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Rita Smilkstein returns to the chapter executive board!

Rita Smilkstein has agreed to fill an open director position on the chapter's executive board after an absence of some six years. The position had been open since last May when officers and directors were elected to two-year terms at the annual meeting. Her term of office will run from December 3, 2013, until the spring of 2015, when new elections will be held.

She was on the chapter organizing committee in 2003 and is a charter member of the chapter. She previously served on the executive board from the chapter's inception in 2003 until 2007, when she stepped down. Welcome back, Rita!

We asked her to tell us about herself, and here is what she told us.

I'm dedicated to being an educator By Rita Smilkstein, Director



I started teaching at North Seattle C.C. in 1970, right after the state community college system was created. At that time, about 70% of the community college faculty statewide were part-timers paid by the in-class hour, with no compensation for any out-of-class work – like preparing for class and correcting student work, which took hours and hours, especially for English teachers like me. We could teach no more than a two-third load, which meant about 50 to 60 students a quarter – which meant about 50 to 60 essays to read and respond to every week. That's the way it was for all untenured, who never would be tenured, part-time faculty.

I joined our AFT union (SCCFT, Local 1789), and we started what became a state-wide organization of community college part-time faculty: Northwest Part-Time Instructors Association (NWPTIA). We recruited one of our part-time law instructors to write a piece of legislation that we then lobbied the hell out of down in Olympia and across the state. The legislation, which was passed in 1973-4, allocated \$3.5 million for the community colleges to pay equal wages for equal work. However, only those colleges with a strong union were able to negotiate that money for that purpose. Fortunately, our union not only did it but also negotiated that part-timers who had worked at the college continuously for three years would become full-timers. This is how I became a full-timer in 1974. And I taught at NSCC until I retired in 1998. During those years, I was also president of our local for a few years;

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was elected to the Executive Board of the King County Labor Council, AFL-CIO; and participated in the WFT.

While teaching, I got my Ph.D. at UW in Educational Psychology, and since I retired from NSCC, I've had four books--two were co-authored--published on teaching the way the brain learns. I've also been giving talks on this subject at colleges and conferences around the country; in March I'll be presenting again at the Teaching Academic Survival Skills (TASS) conference in Florida. Also, after I retired from NSCC, Western Washington University's Woodring College of Education invited me to teach in their Master in Teaching (MIT) program. Currently, I teach two or three courses a year -- one each winter, spring, and summer quarter--at their Everett CC campus. And now I'll be serving once more on the retiree chapter executive board, which fulfills my lifelong dedication to being an educator. So thank you!

What's happening to our memory these days?

In 2009, the National Institute on Aging published an article, "[New research illuminates memory loss and early dementia](#)," including the following table that we think may be of interest to you:

Telling the Difference Between Normal Forgetfulness and Memory Loss

Normal Age-Related Memory Loss	Memory Loss in MCI*	Memory Loss in AD**
Sometimes misplaces keys, eyeglasses, or other items	Frequently misplaces items	Forgets what an item is used for or puts it in an inappropriate place
Momentarily forgets an acquaintance's name	Frequently forgets people's names and is slow to recall them	May not remember knowing a person
Occasionally has to search for a word	Has increasing difficulty finding desired words	Begins to lose language skills and may withdraw from social interaction
Occasionally forgets to run an errand	Begins to forget important events and appointments	Loses the sense of time; does not know what day it is
May forget an event from the distant past	May forget recent events or newly learned information	Has seriously impaired recent memory and difficulty learning and remembering new information
When driving, may momentarily forget where to turn, quickly orients self	Becomes temporarily lost more often; may have trouble understanding and following a map	Becomes easily disoriented or lost in familiar places, sometimes for hours
Jokes about memory loss	Worries about memory loss; family and friends notice lapses	May have little or no awareness of cognitive problems

*MCI = Mild Cognitive Impairment; **AD = Alzheimer's Disease

The table was adapted from the book, *The Johns Hopkins White Papers*, by P. Memory Rabins (2007).



State Supreme Court delays COLA ruling, and AFT WA sets 2014 legislative agenda By Mary Hale, Treasurer



COLA Lawsuit. After two lower courts ruled, in part, that TRS 1 and PERS 1 pensioners were wrongfully denied a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for

2011-2012 by the state legislature, the state appealed those decisions to the State Supreme Court. Arguments before that court occurred in late October 2013. Representatives of the petitioners speculate that the Supreme Court will not decide the case until after the end of the 2014 legislative session.

The Retired Employees Council, Washington Education Association, and Washington Federation of State Employees are the lead groups in this lawsuit on behalf of TRS 1 and PERS 1 pensioners. The wheels of justice grind slowly.

Many of our members are in the TRS 1 pension plan, and others are the spouses of those in the PERS 1 plan (numbers unknown).

2014 Legislative Agenda. AFT Washington has set its 2014 legislative session lobbying agenda (a "short" session, probably no more than 60 days). Lobbying will be focused in six areas:

- Support I-732, Funding Cost of Living Adjustments. Not funded for the past two biennia, and the savings for not funding them is used to balance the state budget.

Support HB 1348, Local Bargaining for Increment Funding. Local funds could be

used for step increases.

- Support Step Increases (Increment Funding).
- Support legislation to fully fund the prototypical class-size-reduction model of I-728.
- Support HB 1817, The Washington State Dream Act, to allow young people to be eligible for the State-Need Grant and College-Bound-Scholarship programs.
- Fend Off Any Revival of SB 5905 which is a push to remove part-time state employees from the state health care benefit programs and into newly established exchanges under the Affordable Care Act.

To assist in these lobbying efforts (Hotline calls and emails to your legislators, etc.), please contact **Kristin Elia**, AFT Washington Political Organizer, at kelia@aftwa.org or 206-432-8085.

COPE at Work. In early preparation for a "heavy" election year (all state house positions and one-half of all state senate positions), AFT Washington's Committee on Political Education (COPE) met in December 2013 to discuss

- Possible changes to the candidate questionnaire
- Possible changes to the scoring (weight) of each question on the questionnaire
- A work-completion timeline





The Boeing pension issue and us

In early November last year, Boeing promised the Machinists' Union members at the company that if they would agree to an extension of the collective bargaining agreement then in place from 2016 to 2024, the company would build the new 777X jet and its advanced wings in the state of Washington. On November 13, union members rejected the company's offer. Their chief objection was Boeing's proposal to end in 2016 the defined-benefit retirement program in which all members were participating and replace it with a defined contributions program.

In December, the company submitted a request for proposals from states interested in carrying out the 777X work and resumed talking with the union. On December 12, the company made its "best and final offer" to the union's leadership, who rejected it and insisted that there was no need for a second vote. In this second offer, the company did not modify its proposal for changing to a defined-contributions retirement program.

Nine days later, on December 21, the Machinists' International Union ordered the local union's leadership to conduct another vote on January 3, 2014, and to allow for absentee ballots because some members would be on holiday vacations.

The vote was conducted on January 3, and the membership approved the contract extension by a margin of 51% to 49%. (Source: [The Seattle Times](#), Jan. 4, 2014)

At Thanksgiving time after the first vote was conducted, **Michael T. Harves** submitted an article to the *Retiree Newsletter*, responding in part to the vote and reflecting on his own experience with pension plans during his teaching career. On the day following the second vote, **Ross Rieder** submitted his own article on the matter.

Both articles follow.

Let us give thanks!

By Michael T. Harves



Roger Carlstrom called me the other day, and I was anticipating a great joke or a good story, but instead I got an assignment. He asked me to write

an article for this newsletter, and those of you who know Roger also know that he does not take "No" for an answer. So now I had to deliver and was at a loss for a decent topic. Then along came Boeing, Inc.

I will not get into the issue of the tax breaks for Boeing and other perks from our governor and legislature. That is for others much wiser and closer to the issue. But I do want to speak in support of our brothers and sisters in the Machinists' Union who turned down a contract that asked them to give breaks and perks to Boeing. Tim Egan has a great piece about it in the November 14, 2013, *NY Times*, entitled "[Under My Thumb](#)":

What Boeing's riveters, line-assemblers and welders want is a thimble of respect. People have been building flying machines in this region since young Bill Boeing rolled seaplanes out of a barn nearly 100 years ago. The machinists didn't ask for hefty pay raises or new benefits as a condition to keep the much-promoted 777X production in this region. They just wanted to preserve what they had — jobs that could pay upward of \$80,000 a year, with a guaranteed pension.

And here is the thesis of my article: "They just wanted to preserve what they had (and been

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promised in earlier contracts),” and shouldn’t you and I be thankful that we got to retire on our terms? I am, and I have my unions (three in my career) to thank for it. I was a member of a teachers’ union in Australia that even included the headmasters (read principals). I earned a good wage, a pension plan, and the respect of my community.

When I started teaching in Washington State in 1977, my union (yes, that other one but you “dance with the one who brought you”) won the right to include the new hires in TERS I, which helps support me now. After starting at Yakima Valley Community College, I got great advice from AFT members about switching to TIAA-CREF, which is now icing on the cake. So, as I write this just before Thanksgiving, I want to give thanks to unions everywhere and just wish Boeing (and others) would give thanks too.

Michael T. Harves taught science and math in Queensland, Australia, from 1975-77; physical and biological sciences at Davis High School in Yakima from 1983-1992; and then biology at Yakima Valley Community College, from which he retired as Faculty Emeritus in 2010.

Three cheers for Mike Harves! By Ross Rieder, President



This space was to be filled with an article/editorial about the situation between the workers who build airplanes at that little factory by the river in Bigtown on the Sound.

One of the perks, or dangers, in being president of an organization like ours is that it is full of better writers than this one. I was going to write about the Boeing deal. Good job, **Brother Harves**.

Of course, I have a few words to add – about the bloody gall of the attack made by our state’s largest employer. They are experiencing the highest level of profit they have EVER experienced in their history. They have 3,700, or is it 3,900 orders to fill on existing planes. What is their problem? From whence comes this hubris!

Why do they attack the people who made them rich?

When I was in high school (Eisenhower HS, Yakima, first graduating class), the son of one of the local ministers of an upper middle class Yakima church said, in my presence, that “it takes a person with an IQ of 92 to run the average small business.” At the time, I thought quietly to myself that that was pretty harsh.

Ever since, I’ve noticed that something happens to management, whether corporate or government, including education, to those who purport to lead us. (My dad, who taught in Yakima 30 years, turned down administrative assignments with “I’m here to teach.” – kinda like “I’m here to build the best planes.”)

Unfortunately, there is little political will from our corporate culture to do much about it. That’s all I wanted to say. Good on you, Teacher Harves.

Caregiving & advocacy are a calling By Jackie Herum



Since retirement in 1998 I have devoted much time and energy to care giving and to advocating for people with the serious and persistent mental illnesses, clinical depression, manic depression (a.k.a. bipolar affective disorder – its newer

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name), and schizophrenia. Ah, this sounds serious, and it is.

I'm a long-time member, since 1996, of our Kittitas County Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities board and that same year I became very involved with NAMI (the National Alliance on Mental Illness) at its local and state levels. I have met many wonderful, kind, hard-working people through this work.

You may have heard about the 2009 federal suit in which the plaintiffs, ten children represented by Disability Rights Washington and Young Minds Advocacy Project and other groups, claimed the state wasn't doing enough for young people with mental illness. The suit was settled on December 19, 2013, and both sides, the defendant being the Department of Social and Health Services, agreed that enhanced mental health services needed to be provided – and in the community. David Carlson, a lawyer representing the ten children who brought the class-action suit, said, "It's a complete overhaul of youth mental-health services for Medicaid-eligible (children). It's a sea change."

Is there a problem? Yes, the cost will be about \$75 million every two years. The 2014 legislature must provide the funds. Advocates will be watching to make sure the money is not taken from other mental health programs.

A major problem is "boarding," which happens when a person is involuntarily committed for inpatient psychiatric treatment and there is no bed available in the state for that person. The person who desperately needs inpatient treatment is "boarded" in an emergency room, awaits room in DSHS offices, or is simply "let go" because there is no place for him or her.

These people need help *now!*

Can we do better for them? Will the legislature be willing to provide funds for such services,

preferably in the communities in which they live?

Please be aware of the plight of patients and their families during the 2014 legislative session and be willing to contact your legislators to request needed services.

Jackie Herum began teaching as an adjunct faculty member at the "advanced age" of 50 for Central Washington University, where she taught ESL for several years and then taught the research-composition class. She was there from 1990 until 1998, when she was unceremoniously told at the end of the winter quarter that she should not return for the spring. She then turned to other things, as you can see from her article.

Life, then and now By Roger Carlstrom, Editor



Rita Smilkstein's account of her life devoted to education on pages 1 and 2 above has prompted me to reflect on my own life as an adult.

I taught English for more than thirty years at Yakima Valley College, was very active in the teachers' union for almost all of that time, and retired over fifteen years ago. When I look back now, my time at the college seems far away; the college was another world, a world with which I am now no longer familiar.

I loved learning how to teach, and it took me about twenty years to reach the point where I thought I knew what I was doing. I loved learning how to be an effective advocate for faculty members. I loved trying to improve working conditions for them, trying to create an environment in which teachers could teach with as little interference from administrators as possible. (I

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well remember Albert Shanker’s telling some of us in the state Fed once at a conference somewhere that the hospital administrator does not stand over the surgeon, telling him to cut a little to the left.)

There were many events, large and small, that made my professional life in teaching and union advocacy rewarding. It was a life fueled by adrenaline. For the most part, I thrived on stress – of my own making and the making of others.

Adrenaline is not a part of my life in retirement, and I can’t say there’s a lot of stress. I miss neither of them. The loves of my professional life have been supplanted by new ones: Having the time to read whatever I want whenever I want. Boating in the Puget Sound, the San Juan Islands, and the Gulf Islands. Volunteering as a mediator for the local dispute resolution center. Editing newsletters, both this one and another one for the yacht club to which I belong. Helping a former colleague and close friend to edit books that she has written.

Fundamentally, retirement has proven to be a life in which I owe my soul to no one but myself – and to my wife **Connie**, of course. That, perhaps, is the greatest difference between this life of mine now and my life at the college. Each life, in its turn, has been worthwhile, but I prefer to stay in the life I have now. I wouldn’t go back.

A note regarding links to sites on the internet

A large majority of our members prefer to receive the *Retiree Newsletter* through the mail rather than electronically. That can cause a problem when it comes to material in the newsletter that relies on or refers to sites on the internet. How can we provide access to these sites for our hard-copy readership without printing the full internet address, which in many cases can seem to be miles long?

The approach we’ve taken here is to establish “hyperlinks” with sufficient information that a hard-copy reader could access sites through a search engine. (Such hyperlinks appear in blue and are underlined.) Alternatively, the reader could go to the chapter’s web page (<http://wa.aft.org/retirees>), where the first item that appears is “AFT Washington Retiree Chapter Newsletter.” By clicking on that item, the hard-copy reader would gain access to pdf versions of the newsletters we’ve published. It would be simply a matter of selecting the appropriate newsletter issue, finding the particular hyperlink in which the reader had interest, and then clicking on it. *Voila*, the reader would be at the site in question.

For back issues of the Newsletter, go to <http://wa.aft.org/retirees>

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