



Local 237 Retirees Honored by Governor for Seniors Day

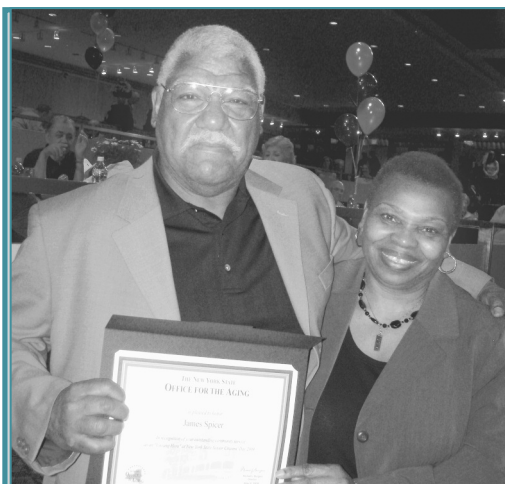
Local 237 retirees Doris Welch and James Spicer were among hundreds of retirees from around New York State honored for service to their communities at the state's Senior Citizens' Day celebration in Albany May 6 to mark Older Americans Month. More than 500 New Yorkers attended the event, which was sponsored by the New York State Office on Aging (NYSOFA). Twenty-five Local 237 retirees and Retiree Division Director Nancy True and Assistant Director Susan Milisits participated in the festivities. A Senior Expo featured entertainment by seniors, door prizes, and a resource fair, as well presentations and remarks by Governor David Paterson and other officials.

Welch received an Outstanding Older New Yorker Award during a ceremony at the Executive Mansion in the morning. Spicer was presented with an Unsung Hero Award in an afternoon event at the Empire State Plaza Convention Center.

Both Welch and Spicer have been involved with the Alliance for Retired Americans and have been delegates to national



Honoree Doris Welch (front) with (l-r) Suleika Cabrera-Drinane, executive director of the Institute for Puerto Rican and Hispanic Elderly; Local 237 Housing Director Remilda Ferguson; Retiree Division Director Nancy True; and New York State Office for the Aging Executive Director Michael Burgess. Local 237 retirees and seniors from the Institute shared a bus to Albany for the event.



Local 237 retirees James Spicer and Doris Welch hold their awards at the Senior Citizens' Day celebration in Albany last month

DORIS WELCH: Motivated to Fight

Sitting in the governor's mansion with the other honorees, I felt proud of having given a small part of myself for the struggles of seniors and retirees.

I'm inspired by older people who are so active to think, when I'm in my 80s, I still want to be doing what I do. I want to emulate the Barbara Hazelwoods, the Wilfred Fergusons, the Dabney Montgomerys [active Local 237 retirees]. That's my goal. My mentors have given me motivation to continue to fight for the rights of seniors.

Because of the great efforts put into senior activism by the New York City Department for the Aging and the New York State Office of the Aging, because they look at seniors for other than just talking, they give us inspiration to fight.

I'm proud that I was just asked to serve for another term on the governor's advisory council for NYSOFA. I'm going to continue.

JAMES SPICER: *Unsung Heroes Really Are Out There*

Many people, when they get to a certain age, feel they don't want to do anything anymore. At the Senior Citizens' Day program in Albany, there were people of all ages, up into their 80s, who seem so active and alive, they want to do things no matter how old they are.

We don't see a lot about what seniors are doing. In Albany, seniors came out, we found out about the wonderful things they're doing, you get ideas about what you'd like to try. I had such a wonderful time. It was wonderful to be around them. There was so much energy in the room. "Unsung heroes" really are out there.

They're not going away. And our numbers are increasing, with the baby boomers coming up. We're the new generation.

We saw so many different aspects of what's going on. The tables had a lot of information. There was a lot of health information to help seniors live healthy lives. There was someone from the Veterans there who was able to help me. The entertainment was nice, too. It was done by older people. They were dancing and singing songs from cultures all over the world. For their age, they could really get down there.

I'm proud to be part of these organizations that are doing these wonderful things. It's great to see organizations that say "come join us and do things with us." Volunteering is very important, especially now with the economy the way it is.

As for the award, it was wonderful, but the idea of helping other people is a reward in and of itself, because people are so wonderful.

ARA conventions. Welch sits on the New York City ARA's executive board, where she works with retirees from other unions and community groups. Both are graduates of the Institute for Senior Action (Spicer was class valedictorian) sponsored by the Joint Policy Action Committee for Older Adults (JPAC). Welch served a one-year term as chair of JPAC's advisory council and Spicer is a member of JPAC's Housing Committee. Welch also serves on

the advisory council of the New York State Office for the Aging. Both participate regularly in union and Retiree Division activities and have been active in voter registration and get-out-the vote activities.

NYSOFA Director Michael Burgess said, "Doris Welch and James Spicer have shown a lifelong commitment to their communities and have done outstanding work mobilizing retirees as well as younger generations for social change."

You have probably heard about the recent agreement between the public employee unions and the city concerning health benefits and layoffs. Faced with the prospect of members losing their jobs during the most severe financial crisis since the Great Depression, and after long and very difficult negotiations, the Municipal Labor Council has agreed to health-benefit concessions for city employees and retirees. In exchange, the city will defer layoffs of permanent civil servants until at least October 1. In addition, the union welfare funds will receive \$200 for each active and retired member.

The concessions will save the city \$200 million in the coming fiscal year and a total of \$1 billion over six years.

As part of the agreement, two committees will be set up to explore other cost-saving options and proposals so that we can prevent future layoffs. During that time, the effects of the federal stimulus package may improve the city's financial situation. In addition, as we get closer to the mayoral elections, Bloomberg may back off on layoffs because the the politi-



A Message from the President

cal consequences will be greater. Layoffs inevitably result in reduced public services, and that affects everyone.

The unions successfully thwarted Mayor Bloomberg's demand for far deeper benefit reductions and imposition of premium payments. We agreed to changes that we felt would affect the fewest members and retirees and cause the least hardship. Generally, the changes equalize the provisions of the different plans. The main changes are:

- a \$50 emergency room co-pay for members in HIP and retirees covered by Medicare, which will be waived if the patient is admitted or if the visit is approved as a real emergency;
- HIP members will now have a \$100 co-pay for hospital admission and a \$50 co-pay at ambulatory surgery facilities

(out-patient surgery), similar to what GHI enrollees already pay;

- GHI members who use free-standing surgical facilities (such as community medical centers) and have dialysis will now have to pay part of the cost if they use a non-participating facility, similar to rules for non-participating providers that are used for other services.

There will also be some administrative changes that will save the city money but will have little impact on services. Also, HIP made a commitment to the MLC that it will lower their premiums by .5%.

You will receive details in the mail, including when these changes go into effect. The Retiree Division staff will be available to answer questions.

The Mayor is seeking additional, major concessions from the unions. Many of them are concessions the city has sought for years, and he is now using the financial crisis as leverage. The unions have fought off these demands. As your president and secretary of the MLC, I promise you that we will continue to fight to protect your benefits.

President Obama is committed to reforming health care this year, and it looks like it's going to happen. Legislation has been proposed in both the Senate and the House. The debate is on.

Elsewhere in this issue of *Retiree News & Views*, we reported on the Alliance for Retired Americans campaign to ensure that Medicare reform is part of health care reform legislation. As ARA President Barbara Easterling said, You can't talk about health care without talking about Medicare.

Health care reform legislation must also include a strong public health plan option. People should have a choice between a public health plan and private insurance.

A public plan would be available to everyone, including people with pre-exist-



Fight for a Public Health Plan Option

By Nancy B. True
Director, Retiree Division

ing conditions. A public plan would reduce health care costs and make coverage more affordable because a greater percentage of premiums will go for health care instead of administrative costs, advertising, and profits. Medicare spends only 2 percent on administrative costs, and Social Security, the most successful government program in history, spends 3 percent.

A public health plan would, as President Obama says, "keep private health insurance plans 'honest' by making them more competitive."

This has been the most contentious issue in the health care reform debate. The health insurance industry and most of the Republicans are dead-set against offering a public plan option. Simply put, private insurance plans are afraid their profits will suffer and they might even be put out of business because too many people will choose the public option.

The industry has launched an aggres-

sive campaign to defeat it. Blue Cross in North Carolina, for example, started running TV ads claiming that people enrolled in the public health care plan won't have a choice of doctors, will face long waiting periods for appointments and procedures, and will not even be able to get a clerk to answer questions on billing. If this were true, private plans would have nothing to worry about because no one would enroll in the public plan. Their real concern is their profits.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said that no bill would come out of the House without a public option. We are not so sure about the Senate, however. Senator Max Baucus, chair of the Senate Finance Committee, one of the two Senate committees that is dealing health care reform, needs to be convinced. Senator Edward Kennedy, chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pension Committee, the other committee, supports a public health plan and has, with Senator Christopher Dodd, introduced the Affordable Health Choice Act.

Write or call Senator Baucus and your senators and representatives, write letters to the editor, talk to your family and neighbors. If members of Congress know how strongly people feel about this, they will think twice about voting against it. Make your voices heard.

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NYS Retiree Activists Strategize for Health Care/Medicare Reform

The New York State Alliance for Retired Americans held its third biannual convention May 27, its first in the post-Bush era and the first at which delegates focused on building a movement *for* something rather than *against*. Health care reform was at the top of the agenda.

The meeting, held at the New York State United Teachers' modern conference hall in Latham, New York, just north of Albany, brought together union retirees and community-based senior activists representing 70,000 members in ARA chapters all over the state. Among the delegates were Retiree Division Director Nancy True, who is the secretary of NYSARA; retiree Doris Welch, an executive board member of the New York City ARA; and Teamster retirees from several other locals.

ARA President Barbara Easterling, the convention's keynote speaker, NYSARA President James Wood, and ARA Field Mobilization Director Danielle Pere discussed core principles the ARA believes must be included in health care reform, which is expected to be enacted this year.

Wood, declaring that "we cannot accept phony health care reform," said the program must:

- give people the option of a strong public plan;
- do no harm – do not give anyone less coverage than they have now;
- be universal and affordable, with no discrimination based on pre-existing conditions;
- include preventive care;
- not tax employer-provided health benefits;
- cut costs through use of technology.

Easterling, who was attending her first New York statewide meeting since becoming ARA president in February, said that health care should be considered a basic right. "We need Medicare for all," she said. The ARA is campaigning to ensure that the health care plan passed by Congress in-

corporates Medicare reform, including:

- a Medicare buy-in for the more than 5 million retirees ages 55-64;
 - Improvements in the Medicare Part D prescription drug plan
 - authorize Medicare to negotiate with drug companies for lower prices
 - eliminate the "donut hole" coverage gap
 - stop Medicare privatization by ending overpayments to private Medicare Advantage plans and repealing the Medicare Privatization Project set for 2010 under the Medicare Reform Act of 2003
- Pere, who consults regularly with ARA regional leaders and members around the country about implementation of Alliance

The role of NYSARA is to Educate, Advocate, Activate

campaigns, said that it's harder to mobilize retirees on some of these health care reform issues because there are a lot of details involved, unlike the campaign to save Social Security, which focused on more general issues. She reported on the Alliance's campaign during May, Older Americans Month, on retirees' stake in health care reform. Each week had a different focus and included education, lobbying, letter writing, meetings, and other activities.



Delegates to the New York State Alliance for Retired Americans adopted the national ARA's position that health care reform must include Medicare reform.

Easterling also discussed the Employee Free Choice Act. She pointed out that union workers' wages are three times higher than wages of nonunion workers and union workers are much more likely to have pensions and health benefits. "We can't have a stable retirement without a stable middle class," Easterling said. She urged the delegates: "Talk to your children and grandchildren. They don't understand the importance of unions and collective bargaining. Tell them how unions have benefited your family." She also urged them to contact their legislators, write letters to newspapers, and call radio talk shows to make their voices heard.

Michael Burgess, director of the New York State Office for the Aging, and NYSOFA Deputy Director Greg Olsen (both of whom are former executive directors of NYSARA) reported on NYSOFA programs for seniors around the state. They presented senior issues as family issues, and talked about volunteer opportunities for seniors, the fight for long-term care programs and New York State budget battles. NYSOFA was able to maintain its core programs and get \$5 million in additional funds.

The convention passed resolutions on elder abuse, state health care programs, celebrity drug advertising, and other issues.

The delegates also heard from Fred Nauman, NYSARA founding president, now retired; Terrence Melvin, secretary-treasurer of the state AFL-CIO; Cathryn Bern-Smith, policy director for State Senator Ruben Diaz, Sr., chair of the state Senate Committee on Aging; and Kathy McCormack, director of labor relations for Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli.



James Wood



Teamster delegates to the NYSARA convention with national ARA President Barbara Easterling (rear, second from left) and NYSARA President James Wood (back center). Shown also are NYSARA board member Joe Robinson, president of the Local 295/851 Retiree Chapter (far left) and Harold Scherch, chair of the Mid-Hudson ARA and president of the Local 707 Retirees Club (third from right). In the front are Local 237 retiree Doris Welch and Local 237 Retiree Division Director Nancy True, NYSARA secretary



Barbara Easterling

Did You Receive Your \$250 Stimulus Check?

Social Security recipients should have received their one-time \$250 economic recovery payment. The payment is part of the \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 that President Obama signed in February.

The Social Security Administration said that eligible individuals who have not received their check you can call SSA's toll-free number, 1-800-772-1213 (TTY 1-800-325-0778) or contact their local Social Security office.

The checks were sent out by June 4 to more than 50 million individuals who were eligible for Social Security, SSI, Veterans, or Railroad Retirement benefits at any time during the months of November 2008, December 2008, or January 2009. The payments were made the same way an individual's regular monthly payment is made.

The \$250 checks are intended to pump money into the local economy. The payment is one of several direct benefits for individuals under the act. Unemployment benefits were increased by \$25 a week, a \$400 "Making Work Pay" tax credit was given to moderate-income paychecks during the spring, and food stamp allotments increased by 13.6 percent starting in April. In addition, most workers laid off since September 2008 will be eligible to extend their employer-provided health insurance through COBRA with 65 percent of the cost picked up by the federal government for nine months.

The next issue of *Retiree News & Views* will be a July/August issue. Have a great summer!

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

Tell Congress health care reform must include Medicare reform and a public health plan option

Capitol Switchboard
202-224-3121

U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510
www.senate.gov

House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
www.house.gov

Retiree Personal Notes

Congratulations to Retiree Division Director Nancy True on becoming a grandmother! The new grandson, Isaac Perez, weighed in at 7 pounds 11 ounces on the morning on June 10 to daughter Julia and her husband Max, in Oakland, California.

* * *

Happy 62nd birthday on May 25 to retired Lt. **Doris Gaskins**, who is now enjoying life as a travel agent for Pro Travel Network. Last year she traveled to Italy, France, and Spain for 14 days . . . Retired CUNY Public Safety Agent **Dennis P. Kehoe** of Tampa, Florida, proudly reports that his son-in-law graduated from Fordham Law School and aced the bar exam for New York and New Jersey. Kehoe's daughter, the mother of four, "held down the fort" while her husband was at school.

* * *

Jack Panzer and wife Barbara proudly attended the graduation of their grandson Eric Walker, magna cum laude with special honors, from George Washington University last month . . . Happy birthday to **Walter Eubanks**, who celebrated his 89th birthday April 13. The retired senior special officer sent a short note to "say how much I enjoy reading your monthly publication about 237 retirees," report that he moved to Rockledge, Florida, after 17 years in Fort Myers, and say hello to all senior or special officers in social services.

* * *

Condolences to **Carmen Santos** on the passing May 13 of her husband, retired NYCHA retiree **Rafael Santos** . . . Condolences to Inez Whyte and family on the death of her husband, retired SSA **Cecil Whyte**, on May 6 after a long battle with cancer.

Retiree News & Views and Local 237 Web Site Win Awards

Local 237's web site took First Place and *Retiree News & Views* won three awards in the Annual journalism contest for work in 2008 sponsored by the Metro NY Labor Communications Council, the organization of labor communicators in the New York area.

Retiree News & Views competed with labor publications in the 5,000 to 25,000 circulation category, including magazines and publications with up to 25 pages. The paper won third place for:

- Best Writing, for "Nonviolent Activism: A Powerful and Just Weapon," about the Retiree Division's program in honor of Martin Luther King's legacy (February 2008 issue);
- Editorial/Opinion, for "Message from the President," Local 237 President Greg Floyd's column on a vote for Barack Obama as a vote for change (June 2008 issue);
- Best Photo, for a picture of Local 237 retiree Cejester Walker, one of several photographs illustrating an article, 'Put the Money Back,' about a rally at City Hall led by Local 237 demanding that the federal government "put back" funds cut from public housing.

The awards were presented at Metro's annual convention June 5 held at Musicians Local 802.

RETIREE NEWS & VIEWS

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Happy Father's Day

