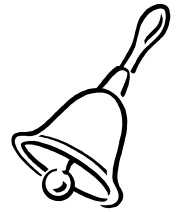




PEIRTA Newsletter

Prince Edward Island Retired Teachers' Association



VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

SPRING 2008

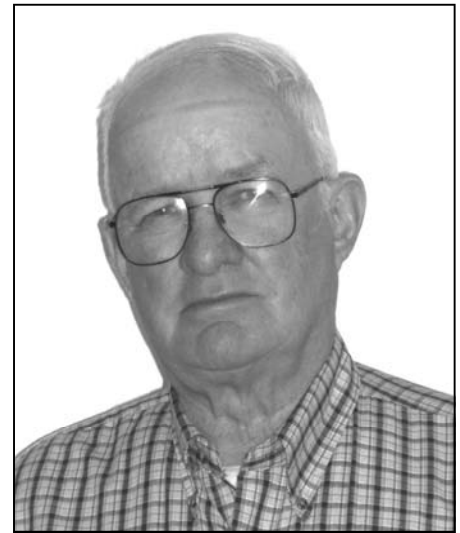
From the President . . .we have had a busy schedule!

Welcome to the first edition of our new and revised newsletter. I hope that you will find our new format pleasing. Much credit for this must go to John Rowe, our past president. John was a moving force to make our newsletter a better publication. When we went looking for an editor we were pleasantly surprised to receive several excellent applications. In the end we chose Margaret Stewart to be our editor, and this is her first effort. I must say that Margaret is a hard worker and is determined to make this work. If she is to be successful she will need assistance from you, our members. So when Marg comes calling, please help her out.

Since your new executive assumed office in January, we have had a

busy schedule. We have done work on our constitution, which you will see at our next annual meeting. We have arranged with the government to have our dues deducted at source so that we have a much more even cash flow throughout the year. I hope you are pleased with this method of payment. We have entered a new agreement with Johnson Inc. for the publication of our newsletter. Since our Spring Fling appears to have run its course—it was difficult to arrange, and wasn't really meeting our needs—we have tried to establish activities for RTA members in each region of our province. Our County Representatives have made the arrangements for these socials, and by the time you read this newsletter I hope to have seen you there. I will be very interested in your reaction to our new proposal.

I am very appreciative of being able to chair this organization. As I see it, we have many challenges as we go forward. We have to be vigilant of our pension status as this is our income now. We have to be ever aware of health insurance problems—those that arise from our teachers' plan (for those of us who retained it), and those that arise from the seniors' plan—which affect all of us. As a group we have much to offer



senior organizations, and I trust that many of you are enjoying experiences in various organizations. At the executive level we are most interested to hear your concerns. Please feel free to call any of us if you have an issue.

I also want to thank Phyllis Horne and the executive of PEITF for their kindness. They allow us to headquarter with them and provide us valuable assistance for meetings, photocopying, and on and on. We appreciate it greatly and feel very much at home at PEITF.

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Visit our Web site at

www.peirta.com

Meet the Editor

Since this newsletter is the principal means of communication with members of the PEIRTA, your executive decided to have some-one take on its coordination—instead of expecting the president to collect/write content, arrange for photocopying, etc. I have agreed to do so.

I am a retired English teacher/teacher-librarian and a former president of the PEITF. I believe

that the PEIRTA has the potential to be a strong voice for its members, and that the executive is interested in taking the steps to make it so. Revamping the newsletter so as to improve communication is one of those steps.

After 2008, we hope to publish three newsletters a year. A permanent design will be adopted (tentatively, I have mirrored the 1980 Centennial edition of the

PEITF Newsletter—comments welcome!). We will attempt to be informative, entertaining, and sometimes (maybe) a little provocative. You can help us—by submitting articles and/or letters, or by making suggestions for change. You can reach me at 894-8612; by mail at 34 Belvedere Avenue, Charlottetown, PE C1A6A8; or by e-mail at margstewart@pei.eastlink.ca.

Letters to the Editor

Members of the PEIRTA are invited to submit letters to the editor and/or other material for our newsletter.

Letters to the editor must be no more than 300 words. The editor retains the right to select material to be published, and to edit for length. Substantive changes will be approved by the author. All letters must be accompanied by the author's full name, contact information,

and one-line bio (e.g., Marg Stewart retired from Bluefield High in 2004).

Opinions expressed in letters to the editor, and material authored by those other than official representatives of the PEIRTA, shall carry a disclaimer stating that opinions are not those of the RTA Executive or editor of the newsletter and do not necessarily reflect policies of the PEIRTA.

Thanks, Don!

Until recently, Don Craig was the Queens Representative on the RTA Executive. Other responsibilities have taken him from us—at least temporarily—and he has been replaced by Eldon Rogerson.

Thanks, Don, for all your great work, and all the best!

PEIRTA Executive and Officers 2007-2009

President: James MacAulay (961-2818)	festival@eastlink.ca
Vice President: Cindy McNally (859-3260)	johnmcnally@pei.sympatico.ca
Past President: John Rowe (838-2098)	rowe@pei.sympatico.ca
Secretary: Pat McCardle (892-1915)	patmcc1999@hotmail.com
Treasurer: Joyce McCardle (436-6960)	joyce.mccardle@pei.sympatico.ca

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Prince: Spurgeon Robbins (436-7335)	spurgeonrobbins@hotmail.com
Queens: Eldon Rogerson (628-3816)	erogerson@eastlink.ca
Kings: Aquinas Ryan (961-2782)	RR St. Peters Bay, PE C0A 2A0

Pension Committee Representative: Frank McQuaid

Group Insurance Representative: Kimball Blanchard

To sub or not to sub—that is the question!

There seems to be some confusion about the use of VRP (Voluntary Retirement Package) teachers as substitutes, and the circumstances under which these teachers may agree to substitute. Members of your executive have met with both Eastern and Western superintendents, and would like to offer some clarification.

A significant number of teachers accepted a retirement package offered in 2005. Included in the package was an understanding that these teachers would not be allowed to substitute teach until 2010, except under special circumstances. In essence, according to Dale Sabean (Superintendent, Western Board), VRP teachers from 2005 cannot be hired until all other certified teachers have been asked. (They can, however, be called ahead of non-certified teachers.) Also, specific permission from the Department is required in order to fill a term position with a VRP.

In a letter to principals in February 2008, Sandy MacDonald (Superintendent, Eastern District) says “. . . we were given permission to use the VRP teachers as subs in the case of emergencies or when the effective functioning of our programs demanded their use. In other words, we were to employ the VRP individuals as subs as a last resort.”

School Boards have once again come under pressure from officials at the Department of Education who accuse them of taking advantage of a loophole and abusing the system by hiring VRP teachers more often than the agreement allows—over 400 days in the Eastern District between

September 2007 and February 2008—and not always as a “last resort.” In his letter to principals Mr. MacDonald warns that if the Department (in a promised audit of the process) finds that the spirit of the agreement is being broken, there is a good chance that the hiring of VRP’s will be completely disallowed, and the

“If we start using the VRP’s only when ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY, then we might be able to keep them. If we don’t, then as my dear departed mother used to say, we’re up against it.”

Sandy MacDonald, in letter to principals

Boards, in his words, “won’t have a leg to stand on!” He goes on to ask all principals to “take a long hard look at [their] use of VRP teachers as subs.” He fears losing the right to use VRP teachers in any capacity, and warns that a teacher who violates the agreement may run the risk of having his/her package partially clawed back. He concludes by saying that the only way to protect the privilege of using VRP teachers at all is to use them only when absolutely necessary.

So—if anyone has been under the impression that the restriction on VRP’s has been lifted, it hasn’t been. If you are interested in subbing, and have questions, Board/District Superintendents can answer them.

Heartburn, anyone?

The following article by Don Ash is taken with permission from the January 2006 Newsletter of the Retired Teachers’ Association of Newfoundland and Labrador.

For years I have watched a good friend of mine popping pills and grumbling about his incessant heartburn after every other meal and beverage. I read an article on *Helicobacter Pylori* (H. Pylori) testing, suggested he see his doctor for testing, and one strong dose of antibiotics later he has been heartburn free ever since. Perhaps, I thought, there are some of my teacher colleagues suffering unnecessarily from the effects of the H. Pylori bacteria, thus the generation of this article.

H. Pylori is a strain of bacteria that can cause gastritis, peptic ulcers and other gastrointestinal problems. A simple and painless test performed by your family doctor in his office can detect the presence of the bacteria. A program of antibiotics will [may] eradicate the H. Pylori bacteria, leaving the person free from heartburn and other gastrointestinal ailments.

The number one prescription drug in both dollars claimed and scripts issued to teachers in the NLTA Health Plan is Losec—\$383,242 claimed with 3,070 scripts in 2004-05 alone. Losec is used to combat gastrointestinal problems. Industry experts have estimated that between 20 percent and 30 percent of Losec users are suffering the effects of the H. Pylori bacteria. Besides alleviating teachers from needless suffering, the detection of the H. Pylori bacteria and appropriate antibiotic treatment has the potential for significant savings to teachers and their Health Plan. Teachers suffering from heartburn, gastritis or other gastrointestinal ailments might consider asking their doctor to test for Pylori.

PEITF—the early years

Editor's note—In the spring of 2007 I was asked to address the PEITF Area Association annual meetings and attempt to answer the question “What gains have been made by PEITF over time?” What follows is the first installment of a somewhat amended version of my text. I am indebted especially to Arlyn Leard's early history of the Federation, and to Jim Blanchard, Paddy Murphy, Sterling Stratton, and the staff at PEITF.

An extract from a Report of the Board of School Trustees of Charlottetown for the period January to June, 1880, reads as follows: *During the month of February last, the teachers of the City Schools and several earnest friends of education organized as an association for the purpose of discussing questions bearing upon educational work. . . . It is expected that much good will result from the working of this institution.*” (President F. Blanchard address to membership, 1968)

According to Anna Riley, one-time General Secretary of PEITF, writing in 1967, “[in] those early days teachers were expected to be satisfied to accept the decisions of others, to be content with the lowly status accorded the teacher and the teaching profession. They had no representation on policy-making boards and committees, no means of seeking redress for grievances. (Leard 26)

The founding of the Provincial Teachers' Association of PEI by 138 teachers was an attempt to address this concern. The first constitution defined their objectives as being 1)



the promotion of the interests of education and 2) the raising of the status of teachers. Over 120 years later, the first object of the PEI Teachers' Federation is the same as it was in 1880, and the second one is similar—to promote and safeguard the interests of the teaching profession and its membership.

When the Association was founded, the annual membership fee was set at 25 cents. There were in PEI approximately 430 schools, 450 teachers, and 20,000 students. The student-teacher ratio was 42.2 to 1.

Many changes took place over the next decades. For example, in 1918 a group of teachers formed a union, primarily to fight for better salaries. This group eventually joined with the Association to form The Prince Edward Island Teachers' Union. Then in 1924 the union was dissolved and the PEI Teachers' Federation was born, although it was not incorporated until 1945. Since then it has been reorganized a number of times,

partly in response to school and school board consolidation.

So—what prompted President Marjorie Dover to write almost fifty years ago, the following:

When you become a teacher, you become a beneficiary of hundreds of other teachers, living and dead, who have built the teaching profession. If there had been no organized effort, if nobody had ever contributed time and energy to lift the status of teaching, if, down through the years, our organization had not taken the trouble to fight for improved salaries and working conditions, if it had not assisted and protected its members in times of need, how many of you, I wonder, would have chosen teaching as a career?

In the beginning, this organization was somewhat like the proverbial voice crying in the wilderness. The province was economically depressed and government, often with good reason, continually cried poor. Salaries for teachers were pitifully low—and for a long time increases were few and far between. Tenure was unheard of. Teachers in Charlottetown did not have contracts, so their positions depended upon the pleasure of the Board that hired them. Rural teachers had repeating one year contracts which could be terminated with one to three month's notice, and contracts were often terminated not for poor service, but in

order to hire a local person. With low wages, poor working conditions, and job insecurity, there was tremendous turnover in the profession. Teaching careers tended to be very short (for example, the average reported in 1949 was 8.3 years).

In the early years of the organization, teacher leaders volunteered their time, worked from home, and had no staff support. Membership fluctuated from year to year, and communication was very difficult. Maintaining teacher interest was a constant challenge, in part because Government had neither the resources nor the will to address the needs of teachers. There was little understanding or respect for either the profession or the organization.

In spite of all this, because of the commitment, persistence, and hard work of a few people, small gains were made. Initially, the greatest attention was paid to matters such as uniform school hours, summer holidays, and other still familiar issues—salaries, pension, curriculum, and the right to participate in decision making related to education. The Federation had the support of the Canadian Teachers' Federation, and sometimes other provincial groups, such as the Women's Institute. Generally, the relationship with trustees and the Board of Education was good. Gradually, salaries crept up and benefits were won. A part-time General Secretary was hired in 1940, at an annual salary of \$300, and for the first time there was someone whose job it was to look out for teacher affairs. Slowly but surely, the Federation established itself as an advocate and defender of teachers.

Teacher Rendezvous 2008

Teacher Rendezvous 2008, the first of what we hope will be an annual event, was held at the Eptek Art and Cultural Centre in Summerside on May 2. The 71 retirees who attended were welcomed by Spurgeon Robbins, Prince County representative on the RTA executive, and then President Jim MacAulay shared a few (no doubt very wise) thoughts with the group.

The rest of the afternoon featured music, comedy, and art. The well known Marcia Whelan got lots of laughs (as usual) in response to her skit "The Golden Years"—a phrase becoming more familiar to all of us. *Ernie* [Gallant, retired school principal] and *Friends*, a four-piece band with two guitars, mouth organ, and fiddle, provided an hour of music and humour—including an Elvis impersonation. Two other retired teachers—Theresa Hudson and Trudy Corbett—Hughes—also performed. By all accounts, the audience was involved, time went quickly, and people had fun!

Paula Kenny hosted the event and gave a brief introduction to some of the art and artifacts at Eptek. Works by grades 11 and 12 art students from TOSH were on display, and ArtsSmarts (a national program that provides funding to schools for projects which promote learning through drama, dance, music and the visual arts) featured work from Elm Street Elementary (woven baskets and bugs made from recycled machine parts, etc.) and École Pierre Chaisson (Acadian life—past, present, and future).

Thanks go out to the staff and volun-

teers at Eptek; to the many businesses and agencies who donated lovely door prizes (just about everyone went home with something); and especially to Bernice Arsenault (Abram's Village) and Allan Graham (Alberton) who, along with Spurgeon Robbins, were primarily responsible for organization of the event. If for \$3.00 one can enjoy music, laughter, food, gifts, and friendship, it seems like a pretty good deal!

Kings County Social

A social for Kings County retired teachers was held at the Roddy Pratt Community Centre, St. Peters, on May 21. Thanks to Queens County representative Aquinas Ryan and his committee—Maureen Solomon, Norma Douglas, George Knox, John Cameron, and Marjorie Gillan. About twenty-five retirees escaped the dreary weather for a bit, enjoyed a lovely afternoon lunch, and were entertained by Joyce McCardle, who performed a skit about her experience at a gym with a personal trainer. One can only imagine!

President Jim MacAulay was on hand, as were other members of the RTA Executive. Jim updated the group on the state of pension plan indexing and our group health plan, and outlined some of the goals that the present executive has set for their term.

If these county social prove to be popular, they will occur annually. The Queens social will be held sometime in the fall, and we will be hoping for a good turnout. Date, location, and time will be advertised later.

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This would be tentatively booked for Sept. 21; it would be 10 days, 9 nights.

Deposit of \$200/person would be required July 4, 2008, with the balance due 60 days prior to the tour.

Cancellation insurance ranges from \$115 - \$230/ person depending on your age.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Shopping at Vanity Fair Outlets in Reading, PA
- 5 nights in Amish country
- Bird-in-Hand Farmers Market & Kitchen Kettle Village
- Hershey's Chocolate World & lunch at Hotel Hershey
- Green Dragon Market
- Afternoon tea at Landis Valley Museum
- Strasburg Railroad
- Performance at Sight & Sound Theatre
- Amish country fall foliage
- Highlights tour of New York City
- Shopping at the Christmas Tree Shop
- 4 full breakfasts
- 5 continental breakfasts
- 1 lunch
- 2 dinners
- 1 afternoon tea
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If there is enough interest, a more detailed itinerary will be provided, or you can go online at the above address.

You may call Joyce McCardle 436-6960 (H) 439-7501 (cel), or Colleen Davis at The Travel Store 436-7099.

We must have our numbers in place NO LATER than June 20, 2008.

When it is decided that the tour will be offered, all bookings and payments will be made through Colleen.



Phyllis Horne

I want to thank your Executive for giving me this opportunity to briefly bring you up to date on current PEITF issues.

PEITF set up a meeting with Honorable Minister Wes Sheridan to discuss the lack of consultation about the make-up of the Investment Advisory Committee. Our membership was cut from three members to one member. Our three past (current) members—Michel Plamondon, Duncan McKillop, and Al Ledgerwood—Shaun MacCormac, and I attended this meeting, and we hope to have the committee changed to better reflect its original structure.

There has been a lot of media attention focused on the change of age of entry for kindergarten and Grade 1. My response to the media has been that we were not consulted about this decision. We would expect that there would be extra money put aside to support the Grade 1, Special Education/Resource, and Reading Recovery teachers, due to the increased number of students who have not had the full year of kindergarten preparation for Grade 1. As well, I have encouraged parents to get their child enrolled in kindergarten immediately if they plan on enrolling him/her in Grade 1 and to speak to the kindergarten teacher at the end of the year about their child's readiness for Grade 1.

The International Baccalaureate (IB) Program will be piloted at Colonel Gray High School and Charlottetown Rural High School during the 2009-2010 school year. This program is offered as an enrichment program for students who are willing to put in extra

work. PEITF will be monitoring this as teachers have expressed some concerns around workload, class size, and scheduling for all teachers in those schools.

Storm days have been the topic of the season. Because of our most recent negotiations, teachers can now choose where they work on the first day of each storm I was contacted by the media on many occasions about the number of storm days this past winter and asked if teachers should be doing professional development on weekends and/or evenings. I used this opportunity

to explain what teachers are already doing after hours and the importance of professional development. (I also told the media we live on PEI, and the reality is that we do get winters like this every few years.)

President Jim MacAulay and your executive are working hard on your behalf. They meet at the PEITF office on a regular basis and keep us informed about their issues. We look forward to continuing with this collaboration, as all of us will be your members in the future.

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2008 PEIRTA Annual Meeting—November 6—Summerside Legion.

Please put us on your calendar. Item of interest—revised RTA constitution for your approval. Info will be available for your consideration prior to the meeting.