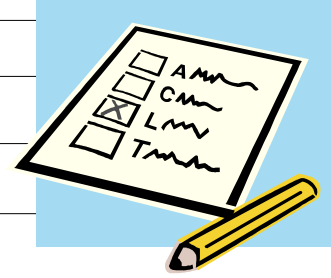


# FOCUS

ELECTION ISSUE ★ MAY 2006



## Meet the Candidates

Every two years JTA members vote for the following Executive Board positions: President, High School Vice President, Middle School Vice President, Elementary Vice President, and Secretary/Treasurer. We have two candidates running for Union President - Maryann Risi, the incumbent, and Ron Verderber. We also have two candidates running for Middle School VP - Ted Lucher, the incumbent, and Peter Horvath. Each member of the Executive Board has submitted a statement (even if they are running unopposed).

The following statements are printed as submitted and have not been edited for grammar or factual content.

### Union President Candidate Maryann Risi

May, 2006

Dear Members of the Jericho Teachers Association,

After much thoughtful deliberation, I have decided to run for a full term as president of the Jericho Teachers Association. As you can see from the reverse of this sheet, I have had a great deal of experience in working within this union. Before I was even granted my tenure, Emil Voigt, the president before Joan Rosenberg, came to me and asked if I would join the Negotiations Committee. He said he had watched me at the Curriculum Committee meetings, and, if I could be comfortable debating with administrators so early in my Jericho career, he wanted me actively involved in the union. I haven't turned back since.

As a negotiator, I have made presentations to building meetings, and worked with the lead negotiators to plan our strategies. During the last negotiations in 2000, I sat with the Association president at the table with the District lawyer and the Superintendent to bargain for our members.

As a building rep, vice-president and, now, as president, I have prepared agendas, met with administrators, taken union courses and attended a myriad of District and Association meetings.

At each level within the union, I have worked diligently for the Association. I believe that I have made a positive difference in the lives of our members. My work with our Executive Board, out front or behind the scenes, has afforded this unit a Memorandum of Agreement allowing us to tax defer retirement money and take only one course a year after 90 credits. When I sat at the negotiations table as the Elementary representative, I was instrumental in getting the FLEX period as a prep period for all elementary grade levels (it was originally only for 4th and 5th grades). Lunch duty every other week and a half day at the end of the school year for Elementary faculty are two more benefits I have negotiated for our teachers.

This year, I accepted the position of interim president knowing full well all of the hours that this would necessitate. I remained a fourth grade teacher, with all of its test pressures. Science is the only curriculum area that I do not teach. This means, in essence, that I am working two full-time jobs. Despite this, I still feel that I have accomplished my fair share.

I would like the opportunity to continue to do more for each of you. Your vote will mean that our Association will continue with experienced hands to lead us through what may very well be long and contentious negotiations.

Fraternally,

Maryann Risi

#### Experience in District

- 15 years teaching Elementary School (15 years experience outside of Jericho)
- Building Rep for George A. Jackson School

(Continued on page 2)

## **Maryann Risi's Statement *continued***

- First Elementary Vice President
- First President from the Elementary level

### **NYSUT Training**

- Building Rep I
- Building Rep II
- Negotiations
- Grievance
- Leadership
- Ethics
- Roberts Rules of Order

### **JTA Committees**

- Duties of the Building Representative – Chairperson
- Negotiations – worked both as a committee person and negotiated at the table

### **District Committees**

- Curriculum Committee
- George A. Jackson Site-Based Team
- Elementary Report Card Committee
- Committee on Gifted Education
- Various Interview Committees

### **Experiences on Executive Board**

- Met one-on-one with building Principals, Curriculum Associates, Assistant Superintendents and Superintendent
- Met with Central Office
- Attended monthly meetings of ED 19 (Meeting with the union officers of our neighboring districts)
- Attended annual NYSUT Representative Assemblies
- Attended AFT National Conventions
- Attended AFT QUEST Convention in Washington D.C.
- Attended meetings of the Long Island Presidents' Council
- Planned agendas for monthly Delegate Assembly meetings
- Attended PTA meetings, PTA Presidents' Council meetings; SEPTA Executive board meetings
- Attended monthly Board of Education meetings
- Attended Vote-Cope meetings, set up phone banks
- Planned new End-of-Year Party to honor newly tenured as well as retirees

## Union President Candidate: Ron Verderber's Statement

Dear Fellow JTA Members,

My name is Ron Verderber and I am running for the position of JTA president. Thank you for taking the time to read this statement and base your vote on the issues. I have been the chorus teacher at the Middle School and High School since 1994. I have been a member of the Delegate Assembly as a Middle School building representative for 8 years. As a candidate for the office of JTA president I would like to present you with a few reasons why I believe I am the best candidate for the position.

Why did you become a teacher? Teaching is a vocation, an art. It is something that is within you, not just something you do to earn a living. We used to teach in an environment where we had autonomy in our classrooms and a partnership with our administrators. Now we are directed to do things and have mandates in our classrooms. Teachers are directed to complete more and more paperwork, sapping the energy and time they could use designing creative lessons or being available to kids. Administrators direct us to attend more and more meetings, again taking time away from us that could be better spent serving the needs of all of our students and not just the few high-profile students. We used to have an environment where educating was the priority. Now the priority seems to be keeping us as busy as possible. Why did it change? There are many reasons, but the most disturbing is that we allowed it to change. Now we need to change it back.

At our first district-wide meeting this year, we were told by our union leadership that we are nothing but dollar signs to the community. If we are viewed as \$\$, how do we change that? How has our leadership encouraged us to change that view? How do we make the community so aware of our dedication to them and especially to our students? Our leadership should be encouraging us to become more visible. We must attend Board of Ed meetings, PTA meetings, sporting events, arts events, anything that demonstrates how important the success of their children is to us. That means not just showing up to fulfill a contractual obligation or to earn extra money supervising. If those are the only reasons why we come out, then we are only \$\$\$. We know how important the students are to us. We are the ones giving more than what is "required" such as additional extra-help hours, extra sports practices, additional performance rehearsals, constantly striving to improve test scores, and writing recommendations. These are the things we do that the community does not see. Everyone wants to feel important. If we make the community feel important by showing what we do for them, they will see us as more than just \$\$.

Our union leadership should be encouraging us to do these things, inspiring us to be our own advocates, empowering us. These are going to be the tactics we need to utilize in our future contract negotiations. These negotiations will not be about who is the most experienced negotiator. We have not had to truly negotiate in seven years, and those negotiations were primarily handled by a person who has since retired. I feel there are many members of our union who would be exceptional assets as part of our negotiating team. I would involve these members to ensure that we negotiate the best contract we can get. Recent negotiations have been handled solely by our executive board without input from our elected building reps or our membership. The domestic partner agreement gave up significant chaperone money for what I feel was an incomplete package. The dental portion of our insurance was not included in the agreement. This was not discovered until members tried to take advantage of our newly-negotiated benefit. So, even though our district should have established a domestic partner policy simply because it would be the right thing to do, we negotiated in good faith with the district and signed an agreement that was not complete. The district was unwilling to budge when this was brought to their attention, again choosing not to do what would be ethical.

When the district broke the law and discontinued the driver education program by hiring an outside agency, we entered into negotiations to replace the lost position. Again, these negotiations were handled entirely by the executive board without input from the elected building reps or the membership in general. I believe there were many items we could have had on the table to negotiate. No one really knows what was on the table because it was never discussed. I can only respond to what our union finally settled on. We received an easier way of maintaining the MA 90 stipend and the tax benefits of placing lump sum money from accrued sick days into a 457 tax shelter account. For these conveniences we allowed the district to save money by hiring an outside agency for the driver education program, allowed the district to save money by limiting the amount of classes offered to our members for salary credit and limiting stipends to our members who teach these classes, allowed the district to save money by limiting the classes offered for teachers to move across the salary schedule, and allowed the district to save money they would have to pay in taxes for teachers receiving a lump-sum payment for their accrued sick days when retiring by establishing a 457 tax shelter account. So, who do you think came out with the better deal in these negotiations? How nice of us to settle for these conveniences when the district broke the law. We were told that this "package is fair and gives something to a large majority of our members." We have 83 members who are at MA 90 and 2

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Ron Verderber's Statement *continued*

members retiring. Therefore, the immediate benefit is available to less than one-third of our membership. The rest of us will benefit from this agreement when we retire and/or reach MA 90, which will be more difficult now that the district does not have to offer as many classes in order for members to maintain their MA 90 status. We did not break the law; we should not have settled for an agreement that gives us mere convenience. We are worth more than that. We need leadership that is going to look at every negotiated item and how it will affect everyone in our membership, including those who will be retiring and future members. Based on these previously negotiated changes to our contract, I feel we need to be more vigilant in examining our written agreements and the consequences they establish for our members. If our current executive board had included input from others in the negotiating process, I feel we could have achieved a better settlement in both the Domestic Partner agreement and the Driver Education agreement. They chose to negotiate exclusively, without input from anyone outside of the executive board, and we received benefits that are less than what we should have settled for. I will negotiate strongly, understanding the fiscal environment, but settle for nothing less than what we are worth for all that we contribute to this community.

Why do I want to be your union president? I remember walking the picket line in my first year at Jericho. I was 26 years old. I didn't know what it meant to belong to a union except that they took my money every paycheck. I quickly learned what it meant. It meant going to the elementary schools after the Middle School day was over and walking the picket line. Some of you will remember Tony La Rocca. He simply said, "come with me," and I went in his car to the Jackson School. Memories of college hazing came into my mind, but when we got to the elementary school, someone handed me a sign and we walked as the buses pulled out and the kids were picked up by their parents. We walked for the elementary teachers, who came out and joined us as soon as they were able. I remember walking up the Rt. 106 entrance of the Middle School and walking the picket line before school started and ALL of us walking back into the building together at 7:15. I knew what it meant to be untenured, how I could be "let go" for any reason. I really didn't consider not walking with my fellow teachers. We were together. There was strength in our numbers. I learned what it meant to be part of something bigger than myself alone. I learned what it meant to be part of the Jericho Teachers Association.

Would you be ready to walk the line today if need be? Where has our solidarity gone? I believe we have become complacent. I want to work at restoring that feeling of pride that used to be a part of this union. Today, our union is fractured. We are separate buildings. Each group is doing his/her own thing, sometimes at the expense of other members in the district. We all have been dealing with many issues. These issues are brought up again and again at our monthly delegate assembly meetings, but they never seem to be truly addressed by our executive board, at least not in a way that moves toward resolving the issues. The high school has been dealing with issues of timeliness of observations, the relationship with their principal, and how concerns about their safety are being addressed. The elementary schools are dealing with their obligation to curriculum fairs and how at-risk students are being tutored after school by non-certified teachers. The middle school is dealing with a school day that has been lengthened, inequitable distribution of building duties, and a guidance staff that has had case loads increased without any reduction in responsibilities. These are just a few of the issues that go around and never seem to be resolved. If our union leadership does not respond to these issues as they are brought up by our elected building representatives, then what is the point of bringing them up at all? I'm tired of feeling like our issues are going nowhere. I want to be part of the solution. If elected, I will make sure that issues brought up by the building representatives are followed up by the executive board. I will hold myself responsible to pursue these matters and seek resolutions.

Our leadership must protect our rights and ensure that we are treated respectfully and fairly. They must also be willing to listen to the membership and encourage us to take ownership of our union. The issues we face present challenging problems to solve and should be looked at as opportunities to educate and empower our membership.

I am tired of the way we are being led. I think it is time for a change. This year has brought nothing more than the same as years before. There were opportunities to make changes, but they were not taken. I believe we deserve better than the status quo. I will be visible. I will be in every building at least once a month, not just to attend meetings, but to hear what you have to say. I will listen to all of the issues. I will listen to all of the suggestions. I look forward to hearing differing viewpoints and opinions. I will seek your help in solving our problems, and I will hold you accountable for the viability of our union. I will encourage all of us to be a part of building a better union. We need a union that does not just react to crises as they arise, but is proactive in preventing an issue from becoming a crisis. I will be inspired by you to develop relationships with administrators and the board of education that are healthy, professional, and built on respect. I want us to regain the pride that is the JTA. These are the reasons I want to be your union president.

Sincerely yours,

Ron Verderber

Candidate for JTA president

## **Middle School Vice President Candidate Ted Lucher**

Dear Colleagues

During my tenure as executive vice president the philosophy of the executive board has been to procure the most benefits to our membership at minimum cost while protecting our contractual rights. In this light I have been involved in gaining many benefits which are the envy of our surrounding districts.

In a time when other districts are giving up medical benefits we were able to extend our contract in order to preserve the amount we contribute toward our medical coverage. More recently, we were able to procure the Domestic Partner's provision which has and will enhance the quality of life for many members now and in the future. We are 1 of only 8 districts on Long Island to have this medical benefit. The 457 tax deferred provision will allow our retirees to shelter a greater addition of monies to enhance their well deserved retirement funds. The executive board, along with the curriculum committee, has successfully revamped the R&D process to make available more monies to a greater variety of our staff. We have reduced the number of in-service class hours needed to maintain the M.A. 90 level from 70 hours over 3 years to 15 hours each year. We continue to be one of the only districts in the N.Y. to offer many in-service courses at no cost to our membership. For our newest members we instituted a summer union session as part of their intro to the J.T.A. Hopefully, our revamped end of year celebration, not only celebrating the accomplishments of our retirees, but of our newly tenured professionals, will attract a larger turnout.

As far as our upcoming negotiations go, I know that I am one of the best trained people in our district to help us attain our goals. I have had formal training by attending several NYSUT Negotiations Workshops and Cornell Labor Relations meetings. Informally, I have worked alongside other union presidents to prepare and help their negotiations. Being on our past three negotiating teams alongside Emil Voigt, Joan Rosenberg and Maryann Risi, I have the practical knowledge of how things work here in Jericho.

It is the executive board's shared belief that the building reps must be viewed as the most active and visible proponents of the J.T.A. at the building level. Our fellow teachers must feel comfortable going to them in a time of need or for practical advice. My style of leadership is one that fosters and promotes this. Be assured that I have always and will always passionately support their efforts and our needs in meetings with building administration, central office, PT A council, and the Board of Education

Another requirement of the executive board is to be on call 24 hours, 7 days a week. This typically may extend the work day 2 to 3 hours. At other times, when we need to meet as individuals or as a group at times of crisis this time commitment rises exponentially. I have and always will be available in meeting the demands that the position entails.

However, my proudest moments in serving are those which I can never speak of. It has been in representing individuals at their greatest times of need when they have faced a time of family or professional crisis that I have used all of my skills to help our friends. By working closely and quietly behind the scenes I have ensured that the individual rights of these people have been preserved without jeopardizing their dignity.

Please feel free to contact me about any of the issues you may have. I look forward to many more years of serving the entire membership as vice president and hope you all will support me in these efforts.

Sincerely,

Ted Lucher

## Middle School Vice President Candidate Peter Horvath

My name is Peter Horvath and I am offering myself as a candidate for the office of Vice President of the Jericho Teachers Association. I have served in many different capacities during my years as a teacher in the district. My many years of service as a building representative, Chairman of the Benefits Trust Fund, Chairman of the Vote/Cope fundraising drive in Jericho and the district delegate to the New York State Teachers Retirement System gives me a unique base of experience to offer the Association.

I believe that my past record will enable me to offer the membership a combination of experience and skill in dealing with the many challenges that face us in the future. Not the least of these being the contract negotiations which will begin during the next school year. In these difficult economic times, we need to present ourselves in the strongest possible terms. I am the person to accomplish this goal.

Our Association is in need of strong leadership in these challenging fiscal times. Please join me in this effort to strengthen the JTA.

## High School Vice President Candidate Kevin Brodsky

- **Began my career in Jericho in 1996.**
- **Three years experience as a HS Building Rep**  
I was approached to serve on the Delegate Assembly and accepted without hesitation.
- **Responsible for the reactivation of the Coaches Association and current Vice President.**  
The Coaches Association had been founded in 1993 to facilitate communication with the Physical Education Curriculum Associate. The organization had become inactive. I felt strongly that there were many issues that were not being addressed and began the organization's reorganization this year.
- **Served as Chairperson for numerous Physical Education Co-Curricular activities.**
- **Attended the NYSUT Leadership training sessions held at the Nassau NYSUT headquarters.**
- **Currently Vice President – HS, unanimously appointed by Executive Board and seconded by the Delegate Assembly.**

## Elementary School Vice President Candidate Lois Burn

I have been a member of NYSUT since 1978. At that time, I was working at the Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf. The Mill Neck Manor Educational Association was a new NYSUT local and was negotiating its first contract. While a member of the MNMEA, I served as chairperson of the Grievance Committee, Vice President, and President for 3 years. I was also a member of the Negotiation team and was involved in negotiating 2 contracts. It was new and exciting and I loved being "in the thick of it".

I have been a member of the Jericho Teacher's Association since 1994. Since then, I have served as a building rep at Cantiague for 6 years and Vice President of the Elementary Schools since last November 2005. My duties have included attending monthly delegate assembly meetings and school board meetings, meeting with the administration on a regular basis, and meeting with the executive board on a weekly basis. I have also developed a good relationship with the elementary school principals and am able to approach them with concerns from my colleagues at the elementary school level. They, in turn, come to me with their concerns. I feel that I am able to see both sides and deal with these concerns in a productive, supportive, and diplomatic manner.

For the past 5 years, I have attended union sponsored weekend workshops at Gurney's Inn and have been given the opportunity to meet with labor relation specialists and other local leaders throughout Nassau County. These workshops have focused on leadership training, negotiations, and grievance procedures. They have been invaluable toward providing me with information and training that I have been able to utilize when I come back to my own local.

I grew up in a union family and there was never any doubt that when I started working I would become a member of a union. I have been a member of NYSUT for almost 30 years and a member of the JTA for 12. I am proud to be a part of 2 strong, supportive institutions and hope that I can continue to be a positive representative for our membership.

## **Secretary Treasurer Candidate Fran Rivera**

I have been a building representative from Jackson since September of 1998 and your secretary/treasurer since July 2004. I am running for re-election to the position of JTA Secretary/Treasurer. During the past two years as JTA Secretary/Treasurer, I have tried my best to learn as much as I could about the roles and responsibilities required of the position. I soon discovered that there was much to do and much to learn. My approach has been to keep my eyes and ears open and work diligently during my two-year "learning process."

After attending monthly board meetings, meetings with central administration, PTA meetings, SEPTA meetings, meet-the-candidate nights, and numerous district budget-planning meetings I feel I have gained crucial knowledge and have begun to foster necessary relationships to better serve the JTA. In addition to district-run meetings, I have been attending ED19 meetings monthly. It is at these meetings, with representatives from surrounding areas such as East Williston, Great Neck, Manhasset, Port Washington and Syosset, that issues pertinent to districts similar to ours are discussed. The networking that has begun with some of the individuals at these meetings can only benefit us in the future.

I have also attended numerous NYSUT-sponsored training sessions which have helped me to become better equipped to represent the JTA membership. My attendance at a 5-day NYSUT Leadership Institute at Cornell during my summer vacation of 2005 proved to be extremely worthwhile. This institute conducts an intensive, highly selective training program to which only approximately 40 participants are invited to attend. I also attended the 3-day follow-up leadership institute conference in March 2006. In January 2006, I attended the NYSUT negotiations workshops and, in September 2005, I attended a NYSUT-sponsored training specifically for union treasurers.

My participation in these workshops and training programs indicate how seriously I take my responsibilities as your JTA Secretary/Treasurer. While I admit I still have much to learn, I truly believe I am off to a respectable start. I am dedicated and trustworthy. I believe in unionism and I believe that I have the dedication to get the job done. I can assure you that I will continue to look, listen and learn so that I will continue to be an articulate and informed representative of the JTA.

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**Reminder: Our Next  
District Wide Meeting  
will be held on  
Wednesday, May 31  
at 4:00 pm in the  
High School Little Theater**