

PARA-phernalia

Your **P**ort **A**uthority **R**etirees **A**ssociation | Newsletter • Edition Number 40 • Fall 2009

A Message From Your President

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The media is overflowing with stories about the exploding cost of health care and the 45 million uninsured and millions more who have inadequate coverage. When we read these stories, many of us recognize how fortunate we are to have the health coverage that we have earned despite some limitation. I was not surprised to receive Lou LaCapra's letter of June 12th asking "every person who participates in these programs to do their part in helping to oversee the cost of our benefits." The lack of surprise was due to a number of factors including the PA having recently acknowledged that it is not recession proof and its decrease in revenues reflects that reality. There are tremendous demands being made on PA revenues by NY and NJ and the PA is committed to a major capital program.

Lou's letter calls on each of us individually to do what we can to "partner with" the agency in specific ways aimed at assuring value for benefits earned and received. Among the areas we can help with are importantly: identifying administrative errors, using generic substitutes "instead of a brand-name prescription drug if your provider believes it is therapeutically equivalent," and use of the mail order program which frankly has worked out well for many of our members. Moreover, and I particularly applaud this suggestion in the letter, "Stay healthy....quit smoking, eat right, exercise regularly and maintain a healthy weight." We all know this, but each of us has to do it to enhance our chances of enjoying our retirement years—and to do whatever we can to ensure our benefit programs' continued value and preservation.

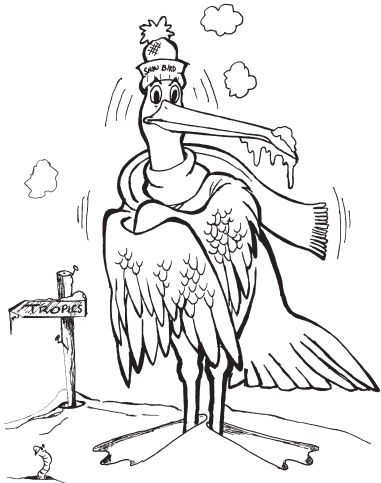
As active employees would pull together to help the PA efficiently and effectively carry out its mission, now in retirement, as the PA meets its recognized obligation to retirees even in difficult times, we must do all we can to help control the costs of these benefits without compromising health care. Lou's letter has five bullet points with specific suggestions that each of us can follow. I urge each of us to do what we can to implement Lou's suggestions. If you see other ways that we can, as Lou described it, "partner" with the PA to contain costs, let us hear from you. The "preservation" of these earned benefits must be of the highest priority for all of us. This without a doubt is in our interest as much as it is in the PA's interest.

Elsewhere in this newsletter is an article on what I consider the launch of an exciting new tool: "eBlast." It will give your Board the ability to bring important matters to your attention with a few strokes on a computer keyboard. The benefit of this immediate communication to mobilize our membership to action has been brought home by recent events that could impact all of us. At the federal level, there has been talk of taxing health benefits received from employers. President Obama, as I am writing this in September, is pressing Congress to fast track health care reform. Suppose, as part of a last minute compromise to pay for health care reform, the proposed compromise is to tax those employer-provided health care benefits. PARA certainly could not effectively get out the word in this printed newsletter that comes out twice a year. We could spread the word with an

"The most important thing about goals is having one."

-Geoffry F. Abert

"Don't forget Where You Put Your PARA-phernalia."



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From Your President - continued from page 1

expensive postal mailing, but even that likely would be too late to provide PARA members time to act. Hence, the potential value of eBlast and why we need your e-mail address. (If you are not sure you have given PARA your e-mail address, please send it ASAP to Dick Lee, our Treasurer, at RJLZEBRA@aol.com).

At the state level, given the recent performance, or should I say nonperformance, of the New York State Senate, it does not seem as unlikely as it once did that there could be a constitutional convention. Former Mayor Giuliani in an Op-Ed piece in the New York Times on June 24th called for a New York State constitutional convention in the hope that it would do something to improve the functioning of the state government. How could that affect the New York State pension system? At a constitutional convention all matters are on the table, and there are certainly those that would want to see the current pension guarantee dropped from the State Constitution. The New York Times reported on July 8th that the Comptroller's Office circulated a paper that indicated government employer contributions by 2015 might increase from last year's \$ 2.6 billion to more than \$8 billion, nearly one-third of the civilian payroll. You can safely bet that whether via a constitutional convention, or otherwise, there will be considerable pressure to offer relief to government employers and their taxpayers. There is certainly going to be a need to stay on top of these matters and act quickly in an effort to protect the interest of retirees. eBlast will be an important tool in meeting this challenge. From what I have been told, a constitutional convention is still unlikely, but we continue to read more recently of increasing pressures to hold such a convention sooner rather than later. Further, I would think there is a real question as to whether the "vested rights" of past retirees would be affected even if a new Constitution were adopted without the present guarantee.

The New York State Attorney General, Andrew Cuomo, has recommended a package of reforms to better protect against the serious shenanigans that had been going on under prior Comptroller Hevesi's reign. Your Board will be looking at the package, but one item that stands out as requiring especially careful consideration is the proposal to replace the Comptroller as Sole Trustee of the state pension fund with a 13 member "board." This "board" proposal drew a strong negative response from Stan Winters, the respected President of the Retired Public Employees Association, Inc. (RPEA). I would urge you to go to the RPEA website, www.rpea.org, to understand Stan's concerns. A spokesman for Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silvers commented there might be other options and "There are advantages and disadvantages to both..."

In the Fall 2007 PARA Newsletter, we set out some of the considerations to think about in evaluating a change to a "board" versus Sole Trustee. Comptroller DiNapoli issued a Press Release which, while finding the proposed legislation "another good step," raised a number of questions including "most significantly, the constitutionality of this kind of change." One could read "opposition" between the lines. (The Comptroller's Press release can be found on PARA's website under the link to the Comptroller's office). It sounds as if we may be in for a battle in Albany which isn't surprising given that control of billions of dollars is at stake, dollars dedicated to fulfilling promises made to us retirees, I might add. The issue for us is, "what is likely to be in the best interest of retirees?" Your Board would appreciate your input.

I fully recognize the limited impact PARA alone is likely to have on these matters, but we must continue to give these issues our best shot, and join with others in protecting hard-won retiree benefits and helping to ensure that promises made are kept.

Richard K. Helman, President

Links pages on PARA's Website a valuable resource for retirees

A first class Website is not limited to providing useful information directly to visitors. It also includes links to the Websites of other relevant organizations where visitors can delve deeply into subject matters of interest. Of course we have an excellent links page on PARA's Website (www.paranynj.org), and many PA retirees have found it to be a particularly valuable resource.

Webmaster Joe SanSevero has skillfully compiled a selection of links on this page to quite a few organizations of special interest to PA retirees whose sites can be accessed instantly and easily from the PARA Website:

Express Scripts, United Healthcare, MetLife, PA Federal Credit Union, LabCorp, Social Security, New York State and Local Retirement System, New York State Deferred Compensation Plan, Medicare, Retired Public Employees Association, New York State Comptroller's Office (retirement news), Port Authority, U.S. Government (official Website) and World Trade Center (construction progress).

If you would like to suggest one or more other organizations that should be added to this list, please contact Webmaster Joe at joe@sansevero.us.

You may recall from our last newsletter that we are compiling a list of "Benefits FAQs" to publish on our Website and in a future newsletter with the active support of the PA Benefits staff. We supply the questions and the P.A. will supply the answers. We have a good many questions so far, but we're trying to make our list as helpful as possible. So if you would like to submit a question, call me at 201-791-3782 or e-mail me at tkwtca@aol.com, and I will be glad to add any new ones to our list.

And if you haven't joined the PA Retirees E-mail Directory yet, now would be a good time to do so. It's a great way to keep in touch with old colleagues – and to let them know how they can reach you. It's in the passworded "Members" section, so you don't have to worry about the whole world knowing your e-mail address. You'll find it's easy to join. Just go to the PARA Website at www.paranynj.org, and click on "Members" and "Retiree E-mail Directory."

Tom Kearney

What on Earth are eBlasts?

In President Dick Helman's President's Message he mentions that PARA will be sending eBlasts (e-mails with graphics and text) to our members within the next couple of months. These types of communications are used by a wide variety of nonprofit organizations, including the Retired Public Employees Association (RPEA), as an efficient and effective way to keep its members informed about relevant news. To be sure, these eBlasts will only serve as supplements to PARA members' main sources of information – our Web site, and our newsletters. Some of the topics you can expect to see in upcoming eBlasts would include health care benefits and other issues of concern to retirees (and PA and PATH employees who are planning future retirement), important articles that have been posted on PARA's Website, dues and election information, and special events, such as the successful program with the Tribute WTC Visitor Center. Stay tuned to www.paranynj.org for more details.

RaeAnn Hoffman

Membership Dues 2009-2010

If you haven't sent in your \$5.00 dues for the current membership year we would appreciate your doing so. Your dues provide the funds required to cover the cost of our Newsletter, maintaining our website, contact with Albany and other retiree organizations, any required special mailings and of course our newest endeavor, eBlast. Simply fill in the required information on the enclosed self mailer, insert your dues, seal it, add postage and send it on its way.

LIVING IN IRELAND (WITH THE IRISH)

A fellow-retiree of the bi-state agency heard that I was moving from England to Ireland. He telephoned from home in NY-NJ (one or the other) to ask what was wrong, and could he help. I explained that my new-Irish wife and I had discussed the options of staying on in my Surrey home; going to live somewhere in the States; or, settling in her Dublin home. We assigned ourselves one vote each - which gave Kay the majority, and we were therefore going to Ireland. My P.A. colleague, friend and retiree was concerned, and reminded me of a dismal transition I had experienced early in my career when I had accepted a promotion which took me from five beautiful years in Paris to Brussels. With a touch of shaddenfreud, he quoted me after my first month in the capital of Belgium, "living in Brussels after leaving one's heart, stomach and soul in Paris was like having tea with the sister of the woman you love." I managed a feeble reply, but doubts had already arisen, and my concerned friend made what I calculated to be his coup de grace; Living in Dublin would, he announced, "after your twenty exciting and productive years with the P.A.'s London Trade Development office, produce a similar, depressing anti-climax."

My well-meaning friend was wrong; Dublin was not a smaller version of dynamic frenetic New York, or of beautiful-glossy Paris, or of stately imperial London. Dublin does have its own soul. It is the relatively small capital of a small country, but it is also undeniably a world class city in terms of culture, education, public transport, scientific research, and international activity. This is also a most user-friendly city and nation. Irish congeniality and warm welcoming are not myths- they are national characteristics and they are in evidence whenever and wherever one is in contact with the Irish. Of particular interest to me was the striking affinity between the Irish and Americans. In these times, we Americans have, for a variety of reasons, become more accustomed to criticism and outright hostility from many previously friendly or neutral countries. Ireland remains a delightful exception to the "U.S. Go Home" mania of recent years - and this is not a "fair-weather friends" syndrome. There exists a fundamental rapport between these two nations that is grassroots, instinctive, emotional stuff. It transcends the formal and sometimes forced "special relationships" proclaimed by some governments. The people of this island do not need to salute a "special relationship" with America - they have been, and are, unwavering special relatives. I frequently attend social functions where I am known only to my host or informal gatherings where I do not know anyone - and invariably am greeted and absorbed into one or another group. When my dulcet tones identify my nationality, there is a surge of interest and questions about: a) where in America is my home; b) the latest American foreign policy blunder; c) you probably met my cousin Liam O'Reilly - he lives in New York too; and d) you'll be having another pint now. To the Irish urban as well as provincial we Americans are all cousins, and highly regarded from the outset - we are presumed innocent unless proven guilty.

Well-run Irish pubs (preferably with a touch of history) are considered respectable places in which to initiate and develop

friendships - and tend to be less expensive - for drinks and bar food, than restaurants. After a short while in Dublin, you will acquire a few favorite pubs where you, the barman, and several permanent clients (the "regulars") will be on first-name terms. Your top, most cherished pub will be referred to as your "local", where you will be "somebody".

Living in Dublin, Ireland, has put me in contact with four happy facets of life.

They are:

1. A good urban and national rapid transit and standard rail network, supplemented by an extensive bus system.
2. One of the developed world's most far reaching and progressive social benefit programs, particularly for the older and the handicapped.
3. Affectionate, inquisitive, helpful neighbors are a precious part of everyday life - unless you crave privacy (too bad). We had just come from England and moved an initial clump of cartons into Kay's house and optimistically set aside an hour for coffee and deep breathing when the phone calls and doorbell ringing began - everyone of our neighbors had decided to obey the word of the Lord to welcome us and help us with any help that we might need. Nine years later, and it still goes on. There is no point pleading headaches or agoraphobia or a sudden onslaught of the elm blight, the Neighbors Are Here to Help.
4. Kay is a true Dubliner and a wonderful, no-nonsense wife who is as knowledgeable as she is beautiful, and who readily picks up a shelalagh to deter anyone who seems to be thinking of being ill-mannered to me - she surpasses all of the benefits of living in Ireland put together.

My retirement in Ireland is pleasantly active. In addition to the natural and contagious warmth of its people for good companionship, there are extensive adult education courses from introductory through university level. The country and its institutions are small in terms of personnel - this makes it easier for individuals to find opportunities for creative expression. Through casual, non-bureaucratic contacts, I was asked to read one of my short stories on the national radio network and later appeared in a national T.V. documentary on the land war in Europe (WW2).

I now devote serious time to addressing school and college student groups on an American perspective of the war years and the historical importance of the Holocaust. In my "spare time" I do oil paintings on commission for discerning Irish art collectors and annoy my wife.

No - living in Dublin after London is not like having tea with the sister of the woman you love. It is more like having champagne with the lovely sister of the woman you once loved.

Sam Notkin

E-mail: samnotkin@eircom.net

Board Highlights - (As of October 9, 2009)

On June 29th a quarterly meeting of the Board of Directors and the Association's Annual Meeting were held at the Port Authority Bus Terminal.

The Annual Meeting was highlighted by a speakerphone discussion with Kevin Murray, New York State Deputy Comptroller for the Division of Retirement Services. He spoke at length, detailing the current financial state of the New York State pension fund, the problem of future pension funding by local governments in light of falling tax revenues and various recent initiatives in Albany concerning the pension fund, including increased oversight of fund activities.

The results of the recent election of Board members were reviewed, with Elizabeth DeLaura welcomed as a new member and the following existing members continued for additional terms: Pat Beckhard, Jerry Doherty, Rita Du Brow, Al Graser, Dick Lee and Jack Savage. All terms are for three years.

At the June 29th Quarterly Meeting, the Association inspired retirees' program at the WTC Tribute Center was discussed and the positive reactions of the participants and the Tribute Center Staff were noted. It was also reported that PARA discussions had been held with PA staff regarding consideration of reimbursement of Part B Medicare premiums.

The recent discussions reported in the news that included taxing employer provided health benefits in connection with health care reform were reported on to the Board. The Board noted these issues and the possible need for action as they progress. To better enable the Board to communicate with the membership on these and other issues which may require action, the Board is exploring an e-mail or "eBlast" communication program with its members and will be asking members that have not already done so to provide e-mail addresses. Also reported on were discussions with RPEA (Retired Public Employees Association) concerning an increased or supplemental COLA for long time retirees who have been hurt by inflation. Unfortunately, current prospects are not favorable, but we plan to revisit this issue at the first realistic opportunity. Arnold Karvasarsky, Barry Weintrob and Jordan Newman volunteered for and were appointed by Board Resolution as advisors to the Board on matters where their expertise and background would be helpful.

On September 24, 2009, the third Quarterly Meeting of the Board was held at the Bus Terminal. The highlight of the meeting was the very informative and candid presentation by Mary Lee Hannell, Director of Human Resources, and Randy Cherkis, Manager of Employee Benefits, on the present state of Authority finances due to falling revenues and the steps being taken from the human resources perspective to eliminate positions and contain costs. An initiative that was stressed by HR staff, and supported by Board Members, was the containment of benefit costs to only those retirees and dependents who are entitled to coverage and by the elimination of possible errors and wasteful practices by service providers. As noted elsewhere in this Newsletter, our members have an important role to play in this by carefully reviewing statements issued to them by service providers to ensure they are accurate.

Ms. Hannell indicated to the Board that she had not been asked to study the reduction of any existing retiree benefits, but that any efforts to increase health and other benefits for retirees would not be looked upon favorably because of the present Authority wide mandate to reduce costs. Board Members made the point that upon retiring, retirees understood their health insurance costs would be fixed throughout retirement. Therefore, the increasing Medicare Part B insurance premiums that retirees must pay upon joining Medicare are viewed by retirees as inconsistent with their understanding. The Board explained that retirees believe their being reimbursed for such insurance premiums by the Authority would only "maintain" the benefit expected—so it is not viewed as an "increase." Unfortunately, given the current financial situation, realistically, the Authority's reluctance to deal with this issue is understandable but your PARA Board expects to revisit this issue in the future.

The Board also heard a favorable report on the progress of the Association's proposed eBlast program about which there is additional information elsewhere in the Newsletter. A resolution recognizing the important contributions Mario Salzano has made to the Association and wishing him well on his retirement from the Board was adopted. Dominick Varricchio was made Sergeant-At-Arms and will serve as our liaison with Authority Police organizations on retiree issues. The next and last quarterly Board meeting for 2009 has been scheduled for Thursday, December 3rd at the Bus Terminal.

Ralph Verrill

COMMISSIONING OF THE U.S.S. NEW YORK

The state of the art stealth ship – The U.S.S. New York – whose bow stem includes seven-and-a-half tons of steel recovered from the fallen World Trade Center, is scheduled to be commissioned into the US Navy's fleet on Saturday, November 7 at 11:00 a.m. President Obama is expected to attend the ceremony.

The ship is 684 feet long and can carry up to 800 combat-equipped Marines. She has a deck from which fighting vehicles can be launched, and a flight deck that can handle helicopters and the MV-23 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft. Her motto: "Strength Forged through Sacrifice: Never forget".

On November 2nd, the ship entered NY Harbor, stopping to render a salute while passing the WTC site, and continue for a land-based welcome at pier 86. The ship will be open for public viewing on November 4, 5, 9, 10 and 11. The crew of the U.S.S. New York will march in the Veterans Day Parade. The ship departs NY Harbor on Thursday, November 12th. For additional information, go to www.ussny.org.

Liz DeLaura

Port Authority Retiree Association

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Your latest issue of PARA-phernalia . . .

Departing Board Members

Mario Salzano, who had served as a PARA Board Director for almost twenty years. Mario joined the Board in the early 90's following his 38-year career with the Port Authority. His Port Authority service included more than 25 years with the World Trade Center, where he had served as Manager of the WTC's Public Services Division. He was awarded the PA's Distinguished Service Medal in 1989.

During his tenure on the PARA Board Mario served on the Board's Executive, Financial and Election Committees and as the Board's Recording Secretary. When asked why he had decided to leave the Board, he reminded us of his age and stated that it was time for younger people to advance PARA's agenda. Mario will be missed and we thank him for his long dedicated years of service.

Rosemarie Smith-Vincent, who was recruited by Mario Salzano in 1999 following her 37-year career with the Port Authority will be leaving us as well. Many of you may recall that Rosemarie served as the Vice President and President of the Port Service Club. Rosemarie's Port Authority career included service in the Personnel Department, Maintenance Training at La Guardia Airport, the Executive Director's Office, Secretary's Office and the Port Department where she held several positions. At her retirement from Port she held the position of Manager, Real Estate Sales

Rosemarie has been involved with a Staten Island, New York community group for the last six years and has served as their President for the last two years. With her family responsibilities as well her community commitments she feels that others can now better serve and meet the needs of PARA. Her loyalty will always remain with the Port Authority and PARA.