

## Recall Petitions Dismissed

Recall petitions against the DFT president were dismissed by the DFT Executive Board on Jan. 13. A special committee appointed by the Executive Board reviewed the petitions and found they did not meet the constitutional requirements of a recall.

“Even if one charge does not meet the requirement of the DFT constitution that it is a clearly stated, specific violation of the obligation of office, the petitions must be thrown out,” said Mark O’Keefe, DFT Executive Vice President. “If it’s not a clear and specific charge, the person being recalled can’t defend the charges.”

Members of a dissident group angry at the new contract wanted to oust DFT President Keith Johnson. The petition charged that Johnson gave away seniority rights in the new contract. The petition said that teachers in priority schools would lose their seniority rights and become “at-will” employees.

“That’s a complete fabrication with no basis in fact,” said O’Keefe. “Anyone who signed the petition thinking that was true was duped.”

Mary Ellen Gurewitz, a lawyer with the firm Waldman Sachs, said the Executive Board’s ruling stands.

“In interpreting its governing documents, the Executive Board was doing exactly what AFT locals around the country and virtually all other unions regularly do,” Gurewitz wrote in her report on the recall initiative (see page 9). “The membership does not have the authority to reject or overrule the decision of the Executive Board on constitutional questions.

“If the membership could overrule the Executive Board then the Constitution would have no fixed meaning. Rather it would mean nothing more than what a majority at any membership meeting, however large or small, would decide.”

## Dads Club Runs School Valet

Chrysler Elementary School Principal Linda Whitaker had the same pit in her stomach as every principal: What child is going to get hurt in that parking lot?

She saw parents backing up, or racing to drop off kids. Whitaker stretched herself to oversee safety. But one person was never enough. She noticed a group of dads having a regular kaffee klatsch in front of the building. The men found a solution.

“We’re going to form a dads club,” said Maceo Coleman, who became the DADS club president. BTW, that’s an acronym for Dedicated Actively-involved Dads who Support successful learning opportunities for all students. Their first task was forming a kind of valet service for parents dropping off kids.

“It just took so much pressure off of me,” says Whitaker. And this is no passing fad. The dads have been out there every morning and afternoon for more than a year.

Since coordinating safety, the DADS club closed the loop in front of the school and set up orange cones, making a lane for parents to drop off the kids.

“We got a concierge service going on,” said Coleman. “We walk the kids into school when it’s raining. We wake them up. We tell a mom, hey, he needs a bigger jacket tomorrow.” says Coleman. The dads remind the parents of a half day or upcoming event. Mostly they open the car doors so parents don’t have to get out.

“As a person who drops my kids off, it saves so much time,” said Jonathan Milsap, president of the Local School Community Organization. “It really is a blessing.



### Dads Serve the Kids

Dads from Chrysler School and a crossing guard help children get to school safely on Lafayette. Principal Linda Whitaker (left) got the help she needed from Maceo Coleman (left), Jonathan Milsap (right) and many other fathers.

We let our kids out. We know they’re safe.”

The 30 dads in the club have professions ranging from police officer to judge to funeral director. They sponsor a father-daughter dance, scholarships to the fifth-graders and more. The Detroit City Council honored the dads club, the LSCO and the principal with

the Spirit of Detroit award.

The dads are there in the morning from 7:40a.m. to 8:45 a.m. and then again in the afternoon. “They don’t leave until the last child is in,” Whitaker says. “They take it seriously.”

There’s a good turnout of dads every day, though there’s no schedule.

“If we did that, the dads wouldn’t come,” says Coleman.

**Past President Mary Ellen Riordan Passes Away — Please See Pages 4-5**

# Unwise Decisions Would Have Destroyed DFT

In the aftermath of the contract negotiations and ratification, the bargaining team, specifically me, has been criticized for not “representing” the interests of DFT members during the course of the negotiations.

## President's Report



**Keith Johnson**

Never mind the fact that we agreed to three contract extensions because what the district was proposing was not acceptable. During the course of these extensions members continued to receive their regular pay, salary steps, and all other benefits protected under the extended agreement. This also allowed the bargaining team to continue to negotiate an agreement that the membership could live with, not an agreement we desired.

Yet we continue to receive criticism from those who have no idea or choose to ignore the reality of where DPS is financially and the potential harm to DFT members if we did not act in a prudent, responsible fashion.

Some have said we should have stood our ground and demanded a “fair” contract. Some have said we should have gone back to the bargaining table and demanded more than what was in the tentative agreement. Still others have said we should have shown our strength by engaging in a work stoppage until an agreement was reached commensurate with the dedication and commitment of our members.

Another alternative would have been to allow the district to declare impasse, go to fact-finding, and live with the results.

Ideally all of the above scenarios would have been desirable if not for one factor: DPS is broke! As painful as that reality may be, it is the reality. The horrific fiscal mismanagement of the past several years finally caught up with the district and the DFT, and the debts of the past now had to be paid.

As president, I had the responsibility to negotiate the best contract possible under the most difficult circumstances imaginable, unprecedented in our history. To do that, I had to put aside emotion, and my knowledge of how unfair it was for the rank and file



**DFT President Keith Johnson with retired Toledo Federation of Teachers president Del Lawrence, who visited the DFT this fall to discuss Toledo's successful Peer Assistance and Review program. PAR is included in the DFT's 2009-2012 contract.**

employees to continue to have to pay for administrative mistakes of the past, and make decisions that would protect this union and this membership in the short and long term.

Let's look at what would have happened had I succumbed to the demands of my harshest critics.

- To stand our ground and negotiate a “fair contract,” at the very least, would have meant maintaining the status quo in salary, benefits, job security, etc. While these are certainly not unreasonable demands, the fact of the matter is that had we been successful at maintaining the contract as it was, as many as 1,800 members would have faced certain layoff. And the cuts would have been across the board in every subject area and job classification. Failure to make those cuts would have resulted in the district's deficit continuing to grow and would have an adverse effect on our ability to educate children. Class size limits would go out the window. Teachers would lose preps. And the district would have no choice but to pursue the bankruptcy option that would have totally voided our contractual rights.

- Go back to the bargaining table and demand a better offer than what was contained in the tentative agreement: In order to “demand” something, you have to be in a position to withhold something, and all that we could withhold would have been our services. Exercising that option would have alienated the support from the

community because now their children would not be in school. The district would have gone to court to get a back-to-work order, which, without question would have been issued. The union would have been fined \$25,000 and \$2,500 per day for each day of a work stoppage. Members would have been initially fined \$2,500, plus \$250 per day for each day of the work stoppage, plus would have lost a day's pay for each day of the work stoppage. Members would have to make up the lost days without being paid for them (thanks to Gov. John Engler).

For a member at master's max, that would have been \$630 per day, plus the initial fine of \$2,500. So how long would the work stoppage have lasted? Not long, I suspect, and the union and its members would have gained nothing. The fact is the union and individual members would have paid a tremendous price from which we may never have recovered.

- Allow the district to declare impasse and go to fact-finding: In better times this would have been a viable option. Exercising this option at this time would have plunged the district deeper in debt and would still have cost up to 1,800 members their jobs. Impasse would have also allowed the district to impose their “last best offer” which could have encompassed any or all of the 91 ridiculous proposals we succeeded in getting off the table during bargaining.

- Call the district's bluff on bankruptcy: Not an option. With an emergency financial manager in place whose primary charge is to restore this district to fiscal solvency, do we really want to give him the easiest route to that end by eliminating the contractual rights and benefits achieved through 42 years of bargaining? Do we want to open the door of opportunity to privatization of support services such as social workers, psychologists, nurses, etc? What have we seen or heard to lead us to believe it was a bluff? I was not willing to take that gamble with so much at stake.

Intelligent, rational decisions were essential in this bargaining process. It was important to put the union in a position to fight another day, not die on our sword in the name of bravado. The decisions were not easy or comfortable, but they were necessary.

This union must remain viable, strong and diligent in our pursuit to deliver quality education to the children of Detroit. By making tough decisions and the right decisions, we remain in a position to meet the challenges of the present and the future.

Leadership is easy when adversity is not your constant nemesis. The true test of leadership is making the decisions you know are right even when you know they will not be popular. That is what you elected me to do and that is what I have done and will continue to do for as long as I am entrusted with this unique and honorable

**THE DETROIT** teacher

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# Updates...

## Retirements Announced

The following DFT members have announced their retirements: Mary Bedikian, Deborah Brown, Barbara Rosenfeld, Edward C. Jackson, Harriette Ald, Lourdes Cooney, Edna Douglas, Marva Dozier, Reanetta Garner-Waldman, Doris Goza, Joyce Hamlett, Patricia Horton, Maureen Ladasz, Marta Lamb, Michael Larmee, Bulah Lewis, Mary McGrath, Judith Miller, Avia Mitchell, Earl Moore, Sarah Moore, Phyllis Samuels, Linda Spires, Harold Stewart, Brenda Stoud, Joseph Taglioli, Anastasia Wilson and Vicki Yabuku. If you have recently retired and would like it announced, please call the editor at 313-875-3500 ext. 776.

## Retirees Take up Social Security, Vision and Dental

The DFT Retirees Chapter will have important information about Social Security at its Feb. 16 meeting. New information on vision (Eye Med) and Delta Dental insurance will

be discussed at the March 16 meeting. The meetings are held at 11:30 a.m. at the DFT Hall.

## Field Trip Giveaway

Schools can win a field trip to The Henry Ford and a \$100 Buddy's Pizza gift certificate. There are five winners monthly for five months. It's easy to enter, just sign up for Club Ed at [TheHenryFord.org/education](http://TheHenryFord.org/education). It's free to join, and Club Ed members are the first to know about teacher resources, field trip scholarships, and other promotions. Club Ed members are automatically entered to win monthly.

## Savings for Teachers

DFT Member Steve Portnoy has purchased software from the following website and saved money. The site is legitimate and, he reports, some prices for software are amazing. You may need to provide evidence of being a public school teacher. Visit <http://www.academicssuperstore.com/>



## TASTERS' CHOICE

Preschool students at Crary Elementary School are learning to cook and eat healthy foods, thanks to a grant from Donor's Choose. With the grant, the class received cooking equipment, and is learning cooking concepts with teacher Vivian Stout-Murphy and assistant teacher Roslyn Lile.

# Steps DFT Members Need to Take to Retire

By Patrick Falcusan  
DFT Retirement Counselor

It appears that hundreds of our members are interested in retiring this year by July 1. How do I know? Well, normally I receive around 85 phone calls each week. Since the meeting at Cobo Hall, I have been receiving 250 to over 400 calls each week.



Patrick Falcusan

I have tried to answer them all but sometimes folks forget to leave a phone number when they call or they call from a cell phone and the call drops. So, if you have not heard back from me, call again.

Hundreds of DFT members have now filed Separation from Service forms with the District and now are on track to retire July 1. So now the question is "What do I do next?" Following the countdown below should ensure a smooth transition from work to retirement.

- 4 months ahead (March 1)

Call the State to get retirement forms (1-800-381-5111).

- 3 months ahead (April 1)

Fill out retirement forms, send back to Lansing; include copies of birth certificates or passports; also HMO application if taking an HMO (HAP phone number: 1-800-422-4641, BCN phone number: 1-800-662-6667). For children over 19, proof of being a full-time student and page one of federal tax form. If over age 62, apply for Social Security (go to the Social Security office).

- 2 months ahead (May 1)

If sheltering pay-out money (sick days, TIP account, last four pays if 26 pays etc.), discuss this with TSA agent. If buying time (TDP account), call the Union (313-875-3500 ext. 783) for forms.

- 1 month ahead (June 1)

If Separation from Service form was not filed earlier, file Separation from Service form. To file a Separation from Service form:

- Go to the fourth floor of Kahn Building
- Get two Separation of Service forms
- Fill out both copies
- Check the retirement box
- Have both copies date-stamped
- Take one copy with you

\*Note: Once submitted, a Separation from Service form is irrevocable.

## Applying for Medicare

If you are retiring July 1, 2010 and if you or your spouse are over 65 and want health care through the retirement system when you retire, you will need Medicare parts A & B.

Almost all members over 65 already have Medicare part A, but not part B. Here is what you will need to do to have part B in place by the time you retire.

- On your retirement forms, put the date from your Medicare card when Medicare part A started. Put July 1, 2010 for the date Medicare part B started (if you don't yet have part A also put July 1, 2010 for part A). Submit your retirement forms by April 1.
- In early April, go to Social Security and notify them that you are retiring July 1 and need Medicare part B (and part A if you don't yet have it) effective July 1, 2010.
- If Medicare gives you a form to be filled out by your employer (they almost always do), take that form to the fourth floor of the Kahn Building (make an extra copy of the form in case the first copy gets lost and you have to repeat this process).
- Submit the form from Social Security to the District along with a copy of your Separation from Service form. (If you did not submit a Separation from Service form earlier, submit one now).
- The District will fill out your form from Social Security and return it to you.
- Take the form back to Social Security.