



# East Detroit Federation of Teachers

Educators and more since 1942



A Union of Professionals

Local 698

## June 2012 Newsletter

### It's Déjà vu all over again



It seems like I was writing to you last year to expect a tough year of negotiating and preparing you for economic hardship in the coming year. In fact, I think I did. I guess it really is true that the more things change the more they seem to stay the same. As I wrote to you in early June, the district is going to the State of Michigan with a budget deficit plan that requires a massive reduction in district spending to make ends

meet. Nobody has come to the EDFT and asked for anything so far, but we can certainly read handwriting spray painted across the wall when administration tosses out the numbers they shared at the last budget meeting.

The ultimate question is, what do we do with that information? I have heard many stand up and tell me they aren't paying union dues if we take another cut. OK, does that solve the problem? If it does, count me in. If it doesn't, then its just frustration better focused on finding a real solution. I get that we feel helpless and angry. I don't intend to negotiate away anything that we can salvage. Hey, I'm looking for real answers. When we say, "NO" to a request for massive wage cuts, what do you suggest we do? Are there other solutions to cut costs and keep kids in the district? If so, let me have them.

Many of you have said you want to strike. Do you really want to attempt to do that? Reality check, I can't get most of you to come to a union meeting most of the time, I'm not sure we would have a very large group looking to risk losing their jobs and being arrested to make our point. If I thought it was the answer, we might consider it, but banding together in solidarity and breaking the law is a big jump from I can't arrange my schedule to march in the homecoming parade or go to a board meeting. Let's be rational and react with our heads, not our hearts.

I don't have an answer yet, but I'm looking for one. If you want to lash out, do so in November at the voting booth and tell them to stop cutting education budgets. If you want to lash out, do so in November and Protect Your Job by amending the Michigan Constitution. If you want to lash out, do it at me, but expect to be told to present a possible solution and some energy to try solving the problems we face, not to just expect a nod and have the union assaulted for its inability to change the numbers we face. Our tools are limited, but we are not impotent. We need your help, not your disdain. We need your support, because in the end, YOU ARE THE UNION!

### UNION SHORTS

#### EDFT Newsletter wins national recognition

The EDFT is very proud to have been recognized by the AFT for the monthly newsletter you are currently reading. We won seven awards for various categories in the nation wide publications recognition program.

Winning first place honors in the country for a union our size was the election report from November 2011. David Blake's story on his trip to Wisconsin was also recognized as the nation's best feature story during the year. My piece on "shooting stars and comets" won first place as an editorial and our organizing publication titled, "The winter of our discontent" won first place in that category. We also received second place recognition for our news story on the busing plan's shortcomings and the cartoon we published on the musical chairs of elementary staffing last spring. The American Values Campaign was again recognized as a leading program to connect the community to our membership receiving third place this year.





# Some great people have left this year

## By Summer Bear Stocks

I hear a lot of people say, "If I could get out

now, I'd be gone." Some people are at the point in life where that statement is a real option.

With the uncertainty of the future of retirement and the increasing demands on teachers everywhere, many teachers are hanging up their gradebooks. That is what teachers hang up isn't it? The EDFT will be hosting a retirement party for the retirement classes of 2011 & 2012 when everyone returns in the fall. The EDFT went to a biannual celebration two years ago in order to ensure a large group and cost efficiency while recognizing the honorees.

Marilyn Strong has been in East Detroit since 1968 teaching special education students. That is 44 years in the classroom. Wow! that's like 300 years in dog years. I am very impressed. Her kids will miss her a great deal.

Barb Mayer has taught little kids mostly in Kindergarten since 1975. She has been the treasurer for the EDFT for many years also. My dad says he will miss her a great deal because she is so important to his job. She has agreed to remain on in her role with the union, however and will be the retiree representative on the executive board. I saw her cleaning her classroom up on the last day and I wanted to stay and play, it looked like so much fun.

Richard Neale, another special ed. teacher is also retiring. He has been in the district since 1975 also. That must have been a good year for teachers. The special education department is going to have to work hard to find replacements for these great people.

In 1986, the same year my dad came to EDPS, Pam Polk started. She has been at several grade levels over the years and has been a wonderful instructor for all of those kids. She is one of several members of that year's teachers that have left, does that mean my dad is not far away???

Linda Houhanisin has also been with the district since 1986 and has been in the library. I love books. I think it is the coolest thing ever to help kids learn more

about reading and enjoy books. They are so much better than the Internet. Does that mean I'm old fashioned???

My uncle Jim Domin joined EDPS in '86 and he is retiring also. He went to the dark side by becoming an administrator a few years ago, but dad says he kept in touch with his roots and was a good guy through it all. I know they went through a lot of good and tough times together. He said he would miss Uncle Jimmy terribly. I've heard Uncle Jim taught my boy Joshua some interesting tricks when he was a baby, but only he could give a three year old an electronic drum set for Christmas and think it was a great idea.

Karen Beke arrived here in 1990 and has been at several levels between elementary and Middle School kids. I sure don't envy her job. Dealing with kids at that transitional stage is a very difficult job.

My dad said she did it wonderfully. Harriet "Sam" Muenk came to the district in 1995 and has taught music to the children of Eastpointe. That is such an important job. I am sure the kids will miss her a great deal. I love to sing at the moon! Jill Fleischmann became a Speech pathologist for the district in 1999. As I recall she started as a para-professional. I hope I remember that correctly, I was very young at the time. What an important job. My dad has a bit of a speech issue, and someone like Jill helped him when he was young learn to say his "S's" With a name like Stocks, and a lisp, that was a real mess. Maybe Jill can help him stop stammering when he gets upset.

Earlier this year para-pro Vicki Braun left in search of greener pastures near the waterfront. Special Education teacher Bobbi Agresta left at the end of the school year to find employment in another district. High School teacher Lannette Olenczyk also decided to leave the district as did long time Special Education teacher Marcia Herbst. She is still deciding on whether she will enter retirement or continue to work with kids in another school. All of these teachers will be missed as they leave East Detroit.

The para-pros will lose two of the very best from among their ranks. The "number one" para on the list has been Maureen Haas from the media room at the High School. She was taught by the best and worked very hard to keep the kids at the High School knee deep in copies and video. What will those teachers do now if

the machine breaks down and they don't have the material they need?

Finally Kay Burkhardt is retiring from the High School. She is one of the funniest people I know. She makes my dad and grandpa laugh all the time and really loves the kids she works with. Everyone in the lunch room is going to miss her a great deal also.

Elementary Principal Judy Helms is also calling it quits after this year. She and retiring High School Secretary Donna Labadie are two of the nicest people my dad knows. They made his life much more easy with their helpful nature and honest care for the people they worked with. Moving forward without them will be difficult.

It is always sad, I guess to try and reduce what someone means to us all when reflecting on an article like this. One could write for hours on each contribution and every life these wonderful educators touched. The true mark of their marvelous careers rest in the memories of the children they have instructed, encouraged and educated for all these years. It lay in the smiles co-workers have as they remember conversations; afterglows and time spent together complaining about administrators and union dues. It resides in the collective accomplishment of every person they have touched over the many years of service they have rendered to this community.

The EDFT takes this time to recognize all of these great educators for the wonderful job they have completed. Thank you for your service and your dedication. You will be hard to replace and impossible to forget.

## MPSERS bill stalls in Michigan Senate

A revision of the MPSERS benefits affecting retirement and health care for Michigan teachers stalled without a vote as the Senate adjourned for a summer break on June 15<sup>th</sup>. The House passed its version in time for the Senate to act, but had made several changes that the Senate could not address before it left. Governor Snyder had hoped to get the bill passed as part of the budget proposal, but it will have to wait for now as the Senate will not reconvene until July 19, 2012.

Perhaps the largest change in the bill from previous versions centers on a reduction of retiree Health Care contributions at a 10% level instead of 20%. The timeline for people to make decisions on retirement will obviously be extended to reflect this delay.