. The Assembly Health Committee has already passed the bill and it has 72 sponsors.

Despite this backing, there will be obstacles. Legislators will have to be convinced that this is a cost-saving plan and not “another tax.” And the Senate will need a few more Democrats elected before the bill can be presented. But the tide is shifting. Vermont has already passed single payer insurance. If New York does the same, it will surely influence national policy. Every other industrial nation, includ-

ing our neighbor Canada, and many poorer countries, have health insurance coverage for all. But while the rest of the world had progressive political parties that decided that health care should be part of the public agenda, the notion that health care is a public good, did not really take root in this country.

We spend more money

on health care, but the Swedes, the Danes, the Japanese, the French and others, all live longer than Americans.

Our colleague, Martha Livingston of Old Westbury, a long-time activist for single payer insurance, will be speaking at retiree meetings in Buffalo and Syracuse this May. Perhaps it’s time for retirees who know the benefits of Medicare to become advocates for “Medicare for All.”

(Most of this information came from an interview with Richard Gottfried conducted by Steven Wishnia, which appeared in *LaborPress*.)

*Judith*

# Regional meetings

## Long Island Region retirees meet with music

By Barbara Maertz  
Farmingdale

**T**he fall 2013 meeting of the Long Island Region of COARM met at Farmingdale in the Campus Center ballroom. This was the first time we used the new facility and, except for the parking problem, it was a success.

A special event was the music of the Doumbek drums played by Casey Bond and her band, the “Raq Steady” group. Bond is a professional UUP member in the Hempstead campus of EOC and the professional grievance chair for UUP Farmingdale (UUPF). The Raq Steady group is made up of Margee, Don and Laura, who are students of the Middle Eastern Rhythm drumming taught by Bond. The Doumbek is a drum held between the knees and uses hand motions to produce the rhythms. Besides the drum music, the ladies showed us how to belly dance, with lovely scarves and undulating rhythms. They were very enticing and entertaining, as they swayed through the tables, encouraging us to move to the music. Too bad there were no takers.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CASEY BOND'S FACEBOOK PAGE

Long Island retirees were treated to the music of UUPer Casey Bond and her band, the “Raq Steady” group.

It is amazing the talents and interests that our members have beyond their regular day jobs. Bond has made a mini career of playing the drums in the clubs of Manhattan. If you ask what an Irish girl is doing in this art form, I would say very well. Bond has her own studio and gives lessons in drumming, as well as playing in bands.

Of course, the regular meeting full of benefits information was well received and

many questions were answered by Walter Apple, UUP retiree member services coordinator.

Maertz informed the members about the “observation status” issue with the hospitals. Many signed petitions urging the governor to sign a bill correcting the problem in New York. Cuomo signed the legislation and now a hospital must notify people of their status and admit them as a “patient” so that Medicare coverage is in place. This is only corrected in New York; NYSUT and ARA are working to get federal legislation in place to cover other states.

Yolanda Segarra, UUPF president, explained MOOCs: what they are and what they could mean to students and faculty. She also discussed the chancellor’s Open SUNY initiatives and the ongoing privatization threats at SUNY Downstate Medical Center.

The spring meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 23. Topics to be covered include Medicare and the effects IRMAA legislation will have on retirees.

## Retirees visit Wang Center on Stony Brook campus

By Barbara Maertz  
Farmingdale

**S**tony Brook was host to the fall COARM meeting in the Chapel Room at the Wang Center on the Stony Brook University campus. It is a lovely room with waterfalls and a stage, but the crowd we had was too big for the room. I want to thank everyone for being so cooperative with the buffet and the seating.

More than 64 people came to hear Arty Shertzer, president of Stony Brook UUP, explain the new Advocacy Initiative that UUP is taking. He explained how LOCAL visits and phone calls are so much more

effective with our legislators and how UUP needs to get more people involved just talking to our local Assembly members and senators. COARM needs to encourage our members to advocate for the IRMAA reimbursement as well as the edTPA issue and the budget issues.

Walter Apple, UUP retiree services coordinator, came with plenty of literature about the benefits programs offered by UUP and NYSUT. There were many questions about the Organizing Your Vital Records pamphlet that will help you organize your financial records for your children or caregivers to more easily access important papers. The pamphlet is avail-

able on the UUP website [www.uupinfo.org](http://www.uupinfo.org), then select report, then Organizing Your Vital Records.

Barbara Maertz explained the Observation Status issue and got petitions urging the governor to sign the pending legislation requiring hospitals to make it clear whether you are admitted or remain in “Observation.” Remember, you must have three days of hospital admission before Medicare will pay for rehab.

Because of the large crowd, the next meeting at Stony Brook will be held Tuesday, April 15, at the Hilton Garden Inn on campus. Watch the mail for the invitation.

## ‘Sunny SUNY’ group established in Southern Florida

By Harvey Axlerod  
Buffalo Center

An initial meeting of South Florida retirees was organized by Harvey Axlerod, and took place Oct. 7, 2013, in Boynton Beach, Fla.

The featured speaker was UUP retiree member Harvey Inventasch of Cortland, chair of the union’s Retired Legislative Action Group. He spoke on events in Albany that might affect Florida retirees. The meeting was held the day after the recent massive changes in NYSUT leadership (see related story, page 1); also discussed was the Legislature saving our Medicare reimbursement. A vigorous question-and-answer period followed.

Two decisions were made: the group chose to be called the “Sunny SUNY Group,” and a second meeting will be held in the fall.

Right, “Sunny SUNY” organizer Harvey Axlerod, back row, third from right, is pleased with the number of retirees attending the group’s first meeting.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HARVEY AXLEROD

## AFT ...

(continued from page 1)

Union advocacy has reaped results for SUNY Downstate Medical Center, which sits in a high-needs, low-income neighborhood in Central Brooklyn: The enacted state budget does not include language that would have opened the door for pri-

vatizing the hospital.

The edTPA is a new mandatory assessment student teachers must pass in New York in order to be certified. NYSUT, UUP and the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY object to the way edTPA has been imposed as a high-stakes requirement. Weingarten

compared edTPA to the failed rollout of Common Core.

“Just like Common Core, there is a good way, a bad way (to do this), and an ‘I just can’t believe they’re doing it this way,’” she said.

— from NYSUT’s RA Reporter

## NYSUT ...

(continued from page 1)

Brooklyn,” the resolution states.

A separate UUP resolution, jointly submitted by Professional Staff Congress (PSC)/CUNY, urges NYSUT to call on the state Board of Regents to stop the implementation of the edTPA and engage in discussions with NYSUT on certification and assessment policies and implementation practices to best educate and prepare students for the teaching profession.

“UUP, PSC and NYSUT reject the notion that edTPA constitutes an appropriate assessment of teacher candidate performance,” said Dangler, chair of the union’s statewide Teacher Education Task Force. “We also believe the Regents’

rushed implementation will undermine the preparation of teacher candidates in New York state.”

The “rushed implementation” of edTPA and Common Core was among the many reasons delegates, including more than 120 from UUP, passed a resolution of “no confidence” in King and called for his immediate removal.

### Retiree issues

Delegates voted on a number of pension and retirement resolutions, including one to oppose using the chained Consumer Price Index when calculating Social Security cost-of-living (COLA) increases.

Priority was placed on resolutions that

call on NYSUT to: fight for the elimination of the negative impact of delay and/or transfer of served credit for Tier 3 and Tier 4 members; seek equitable recognition of prior service; and support the appeal of a legal decision on pensions in Detroit.

The latter resolution deals with federal court Judge Steven Rhodes’ Dec. 13, 2013, decision to allow Detroit to enter into Chapter 9 bankruptcy protection, which could result in cuts in pensions of city employees and retirees.

More RA news can be found at <http://bit.ly/1kwwU8v>

— NYSUT and UUP reports

# COARM

## Committee tackles retiree issues, concerns

By Loraine Tyler  
Oneonta

The following are draft minutes from the Committee on Active Retired Membership (COARM) meeting held Monday, Feb. 3, during the union's 2014 Winter Delegate Assembly in Albany.

Present: Chair Judy Wishnia, Frank Maraviglia of Environmental Science & Forestry, Patricia Stempel of Upstate Medical University, Harvey Axlerod of Buffalo Center and Barbara Maertz of Farmingdale.

### Regional Meetings

Southern Tier—three spring meetings planned in Cortland, Oneonta/Delhi and Binghamton;

Long Island—April 15 in Stony Brook and one TBA in Farmingdale;

Western NY—membership meeting in May and social event during summer;

Capital Region—meeting in May;

Metropolitan Region—spring meeting planned;

Central NY—meeting in May; and

Florida meetings—south and central meetings (Axlerod and Stempel).

a motion to support RELAG's recommendation that the statewide UUP Outreach Committee add IRMAA to issues for advocacy. Motion passed.

### Chair's Report—Judy Wishnia

Unum—Policy #118668-035: \$1,000 term life insurance and travel protection. Policy remains in effect until June 30. Will discuss further at the 2014 Spring DA in Albany. The life insurance is important to many retiree members who don't qualify for other life insurance protection. Questions to be discussed include: Will the loss of the insurance cause a reduction in the number of retiree members? Can the two coverages be separated?

Directors of regional meetings should survey membership as to the importance of the life insurance and travel protection, and report results on COARM's newly developed listserv.

### Executive Board meeting update

Danger of privatizing hospitals is in current budget. The need to save Downstate is more important than ever.

### Finance Report—Barbara Maertz

Send requests for anticipated expenses for 2014-15 budget; due by March 31.

Guidelines re: honorariums for speakers at regional/out-of-state meetings—Maertz suggested \$100 maximum, to be discussed at the Spring DA.

A motion to limit the budget line for meetings in nontraditional regions, i.e., out-of-state meetings, to \$1,000 was set aside (no quorum). The vote will be conducted by email.

### Old Business

UUP Retiree of the Year Award—need to specify UUP service? Add to statement in the UUP Policy Manual or to the application.

COARM Statement of Principles: Wishnia to share draft on listserv.

Congratulations to Walter Apple and his family with the birth of his daughter, Violet.

Thanks to Tina George for her service to this committee.



Above, Richard Tyler of Oneonta, second from left, discusses retiree issues. Listening, from left, are Loraine Tyler of Oneonta, and Horace Ivey and Pat Stempel, both of Upstate.

Right, Future UUP retiree Violet Apple naps in a basket.



Guest: UUP Retiree Services Coordinator Walter Apple.

Observers: Richard and Loraine Tyler of Oneonta; Harvey Inventasch of Cortland, Ed Hines of Stony Brook HSC, Tom Morrissey of Fredonia, Anastasia Johnson of Buffalo Center, Charles Simpson of Plattsburgh, and J. Dennis Chasse of Brockport.

### Agenda

Minutes of the last meeting were not available.

### RELAG Report—Harvey Inventasch

Retiree advocacy day to be scheduled in May, all members need to bring someone, numbers are important.

IRMAA—Currently, the state pays for premium for Medicare Part B. May be as much as \$2,600.

Maraviglia moved and Maertz seconded

# Death in December

By Mac Nelson  
Fredonia

Two very different mortal events came together in December 2013. We said farewell to a great old African man, dying full of years. And we mourned anew the brutal deaths of 20 children and six teachers in Connecticut.

I bring these things together because, in my 80th year, I find I can still be taught something about life and death.

Nothing can be more agonizing or senseless than the death of the very young. Ben

Jonson's great epitaph for his 7-year-old son calls the little boy his "best piece of poetry."

Grave-stones in New England call the many dead children there "Lovely in life, pleasant in death," or "A hopeful child." And we know that, until our century, fewer than half of those "hopeful" children made it to puberty.

Bill Knott is not a big name in modern American poetry, but he changed my head with this tiny poem:

The only response  
to a child's grave is  
to lie down before it and play dead.

And there is no more powerful image in western drama than the mad, dying, howling King Lear carrying his dead daughter Cordelia onto the stage, hoping she might

still be alive, knowing she is not.

Thou'lt come no more,

Never, never, never, never, never.

So what have these sad truths to do with the death of Nelson Mandela?

If you watched the memorial service for him, you saw a parade of world leaders honoring him. President Obama gave a good speech. But I found what was going on behind him more captivating. The ordinary people of Suweto and the other poor

to move with it. (The old man had loved to boogie too.)

The arc of Nelson Mandela's life had swept through defeat and imprisonment to release, victory, forgiveness, and, finally, joy. He and his supporters taught me that death, like life, can be something to celebrate.

There is no way to celebrate the deaths of children, though the bereft people of Newtown are organizing memorial founda-



Nelson

## Nelson Mandela and his supporters

"taught me that death, like life,  
can be something to celebrate."

— Mac Nelson

townships, unable to attend the grand memorial in the soccer stadium, were visible outside through windows behind the podium. It was a cold and rainy day. They had umbrellas and flags.

And they were dancing.

They had been swaying and singing, cavorting and dancing for three days, since the death of their Madiba. They were waving their flags and thrusting their umbrellas up and down, rejoicing in the life and accomplishments of the old man who had suffered for 27 years to help to free them. It was gorgeous, happy, life-giving. Some in the stadium caught the rhythm and began

tions and urging political action for mental health and gun control. Bless them.

Perhaps even aching grief and dancing are not co-exclusive. Dancer/director Bob Fosse and writer Paddy Chayefsky were the closest of friends. They made a comic pact that the one who outlived the other would do something personal and unseemly at the other's memorial. Fosse said he would do a tap-dance. When his friend died, Fosse didn't quite do that. Fighting tears, he got up and did a 30-second soft shoe dance. Then he returned to his silent grieving.

When I go, full of years, I hope my friends will sing and dance.



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# Cuba ...

## People to people

By Susan Lehrer  
New Paltz

**F**or most Americans, Cuba is a mystery. The embargo keeps our goods from them; it also keeps us from knowing about them (unless Cuba does something the U.S. doesn't like).

I was curious about Cuba, about what their Revolution looks like now, about what the people there think and how they're living. We know they have universal health care (Michael Moore's *Sicko* included a brief cut on Cuba). Is there enough food? Are people threadbare? Are they demoralized by it all and years of American intransigence? What about After Castro?

Specific groups licensed by the U.S. for "cultural, educational, people-to-people" exchange are permitted to travel legally to Cuba. An increasing number of such licenses have been granted by the US for travel, including Road Scholar, and a Phoenix, Ariz., public radio station (!) So I went not as a "tourist," like any other country's citizens could, but as a "participant." Clear enough?

I met our group in Miami, where we had gathered from across the country, all with an interest in Cuba. We were briefed about what the U.S. regulations allowed—and what wasn't. We had to attend all scheduled meetings with Cuban groups. We could not bring back any Cuban cigars, Cuban rum, or anything not of a craft or artistic nature. There is a two-tiered money system—one for Cubans (pesos) and for us, the *cuc* (Cuban convertible currency), worth about one U.S. dollar.

The next day we took our scheduled charter flight from Miami to Havana (45 minutes). The flight was full of (I assume) Cuban family members bringing stuff to Cuba—flat-screen TVs, bicycles, appliances and other unidentifiable items in huge, airline-wrapped bundles.



SUSAN LEHRER PHOTOS

Several women take part in a basket-weaving workshop.

It took forever to board. For me, the flight across was like an approach to a fabled land—beautiful tropical clouds, water and, then, Havana.

We met our Cuban guide and bus driver, and headed to the hotel. It meets any upscale tourist accommodation on tours I've been on, with helpful and efficient staff and fine food. That was surprise No. 1, since we'd been briefed not to expect the usual (high) standard of travel group. At each hotel we stayed at, we were greeted by a welcome mojito. Good start.

My trip went to three different cities—Havana, Cienfuegos and Trinidad Cuba. Our Cuban guide took her responsibility to provide us with "people-to-people" experiences very personally—she literally stopped people on the street if they were doing something interesting, asked about it and what their situation was. They were quite willing to talk with us, answer her questions and ours, and seemed generally at ease, if somewhat amused, by us all. A couple of us spoke some

Spanish, which made it easier on our translator/guide.

Did we see just what they wanted us to see, and were we heavily controlled? Hard to say. Of course, the specific groups we visited were pre-arranged—several under the auspices of the Catholic church, some government sponsored, including UNEAC, the official organization of writers and artists. We brought small gifts to each—there are shortages of many basics like shampoo, pencils, toiletries etc.

Our visits included a senior center (where I got to chat with a woman who'd owned a store many years ago), day care center for 2- to 4-year-olds, UNEAC artists, and a dance group, as well as an organic farm and a coffee plantation. We had a wonderful, Cuban home-style dinner at the Ludwig Foundation (German money from chocolate), which sponsors Cuban artists and brings outside art instructors to Cuba.

The other question: Were we tightly controlled about what we could see and do? I think that would have been impossible.





Above is a bookstall on the streets of Havana.

Left, a Cuban man refills “disposable” lighters, as Lehrer’s guide asks him about the work he is doing.

We went out for on-our-own meals, or just wandered, wherever we chose. One night I went with another couple to see the home-team Havana Industriales play baseball. Our Cuban guide helped put us in a taxi, and the driver made sure we found the right door in. The roar of the crowd preceded us. And there we were, watching the home team cream the opposition. Alas, the rain started, everyone hung around, it let up and we sat down again. But then the sky really let loose, and we finally gave it up, amidst a bunch of milling hopeful fans. Cubans take baseball very seriously.

We wandered around craft markets and food markets (seemed pretty well stocked), or walked along the waterfront Malecón. Although we did not have much free time due to the full people-

to-people group program, I didn’t feel corralled.

What struck me most was the hopeful feeling that things were getting better; Cubans were looking forward to more loosening of restrictions (both from the U.S. and Cuba, in particular Cubans’ travel restrictions). In Havana especially, we could see neglect and crumbling buildings, first from the American blockade, and then from the Soviet Union’s collapse and consequent end of Cuban support in the 1990s (which they call the “special period”). But we also saw reconstruction and renovations all over, which was a point of pride for our Cuban contacts. There is more private enterprise now, especially tourist-oriented. We ate at and visited several nongovernment-sponsored restaurants and social organizations. I experienced no difference

in food or service (both very high quality) between government and nongovernment establishments.

We could not understand how Cuba could afford social welfare programs on a scale we Americans have never experienced. Our very knowledgeable Cuban guide had a hard time explaining it to us. A growing medical technology sector (exporting everywhere but the U.S.)? Foreign investments (but never ceding an inch of Cuban soil, according to our interpreter)? How do they pay the bills?

Cuba is a country with a long tradition of revolutions. We can visit it as Americans in a limited way, with a group licensed to go, or as a cultural exchange some other way. I would urge anyone interested to find or create a way.

## Advocacy ...

*(continued from page 1)*

Budget called for no increase to SUNY; legislators added \$7.6 million for personal services and millions more for specific projects. Not much, but a clear turnaround from years of underfunding.

SUNY hospitals received an additional \$27.5 million and, most importantly, the union was able to stave off all attempts at privatization of SUNY .

The EOC and EOP allocations were raised beyond what was proposed in the

Executive Budget, and additional money went to TAP.

Unfortunately, in a nonbudget vote, the Republicans in the Senate rejected The Dream Act.

So, the message is: Advocacy works!

In the next few months, we will be organizing once again, not only for the next budget but for two important issues: the establishment of an endowment for SUNY; and FOIL legislation that would allow for transparency of how the

Research Foundation spends its money.

COARM will be asking more retirees to come to Albany to advocate on behalf of SUNY, public higher education and retiree issues. Equally important, retirees are urged to get in touch with UUP Legislation at (800) 342-4206 to help arrange visits to legislators in their district offices.

By this time next year, your representatives should be calling retirees by their by first names!



*Coming Soon:*  
**New endorsed shopping program**

**NYSUT Member Benefits is excited to announce the endorsement of the member shopping program powered by PayCheck Direct for roll-out this spring 2014.**

This program – part of the national retail powerhouse Bluestem Brands, Inc. family, which also includes Fingerhut and *Gettington.com* – allows individuals to purchase what they want now and pay interest-free over 12 months.

Through PayCheck Direct, NYSUT members & their families will have access to more than 7,000 name-brand products such as appliances, televisions, computers, electronics, furniture, and much more.

Members would have the option of paying for any items they purchase interest-free over a 12-month period; bi-weekly payments would be made via automatic checking account withdrawals.

PayCheck Direct offers a 30-day in-home trial on many products; flexible return policy; no interest fees, credit checks, down payments, or

finance charges; and toll-free customer service representatives located in the U.S.

As part of this endorsement, PayCheck Direct will mail merchandise catalogs to the NYSUT membership four times per year.

NYSUT members are encouraged to shop and compare prices before making a purchase with this program and consider it as an alternative to using their credit card.

We are excited to be launching this new program in spring 2014! Join our MAP (Member Alert Program) Alert email service to be among the first to learn more about this program (visit the Member Benefits website for sign-up instructions).

You can also visit [memberbenefits.nysut.org](http://memberbenefits.nysut.org) in the coming weeks for details on how to use this service or call **800-626-8101** with any questions.

# Book review: ‘What’s going on at UAardvark?’

By Judy Wishnia  
COARM Chair

**H**ave you ever thought about what might happen to SUNY campuses if the move toward privatization and corporatization would come to full fruition?

Our colleague, Larry Wittner, has written a bitter but humorous satire of a university where corporate sponsorship had led to the Monsanto School of Science, Walmart Hall, Pharma Quad and, for the less worthy departments, the locally sponsored Herman’s Used Cars Department of History. TV ads are in every classroom, tuition is raised, and low-paid adjuncts are hired. There is even a plan to eliminate all arts and sciences.

Of course, there are more and more administrators, including a vice president for the men’s rooms, and money is being spent on a new stadium (sound familiar?). The union is ineffectual: the union president is in bed (literally) with the very stupid university president.

Happily the terror of such a future for a “business friendly university” is alleviated by much sarcasm and humor. I laughed



Wittner

heartily at the awarding of honorary degrees to the Kardashians and the acronym for the right-wing plan, Protect Liberty and Guaranteed Universal Employment (PLAGUE).

There is also a mention of our old nemesis, David Horowitz; the head of the Federal Bureau of Inquisition is J. Edgar Beria. And who can resist the description of the extreme left’s endless splintering?

Finally, the hero, a progressive English professor and his liberal cohorts, plans a rebellion, an activity characterized by Rush Limbaugh as “part of a feminazi sting operation, put together

by the whores, sluts and queers of the so-called Girl Scouts of America.”

I’ll leave it to you to read the denouement: Enjoy!

(On a personal note: As one of the founders of the Women’s Studies Program at Stony Brook, I appreciated the trouncing of the unfortunate move of some programs from community activism, to esoteric theory and language. The Aardvark Women’s Studies Department is presenting a lecture on “Gender segmentation in Southern Mongolian Yurt Production.” Ouch!)

To the Editor

## Retiree grateful to Upstate for life-saving treatment

To the Editor:

My pumpkin arrived at the Cortland Regional Hospital at midnight to transport me to Upstate Medical University (UMU) in Syracuse. It was a harrowing, though life-saving, trip through the damp and snowy night.

I was down and out for the count in Cortland, where I was not responding to medical treatment, when my health care proxies insisted that I be moved to a hospital with the appropriate specialists to care for me. Kudos to SUNY Upstate Medical University.

Wasn’t I the fortunate one, along with the thousands of Central New Yorkers, to have a major teaching hospital nearby! Upstate is a regional treasure that serves surrounding counties with specialties ranging from pediatric oncology, to a world-class burn unit, to a Level I Trauma Center.

Though I arrived after 1 a.m., I was met by a team of smiling ICU doctors, nurses and technicians who made me comfortable as they performed their tasks. They literally worked me over with a professional precision that seemed like a choreographed dance. I wish I had been more aware and able to keep track of everything they did to me. I do know that it was past 4 a.m. when they finally tucked me in for the night.

For the next few weeks, I was taken care of by a cast of hundreds of wonderful, caring, sensitive and responsive hospital personnel. I can’t say enough good things about everyone. From the cleaning staff who knocked on the door and entered with a “good morning” and a smile, to the person delivering meals, to

the health care techs, to the highly trained RNs hanging IVs and changing dressings with care, to the PAs, interns, residents and chief of service doctors who came daily. I don’t think, in all that time, that someone came to see me who wasn’t professional and nice.

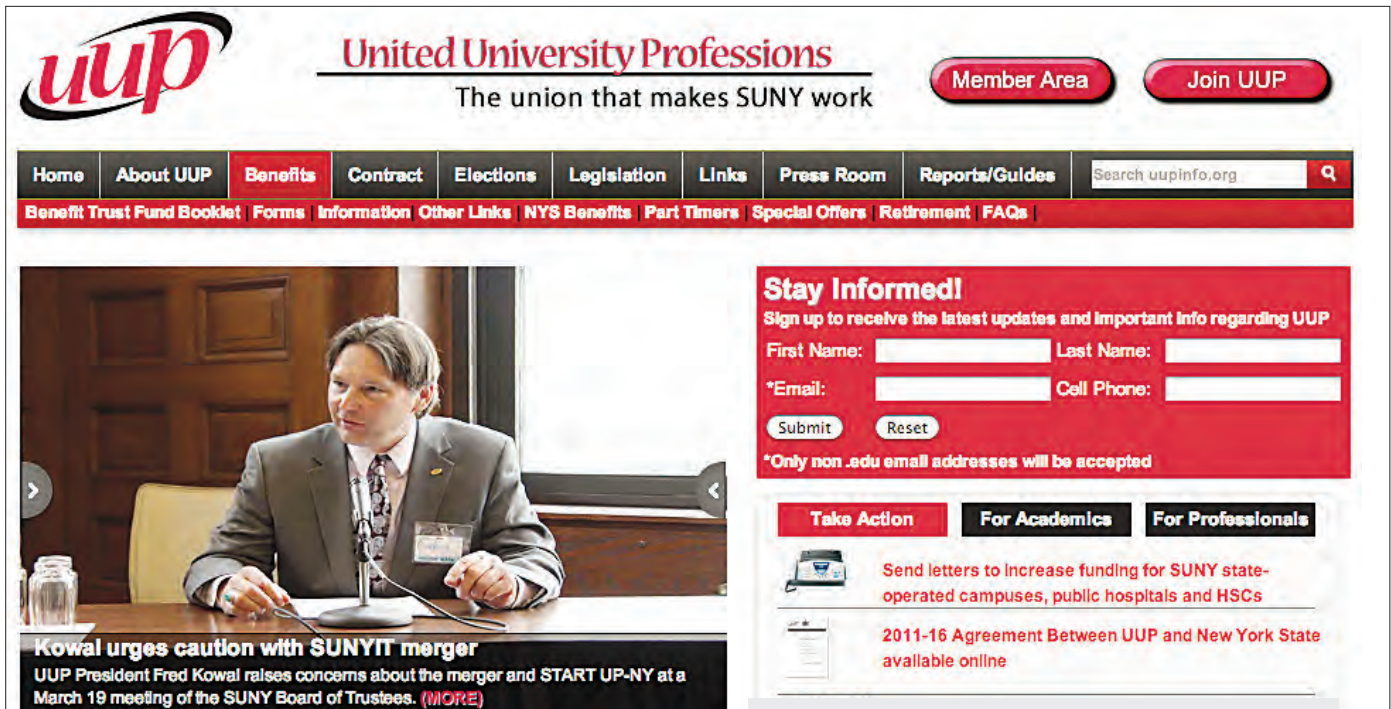
This is an unsolicited note of praise for our teaching hospitals. We New Yorkers should defend SUNY’s hospitals and health sciences centers in Brooklyn, Buffalo, Stony Brook and Syracuse with every fiber of our being. We are very fortunate to have these hospitals within hailing distance of almost every part of the state. I owe everything to Upstate with its cadre of professionals who have the expertise, equipment and ability to make me whole again.

I was additionally fortunate to have a health care proxy on file. It is critically important that you have one on file or tucked in your wallet with your insurance cards. Had my proxies—my son and another doctor—not stepped up to demand the transfer to Upstate, I am not sure you would be reading this instead of an obituary.

— Jo Schaffer  
Cortland


*(Editor’s note: Jo said this all started with bronchitis that developed into double pneumonia. By the time she reached UMU, she had a collapsed lung with a necrotizing streptococcus anginosus infection and empyema, which had her “close to death and laid me low for weeks.”)*

# www.uupinfo.org



The screenshot shows the homepage of the United University Professions (UUP) website. At the top left is the UUP logo. To its right is the text "United University Professions" and "The union that makes SUNY work". Further right are two buttons: "Member Area" and "Join UUP". Below this is a navigation menu with links for Home, About UUP, Benefits, Contract, Elections, Legislation, Links, Press Room, and Reports/Guides. A search bar is located on the right side of the menu. Below the menu is a secondary navigation bar with links for Benefit Trust Fund Booklet, Forms, Information, Other Links, NYS Benefits, Part Timers, Special Offers, Retirement, and FAQs. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column features a video player showing a man in a suit speaking at a microphone. Below the video is a news headline: "Kowal urges caution with SUNYIT merger" and a sub-headline: "UUP President Fred Kowal raises concerns about the merger and START UP-NY at a March 19 meeting of the SUNY Board of Trustees. (MORE)". The right column has a "Stay Informed!" section with a sign-up form for updates, including fields for First Name, Last Name, Email, and Cell Phone, and "Submit" and "Reset" buttons. Below the form is a note: "\*Only non .edu email addresses will be accepted". Underneath the form are three buttons: "Take Action", "For Academics", and "For Professionals". Below these buttons are two links: "Send letters to increase funding for SUNY state-operated campuses, public hospitals and HSCs" and "2011-16 Agreement Between UUP and New York State available online".

## Your online source for UUP news

  
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