



UPDATE

American Federation of Teachers Local 604, AFL-CIO

www.aftlocal604.org

December/January 2024-25

Fix Tier 2 Rally Together we can make a difference!



Front row left to right: Kim Ullsmith, Renee Calabrese, and Adam Harding.

Back row left to right: Kathy Stoch, Dan Mercer, Bob Goldsbury, Alexis Aguirre, Kristy Ledvina, Mary O'Malley, Sofia Thomas, Donald Thomas, Christy Harding, Stephanie Shear, Michelle Blenck, Stephanie Collins and Elaine Barlos.

On November 13th a bus left the AFT Local 604 parking lot with members & family members to head to Springfield for the Fix Tier 2 Rally!

Some of our staff had to arrive earlier to Springfield to help out on this day of action, so they had to drive themselves. Some of our members also chose to drive themselves and spend the night.

The bus arrived in Springfield around 11:00. At 11:30 the IFT had bagged lunches for pick up. The rally began at 12:15 pm and went until 2:00 pm.

During that time the rally goers heard from IFT President Dan Montgomery, Cook County Dept of Corrections, Ryan Molina, IEA President Al Llorens, and AF-SCME Executive Director Roberta Lynch.

At 2:00 pm the staff and members had a chance to talk to legislators.

If you are looking for more information about Tier 2 or the proposed changes to Tier 2, you can go to; ift-aft.org/fixtier2 or fixtier2.com/legislation



Lobby Day!!! #fixtier11

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from the president's pen...



Another Year Over...

By Dan Mercer



In 2024, Local 604 saw many changes. President Bill Briggs retired, giving me the opportunity to run for the office. Two new units joined our membership, the Kankakee Transportation Council and the New Lenox Professional Support Staff Council, adding a total of 267 new members to our ranks. As we approach the conclusion of 2024, there is much upon which to reflect—what have we accomplished this year and what lies ahead.

Let's start with the election. This past summer and fall, much effort went toward encouraging voters to help elect our endorsed candidates. IFT staff and members headed north to Racine and Kenosha, Wisconsin to canvass for the Harris/Walz ticket and Senator Tammy Baldwin. While our efforts to elect our endorsed President/Vice President candidates fell short, our work helped Senator Baldwin win a competitive race. Each candidate received over 1.6 million votes and Baldwin edged out her competitor by fewer than 30,000 votes. At home in Illinois, several Local 604 staff and members devoted over 300 combined hours toward promoting candidates and getting out the vote. One priority was electing our endorsed candidates to the 3rd Appellate Judicial District, in which Local 604 has over 8,000 members. All three won their races, with John Anderson and Linda Davenport declared victorious on election night and Lance Peterson winning a nail-biter by just 219 votes (450,585 to 450,366). In the State House, it was a priority to re-elect Harry Benton to the 97th District. Benton, a member of Ironworkers Local 444, is a strong advocate for working people who supports improvements to the State's Tier 2 pension systems. Another key race was in House District 76 where Amy "Murri" Briel edged out her opponent by 593 votes (23,897 to 23,304) to replace friend of labor, Lance Yednock. Like Benton, Briel has pledged to support improvements to Tier 2 and to defend the rights of workers. In all these races, I know our efforts made a difference!

While elections are important, they are not our primary focus. They are a means to an end. We endorse pro-worker candidates who believe in collective bargaining, education funding, retirement security and other issues to help us achieve our main purpose of helping empower our members to make their lives better. Elected officials who share our pro-worker values support legislation that aligns with our goals. Those who oppose us seek to weaken our union, undermine workers' rights and diminish crucial funding for education and public services. When anti-

labor legislators gain power, we mustn't allow ourselves to become discouraged. Instead, let us direct our energy toward our purpose in the face of those challenges. We will continue to organize, to advocate for our members and to fight for the things we believe in.

In this coming year, we will continue this work as we face some particular challenges. Since 2017, Evidence Based Funding has added at least \$350 million per year in state funding for our public schools, reducing reliance on local funding sources such as property taxes and directing more resources to schools that need it most. Continuing this progress toward all districts being adequately funded requires revenue. Our state's higher education system has been severely underfunded for decades, leading to tuition increases that leave students with crippling student loan debt and even denying access to many would-be students. Restoring that funding and those opportunities requires revenue. Providing educational and public employees with the pay and benefits they deserve requires revenue. And fixing our broken Tier 2 pensions requires revenue. In the coming year, our union will keep working to support solutions that address these needs.

In closing, I want to thank all of our staff and leaders for your efforts toward making our councils and our local stronger and more unified. I also want to thank all of our members for being part of this organization. I encourage you to participate in your union in whatever way works for you, whether it's running for an office, joining a bargaining team, attending a meeting or just by supporting your co-workers in solidarity. I wish all of you the best in 2025!



William A. Lee Memorial Scholarship

Each year the Chicago Federation of Labor awards 10 college scholarships, valued at \$2,000 each, to high school seniors through the William A. Lee Memorial Scholarship.

How to Apply

All applicants must submit the William A. Lee Memorial Scholarship Application and all required materials, including academic information and Union CEO & HS Principal certification. Learn more and download the full application at:

Chicagolabor.org/scholarships

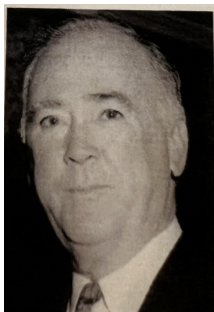
Eligibility

1. Must be a senior in high school and graduating in the spring of 2025.
2. Applicant or applicant's parent must be a member in good standing of a CFL-affiliated union.
3. The applicant must choose to enter either the Academic Competition or Random Drawing for the William A. Lee Memorial Scholarship.

APPLICATION DEADLINE Friday, February 21, 2025

The scholarship was created in October 1957 to demonstrate Labor's commitment to stand in solidarity with students as they continue their educational pursuits.

In 1985, the scholarship program's name was changed to honor William A. Lee, President of the CFL from 1946 until his death in 1984.



A Spanish-language scholarship application is available upon request.

AFT Local 604 Campaign Workshop

Tony Floriani along with Adam Harding and Kim Ullsmith, organized and presented this Campaign Workshop on October 22nd to Local 604 councils.

The workshop covered:

- ◆ Instruction/best practices for Campaign Planning.
- ◆ Structured group work to build your council's campaign outline.
- ◆ One-on-one organizing skills to implementing your campaign plan.

This class was well attended and will be offered again in the future.

Sarah McLaurin, Council President of JTHS Paraprofessionals stated, "Those of us that attended received information that we didn't know and would make our negotiation process successful. We were shown some of the important facts and tools we need to help us get a contract we want. People make decisions to have power; so, people have to be involved in order to make a difference. Being involved is the key. We need to get everyone involved and give them a job; social media, advertisement, community awarenesses. We need to improve our organization skills & improve transparency to be involved with our members. Organizing our campaign is developing power. We don't have a lot of power in the workforce; but together as a Union will give us the power we need; knowing your campaign issues, attend Board meeting, look at some of the grievances, community support and even our area churches. We need to be able to let people know actually what our needs are and what the school is not doing to satisfy them."

Jared Ploger, Valley View Council President states, "My negotiating team LOVED attending the Campaign/Organizing Training in October. Having the whole team that we will use for our negotiations this year really helped us organize, discuss, and brainstorm ideas for what we will need as we enter negotiations. Above that, it allowed us to plan for a possible narrative if we need to plead our case to the general public. The information given was very valuable as we think about what we would need in potentially needing to create a campaign for public support."



Your rights under the Workers' Compensation Act

By James M. Ridge, attorney at law

Protecting Teachers: Addressing Workplace Injuries and Your Legal Rights

As educators, you dedicate your lives to shaping the minds of future generations. While teaching is an incredibly rewarding profession, it also comes with its unique set of challenges, some of which can pose risks to your health and safety.

Workplace injuries among teachers are more common than many realized. From slips and falls and hallways to repetitive stress injuries as well as incidents involving student violence or unsafe building conditions can further contribute to injuries that impact your ability to work and maintain your quality of life.

Common Types of Workplace Injuries for Teachers

- Slips Trips and Falls
- Repetitive Strain Injuries
- Violence Involving Student Altercations
- Exposure to Unsafe Environments

As a teacher, you have the right to a safe workplace. If you are injured on the job, you may be entitled to workers compensation benefits which can cover medical expenses, lost wages, and rehabilitation services. Additionally, if your injury was caused by negligence, such as unsafe building conditions or lack of proper safety measures, you may have grounds for a personal injury claim.

Steps to Take After a Workplace Injury

- Report the incident immediately
- Seek medical attention
- Document everything
- Consult with an Attorney

At Ridge & Downes, we specialize in representing educators and other professionals who have suffered workplace injuries. We understand the complexities of workers' compensation and personal injury law and are committed to fighting for the justice and financial relief you deserve. If you or a colleague has been injured at work do not hesitate to contact us for a free consultation.



For more information on your rights contact:

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Retirees' Council News:

Phil Staley, 604 Retiree Council President

Keep your Identity safe

Our November 2024 Local 604 Retiree's Council Program was held in the Kankakee Public Library with guest speaker Jim Rowe, Kankakee County State's Attorney, who spoke on the topic of "Identity Theft". It seems even though "scams" appear obvious when they are described to us, many people continue to be taken in by the scammer. Unfortunately, taking advantage of people is not limited to online, phone, or door to door contacts.

Below are a few of the reminders shared, which we all, whether retired or not, should be on the alert for:

- ◆ Do not give out personal information such as Social Security number, birth date, mother's maiden name, or bank account information.
- ◆ Online shopping is to be done on a secure browser or a trusted site.
- ◆ The IRS, Social Security Administration and Medicare do not send information via email. They will send a letter through USPS or may return your call if you have contacted them and requested such.
- ◆ Offers too good to be true, may not be true. If you get a request to send money to someone so they can get you your winning lottery or sweepstakes money, you probably did not win.
- ◆ The online 'soul mate' who needs money for a serious medical procedure may not be a real person.
- ◆ If you sell something online and the buyer wants to meet in a secluded location, request to meet at the local police station instead.
- ◆ If contractors come around and suggest home repairs, or you just need someone to do repair work on your home, some County Circuit Clerk's offices can provide you with a list of contractors to avoid who have defrauded homeowners.

Finally, an elderly neighbor of ours recently received an email stating the sender had erroneously deposited some money in his checking account and he needed to call the number on the email immediately to clear up the error. When the neighbor contacted the number, the scammer convinced him to give them access to his bank account. The scammer then moved a large sum of money from the savings account to the checking and claimed it was the money the scammer had mistakenly sent to our neighbor. The next step for the scammer was to get our neighbor to go to the bank and get a cashier's check and mail it to an address in Thailand. Luckily, at this point our neighbor realized something was not right. The Sheriff's office was contacted, and an officer came and took a report. Be sure to report any attempts to defraud you to the proper authorities.

While I do like 'fishing', I'm not sure I like the idea of being the "Phish".

Please consider joining us at the upcoming programs:

Upcoming Meetings

Tuesday, December 3, 4:30 – 6:30 p.m. at Kankakee Public Library, 201 E. Merchant, Kankakee. TRS presentation by Sandie Benhart. All TRS members, current and retired, are welcome to attend.

Tuesday, December 10, 11:00 a.m. Luncheon at Metro Grill and Bar, Essington and Fiday Roads, Joliet. Contact the Local 604 Office, 815-725-0402 to place your reservation.

Tuesday, February 11, 2025, 11:30 a.m. Luncheon at Merishka's, Crest Hill. Sharing Books to Read and Travel Ideas.

Tuesday, March 11, 2025, 2:00 p.m. AFT Local 604 Office, Crest Hill. "Milkweed to Monarchs", Ellen Green, Wildbirds Unlimited.



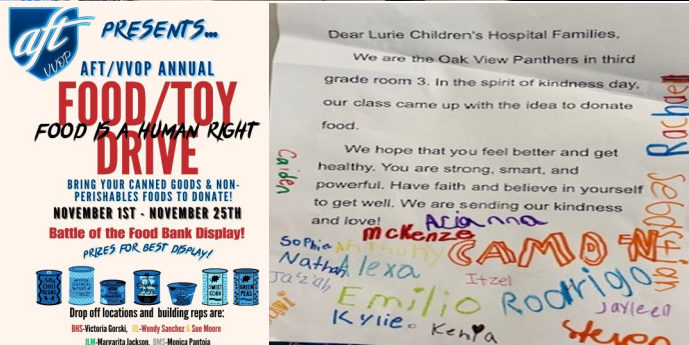
Holiday Food Drive for AFT Local 604 Councils

Summit Hill Food Drive



Valley View Office Personnel (VVOP) along with teachers, students and community members

had four schools collecting food and toys for Lurie Children's Hospital in Chicago. We collected over 50 boxes, and one of the schools extended the spirit of competition to the classrooms by offering a pizza party to the grade level with the most participation (this school collected about 33 boxes alone!). I included the flyer that one of our office personnel volunteered to put together, along with a Canva Video of the displays. There was a competition of displays added to the fun as well. One of the elementary schools had the students sign a letter to the families. We are thankful to be a part of the food drive, and offer this community outreach to local families in need.



Joliet 86 Support Staff

This donation was made to Morning Star Mission



Park Forest Food Drive

Our council members worked with our student organizations (NJHS, FFA, and Student Council) to collect food for the food drive. The food packaged up was enough to provide Thanksgiving food to a family of four for 9 families at Michelle Obama School.

There was additional things sat out during teacher conferences for parents to take what they needed. Any left over food will be sent to an organization for refugees.



Tinley Park ESP Union..Central Middle School

Their donation went to the Tinley Food Pantry, Together We Cope.



Homer

Certified and Support staff unions collaborated again on this year's food drive. Special thanks to Erin Sichek for collecting from each building and delivering to the FISH Food Pantry in Lockport.



Park Forest Receives Award from Enchanted Backpack

Samantha Loughlin, a District 163 School Psychologist and Park Forest Council member, applied for donations of school supplies and other items through an organization called Enchanted Backpack, a charitable organization that, to date, has invested over \$3,600,000 in 350+ schools in 10 counties throughout Northern Illinois and Northwest Indiana. Any school with at least 50% of students eligible for the Federal Free/Reduced Lunch Program is eligible for consideration. Through online applications and virtual interviews, District 163 was selected to receive donations for all 5 primary, middle school and junior high buildings! The average Mobile Van delivery to a school of 400 students has a retail value of \$40,000. Donations include school supplies, winter jackets, hats, gloves, underwear, deodorant, toothbrushes, books, shoes, earbuds, board games, recess equipment, art supplies, incentive items and the list goes on! The first delivery arrived Tuesday, October 22nd at 21st Century Primary Center. Students and staff lined the sidewalk in front of the school and cheered with excitement as two large vans loaded with supplies arrived. The remaining deliveries will follow in the coming months, ending with Michelle Obama School on Thursday, February 20th, 2025.



New Lenox Professional Support Staff Achieves Tentative Agreement

On Tuesday, November 19, the New Lenox Professional Support Staff Council, Local 604's newest council, held a rally for a fair contract prior to the district's Board of Education Meeting that evening. Union and community members packed the meeting and several spoke to encourage the board to agree to a fair contract.

Third year paraprofessional and Council President, Rachel Tuley, is a life-long resident of the community. Both she and her daughter attended schools in the district and her son is a student there today. She knows firsthand the difference that dedicated, caring support staff make working with kids. She said, "Now is the time for the board to show us how much they appreciate us...by giving us higher pay. We are not making a livable wage right now."

After the board action, the parties met to negotiate on December 4, 2024 and reached a tentative agreement they hope to ratify by a vote of union members before winter break. The board team proposed a much-improved offer after seeing the outpouring of community support in November. Including retro-pay from the start of the school year, the agreement will raise wages an average of 11% in the first year, and 26% in total over 3 years. It also includes a long list of improved working conditions and workplace protections.

Members of the negotiating team, Rachel Tuley, Keith Hospodar, Chris Groch, Karen Rohn, Liz Lysik, and Kathy Furtek are deeply grateful for all the support from members and the community. They were assisted by Field Service Director, Tony Floriani, who began working with the group at the beginning of their organizing effort 18 months ago. Congratulations to the team and the members for achieving this tentative agreement!



Congratulations!

Richard Manley Scholarship Winners

Richard Manley Scholarship Winner for current support staff goes to, Maria Arias!

Maria works at Joliet 86 as a Paraprofessional. She is currently pursuing a degree in Early Child Development.

Richard Manley Scholarship Winner for current professional educator goes to, Sara Green!

Sara works as a 4th Grade classroom teacher at John F. Kennedy School in Spring Valley.

She is pursuing a master's degree in Teaching and Learning w/ a concentration in English as a Second Language.



From all of us at AFT Local 604,
we wish you a wonderful
Holiday Season to you and your
Family!

Dan

Darlene

Kristy

Sam

Renee

Tony

Adam

Sean

Katie

Todd

Kim

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UPDATE

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