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R. I. AFT / R THOUGHTS

RI AFT/R holds its annual business meeting

On May 12th, the RI AFT/R conducted its annual business meeting at the Crowne Plaza in Warwick, RI.

The featured speaker, Rita St. Pierre, from the Alzheimer's Association of Rhode Island, explained the relationship between diet, exercise, keeping active and maintaining a healthy brain.

James Parisi, RIFTHP lobbyist and field staff, reported on legislation pending before the General Assembly and highlighted Cranston Mayor Steven Laffey's legislation, introduced by Rep. Davey, that would cut the COLA of current retirees. Jim also noted that the bill would dramatically reduce the areas where active teachers could bargain, eliminating class size, discipline against employees and issues of limiting layoffs teacher assignments, hours of instruction, schedules and the length of the school year. Each of the retirees present had worked under strong and vibrant contracts when they were active teachers. The Davey bill

would rip the guts out of contracts. It is only one out of three bills in the assembly designed to limit collective bargaining rights.

Marcia Reback reported that United Health is not honoring the discount that Blue Cross offered to Plan 65 beneficiaries who purchase their medical coverage through the State Retirement System. Letters should be sent to the Governor by members who purchase their medical coverage, reminding him that he promised that there would be no difference in coverage between Blue Cross and United. Letter should be addressed to:

Governor Carcieri
Office of the Governor
State House
Providence, RI 02903

RI AFT/R President Paula Akers announced the winner of the first RI AFT/R scholarship, Kristen Pond, the niece of member Judy Esmond-Wannie. Paula also announced that next year there will be two \$500 scholarships awarded.

Retired Providence teachers, Elaine and Bob Scanlan, won the first prize, a generous fruit basket.

Vern Stromberg announced that it is not too late to sign up for the New York trip scheduled for June 1. For further information on the trip, call Kenn Fontaine at 273-9800 or e-mail him at RIFTKenn@aol.com. The NYC Bus Trip Flier is also on the Retiree Website: www.rifthp.org.

For those not attending the trip, RI AFT/R members are invited to join thousands of active and retired state employees and teachers at a rally scheduled to take place on June 1, at the State House. The Rally for Respect will begin at 4:30, protesting the proposed cuts in pensions, collective bargaining rights, social security and the fact that Warwick teachers and State employees have not had a raise in almost 3 years.

Thank you Helen

At the September RIAFT/R breakfast meeting, RIFTHP Field Representative James Parisi gave a legislative report on recent changes to legislation concerning Survivors Benefits. This is a program, paid for equally by teachers and school districts in communities that do not have social security, to provide a payment to survivors in the case of the death of a member.

The General Assembly passed a bill to provide an opportunity for retired teachers to withdraw contributions for a limited period of time. The Assembly also enacted a bill sponsored by Rep. Peter Lewiss (D. Westerly) that increased Survivor Benefits by

25% and added a future cost of living increase equal to the increase granted to Social Security recipients.

After the presentation, RIAFT/R member Helen Gilligan questioned the RIFTHP lobbyist to determine whether or not the increase affected those currently receiving benefits. Mr. Parisi informed her that the increase was to affect current beneficiaries. Helen told him that she is a beneficiary and that her benefits had not increased 25%.

The RIFTHP contacted the Retirement System administrators, who acknowledged that benefits had not increased and that they were not planning to in-

crease benefits based on their interpretation of the wording in the new law. Upon request of the RIFTHP and the involvement of the NEA/RI and the bill sponsor Peter Lewiss whose intent was to increase benefits, the ERSRI reconsidered its position and increased benefits. They also paid beneficiaries a retroactive lump sum payment.

Had Helen Gilligan not attended the RIAFT/R breakfast and raised questions about the increase for current beneficiaries, who knows when, or even if beneficiaries would have received the 25% increase granted by the General Assembly.

NYC Bus Trip

The R.I. AFT/R is heading to the Big Apple for a fun day out.

Deadline is May 25th!

See the website or call Kenn Fontaine for details.

Website

The R.I. AFT/R now has a web page on the RIFTHP website. All information provided in mailings will be available online, along with relevant articles and a list of upcoming events.

Go to:

www.RIFTHP.org
and click on the
RI AFT/R link

Rally for Respect

**Pension System
Social Security
Healthcare**

**Wednesday
June 1, 2005
4:30pm**

**Rhode Island
State House**