



PA Spring Election Results

The results of the PA Election are in! Thanks to everyone who nominated a colleague or put their own name on the ballot. Here are the results:

President: Norma Chrisman

Treasurer: Ross Wittenberg

NYSUT Representative Assembly:

- Erica Brindisi (Delegate)
- Christine Miller (Alternate)
- Robin Saxe (Alternate)
- Jon-David Velletto (Alternate)

Audit Committee:

- Lisa Marie Flo
- Rich Kelly

Community Outreach Committee:

- Brittnee Mexico
- Sharon Zohne

Education & Training Committee

- Karen Getman
- Michael Kuczynski

Grievance Committee:

- Sean Davis

Internal Communications Committee:

- Tabbi Carter
- Kenny Morrison

Member Engagement Committee:

- Erica Carrock
- Kelly McNamara
- Jon-David Velletto

Political Outreach Committee:

- Melissa Barlett
- Liz Doherty
- Alan Hazen

Research & Records Committee:

- Bedour Soliman

New Member Committee:

- Kathy Kotary
- Sharon Zohne

Social Justice Committee:

- Belinda Alvarado
- Melissa Barlett
- Shahida Dar
- Pat Gosier
- Denicqua Holmes
- Michael Kuczynski
- Sam McManus
- Kate Polivka

Negotiations:

Faculty:

- Shahida Dar
- Aaron Fried
- Sam McManus

Staff:

- Patti Antanavige
- Brandon Horender
- Yue Riesbeck

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Have a great summer!

panorama

EDITORIAL POLICY

Panorama is the voice of our local. In addition to the PA website (www.mvccpa.org), email, and bulletin boards, Panorama is a principal vehicle for bringing you, on a regular basis, information on the views and activities of our members.

We welcome articles by, for, and about PA members of union-related issues and concerns as reflected in NYSUT and AFT activities as well as in the purpose and functions of the PA's standing committees: Community Outreach, Education & Training, Grievance, Internal Communications, Political Action, and Research & Records.

All submissions are subject to the review and acceptance of the Editor and/or Internal Communications Committee. We do not accept articles that make personal attacks and we reserve the right to edit articles for length. We look forward to hearing from you.

PUBLISHER

MVCC Professional Association

PRESIDENT

Norma Chrisman

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS CHAIR

Robin Saxe

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WEBSITE

www.mvccpa.org

Prez Desk

What every community college member should know about ...

Collective bargaining

Public employees in New York State have the right to be represented by unions and to bargain collectively with their employer for salary, benefits, and other terms and conditions of employment. This right should not be taken lightly. It did not exist in New York until the legislature enabled the Taylor Law in 1967, and it does not exist today for public employees in 17 other states.

Virtually all community college faculty and professional staff in New York State have exercised their right under the Taylor Law to organize and to negotiate collective bargaining agreements with their employers. A copy of your agreement can be found on our website at mvccpa.org.

Because community colleges are governed by both their own board of trustees and often by a sponsoring county (Oneida County in our case), or other sponsoring entity, there may be involvement by one or both entities in the negotiations process. This "joint employer" status may require approval of collective bargaining agreements by both the College's board of trustees and the county legislature.

Some of you may recall, a few contracts ago, the MVCCPA has negotiated in good faith with the College and came to an agreement on a contract. Our membership passed the proposed contract as did our College's Board of Trustees. Once the contract was brought to the county legislature, they did not approve our contracts. One of their reasons was that they were not at the table during negotiations. From that point on, the MVCCPA insists that, along with the College's negotiations team, there is a representative from the county legislature (typically the county attorney) at the table.

The Taylor Law

Before the Taylor Law was enacted, public employees in New York had no collective bargaining rights. Under the Condon-Wadlin Act, a 1947 law that the Taylor Law replaces, striking public employees were penalized by being fired. They could only be reinstated under a three-year pay freeze and five-year probation.

The Public Employees' Fair Employment Act (Taylor Law) was enacted in 1967, following a series of public sector strikes, including the 12-day New York City transit strike a year earlier. The state legislature granted amnesty to the striking employees, and Gov. Rockefeller appointed



Norma Chrisman

a committee to recommend legislation regarding public sector employee rights. The result was the Taylor Law. Its provisions include:

- The right of public employees to organize and bargain collectively with their employers.
- The right to representation by employee organizations (unions) of their own choosing.
- The requirement that public employers (including community college county sponsors) negotiate with their employees and enter into written agreements (contracts) with their employees' chosen representatives.
- Procedures for resolution of contract disputes (impasses).
- Prohibition of improper labor practices by either side.
- Creation of the Public Employee Relations Board (PERB) to administer the law.

While the Taylor Law grants public employees the right to collective bargaining, it denies them the right to strike. The penalties for striking are loss of pay for each day the employee is on strike, plus a fine of an additional day's pay for every day on strike and potential discipline for misconduct.

NYSUT is always attempting to win legislation to improve the provisions of the Taylor Law. For example, a 1982 amendment, referred to Triborough Law, mandated that if a collective bargaining agreement expires, its terms and conditions continue until a new agreement takes effect. That amendment has helped thousands of members avoid hardships when negotiations are impeded by harsh economic conditions, unruly employers, or both. This amendment definitely helped the PA on numerous occasions. Since I was hired in 2002, the PA has not been successful in getting a contract negotiated prior to the previous contract expiring. We were SO close on our last contract UNTIL COVID struck.

An earlier improvement eliminated the "probation penalty" (probation for one year) against tenured teachers who went on strike.

Consulting your union

Always consult your union when faced with choices involving matters covered by your collective bargaining agreement, such as leave and vacation use, as well as other terms and conditions of employment. Your union leadership can be found under the Leadership tab on our website at mvcccpa.org.



Barb Seaton honored by United Way

Congratulations to PA member Barb Seaton, who was honored as one of the 100 Heroes of our community by the United Way of the Mohawk Valley.

Her nominator wrote, "Barb not only volunteers frequently with UWMV, both in the past with Free Tax Prep but also with our various meal box giveaways and other projects, including CI and EFSP board but also is an amazing volunteer in our Rome community. She is a band director, a powerhouse at Rome Community Theater, and a volunteer advocate at MVCC. I know I am missing so many things she does, because she really does it all!"

Congratulations again, Barb, and thank you for all that you do for our community and our College.

PA History

Ellis Gage Searles

Alison Doughtie

Last month, past PA president Bill Perrotti reminded us of the legend that is Sam Drogo. This month, I'd like to introduce (or reintroduce) you to another PA hero: Ellis Gage Searles.

Like our current president, Norma Chrisman (who is our first professional staff PA president), Ellis was also a first, the Professional Association's first female president. After its roughly 30 years of existence, Ellis became president in the spring of 2001 and served eight years (four terms, at the time). But before she became PA president, Ellis was an active union member and served as Second VP and newsletter editor, and she was instrumental in the creation of our current organizational structure.

As it turns out, Ellis forged the template for PA presidential leadership. She was an active member of our union, our eboard, and PA leadership. She was nominated to attend and went to the NYSUT Leadership Institute, and this training, along with encouragement from PA leaders — Sam Drogo among them — convinced her to run for president.

During her tenure as PA president, the Professional Association did remarkable things. The list of negotiated contract successes is impressive: promotion salary increases; the Benefits Fund (which, as you know, pays for or subsidizes vision care; offers free legal advice and wills; and provides other NYSUT-endorsed benefits such as long-term disability insurance); the initial online teaching language — best in the state; the conversion of sick days to the health-care benefit upon retirement; a non-discrimination clause; and longevity pay.



(And despite this impressive list, I am sure it is incomplete.)

One of Ellis' greatest contributions to the PA was creating community awareness of our union and the work that we do. The strategic planning that occurred during LAP (the NYSUT Local Action Project) was essential in making this happen. Thanks to our activities at LAP (as the first community college to attend, by the way), the PA was able to create a plan for informing the community about our work, to invest in PA attire for our members who could then proudly show their solidarity within the union and the area, and to acknowledge the success of what we ultimately do — educate our students — by purchasing keepsakes for MVCC graduates. The PA has participated in LAP for a second time more recently, so you know we view it as a valuable resource and use of time.

To educate the larger, Oneida County, community about the work we do, the PA

started “Educators Meet Legislators” — a time when PA members would address the Board of Legislators at their monthly meeting and give a brief synopsis of their work at the College. The PA also produced a newsletter, The Legisletter, as a way to inform our legislators about the work of our members and of our political action within the state. Additionally, we began our process for endorsing county legislators running for office and advertised those endorsements through the NYSUT newsletter and by sending out postcards of those endorsements to every NYSUT member within Oneida County.

Within the local labor community, the PA expanded its visibility by becoming a more active participant in the CNY Labor Council and Labor Agency — roles that we maintain today. This activity exposes other labor unions in the area to the work we do, and vice versa. Ellis was also active in the local NYSUT presidents’ council — a group of mostly K-12 presidents. Although some of our issues may have been different, belonging to this group was another opportunity to build solidarity among educators and to learn from and support each other.

Ellis also increased our visibility statewide and nationally by being an active member of NYSUT’s Higher Ed Committee (“ED 39”) and AFT’s Higher Ed Programming and Policy Council, by attending the “Committee of 100” and Higher Ed Lobby Days in Albany, and by presenting budget testimony to state representatives. All of these activities encouraged the support of New York’s community colleges, their faculty and staff, and MVCC in particular.

Through her efforts, the Professional Association became a recognized and powerful union within our community. However, increased communication and visibility didn’t always translate into smooth

sailing. As you may remember, not all negotiations were rosy, and Ellis led the PA through some drawn-out negotiations. She rallied and informed our membership, organized informational pickets, and eloquently presented our concerns to the Board of Trustees. She organized members to speak to the Board of Trustees. She charged the Internal Communications Committee to “engage the membership,” and as a result, we started “Blue Mondays” (members wore “PA blue” on Mondays to show that we had started a new week without a new contract) and created the PA podcast, “News and Views.”

Open communication was always at the core of Ellis’ PA leadership. While there were certainly disagreements among the parties, she actively sought out opportunities to engage and inform the community, the president, the county, and the board about the valuable work that we do.

You should know, too, that Ellis’ union work didn’t end when she stepped down as president or when she retired. She became the PA’s chief negotiator and invaluable resource to me in my brief stint as PA president. In retirement, she was the driving force behind the effort to unionize the adjuncts and part-time professionals at the college. I am certain that without her understanding of and enthusiasm for the power that is created through united effort, the Adjunct and Part-Time Professional Association (APA) would not have happened.

Ellis’ union work was never motivated by self-interest but by the vision of what is possible with a unified membership to enhance the working conditions and lives of our members. Sam, Ellis, Norma, and others — heroes, for sure. They so beautifully illustrate what can be achieved through the belief in solidarity, passion for unionism, and respect for the work of our members.

— Congratulations, Norma! —

NYSUT Higher Education Member of the Year

Aaron Fried

We all have had a moment in our lives when the curtain gets pulled back. The things we see change us and will be with us forever.

I was able to attend the NYSUT RA this year and I would not have missed it for the world! Our own PA president, Norma Chrisman, was honored as a NYSUT Higher Education Member of the Year! Sprinkled in between NYSUT's adoption of this year's proposals were the award ceremonies. I was so excited — I forgot to even take a picture.

Norma's a big deal. But you probably know that.

During Norma's recognition, played on giant video screens, I saw one of my idols rewarded for her hard work during the pandemic. I think we all can remember that fondly. I remember that night in March 2020, Norma texted me — How long do you think it would take to put all MV classes online?

Say what?

I think we all know the things that happened next, and Norma — as well as many others — completed Herculean feats of strength managing to make that happen.

But that's not the curtain I want to look behind. That's not why Norma deserved the award.

There are probably only a few people in who can appreciate how much the PA president does behind the scenes to manage the effective and fair implementation of our contract. It is a thankless job. Most times, the president is the first person you go to when you have a problem. And when you



go to Norma, whoever you are, whatever the problem, she sets out to get it solved. Norma always listens first. She questions to understand. If something can be done — she will figure out how.

So here comes the curtain.

Norma can also be the first person the college comes to when there is a problem with a member. A few years ago, Norma asked me to attend a meeting with the College. It was around late April and Norma asked if I could help her meet with the College to discuss several positions the College was proposing to eliminate during the annual budget process. Being a part of this meeting was probably one of the worst feelings I have ever had at work.

This was my first time. This is something PA presidents have been doing since there has been a PA.

The College presents positions that are going to be eliminated. Norma responds with the members' names.

This is a gut punch. This is information that

cannot be shared. This is Norma's private burden. But in that year, Norma was able to work with the College to save each of those member's jobs without the arduous and difficult process of retrenchment.

I couldn't sleep the night after that meeting. When I got to work the next day, I hand wrote a letter to Norma. I told her that the work she does for me — the work she does for all of us selflessly — that I owe her and would always work to repay that debt.

Early in the pandemic, Norma and I met daily trying to figure out the next thing. There is no manual or playbook for what Norma does, but she always does whatever "it" is with dignity, grace, and compassion.

She listens intently, even when we are mad.

She fixes and solves, even when we are the problem.

If you want a list of Norma's accomplishments, go to her office. Look on her wall. There is a reason that every organization honors her for her work. I don't know many people who are more steadfast in executing the things asked of them as Norma.

When the TV show *Parks and Rec* came to an end, Leslie Knope gave a fictional commencement address that, for me, had a very real impact.

Like many of you, Norma is reading this for the first time when this Pano edition comes out. So Norma, this last bit is directly to you, but for everyone to see.

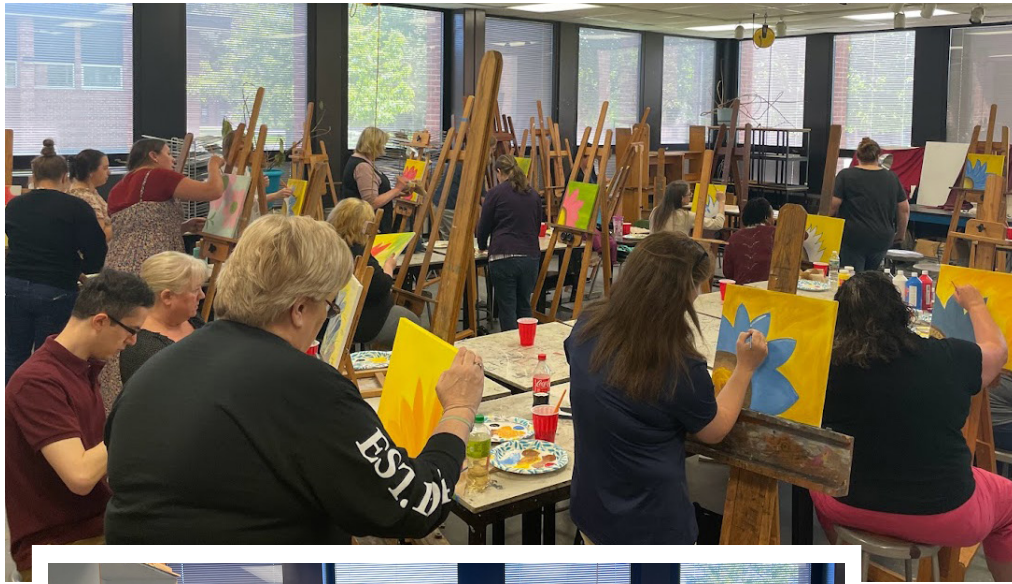
"When we worked here together, we fought, scratched and clawed to make people's lives a tiny bit better. That's what public service is about: small, incremental change every day. Teddy Roosevelt once said, 'Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is a chance to work hard at work worth doing.' And I would add that what makes work worth doing is getting to do it with people that you love."

Norma, Congratulations on being honored as NYSUT's Higher Ed Member of the Year. You are the best of us.

With you, we have all won the prize.



Community Outreach



Paint & Sip

The Paint & Sip led by Robin Saxe at Summer Institute raised \$170 for the PA Textbook Fund.



Heart Run & Walk Shadow Walk

The Heart Run & Walk Shadow Walk that took place at our campuses in Utica and Rome raised \$1,802.09 for Team Sam.

