



# THE EDUCATOR

Newsletter of the Arlington Teachers' Association

VOLUME 13, ISSUE VII

JUNE 2024

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

### Member Spotlight 2

Read about Eve Papp and the New Paltz Pride Coalition.

### Renegades Game 3

Sign up for the August outing.

### Ron Higgins 4

Learn about the history of the ATA and the service of Ron Higgins.

### What's Going On? 6

Member accomplishments are highlighted.

### Pride Parade 7

ATA members attended the annual event in Poughkeepsie.

### Calendar and Announcements 8



## Thank You, Ron Higgins

Each June we celebrate the ATA retirees who are ending their tenure with Arlington, and this year we also have another sort of double retiree to recognize. If the name Ron Higgins isn't familiar to you, it should be.

Perhaps he was your math teacher if you graduated from Arlington any time between 1965 and 2004. Or maybe he was your colleague. He was our union president from 1978 until his 2004 retirement, and after that he became the chair of the ATA's Welfare Trust committee. This June he is finally retiring for good.

As you will read on pages four and five of this newsletter, Ron is the ATA, and the ATA is Ron. He was here for the birth of our official bargaining

unit, and is responsible for many of the ATA's contractual benefits and organizational milestones.

Ron has been a part of the ATA family for 57 years, and his family has been a part of us too.

*As you will read on pages four and five of this newsletter, Ron is the ATA, and the ATA is Ron.*

When Ron came to Arlington in 1965 he was already married to Jackie, and they attended every ATA recognition dinner throughout the years, always cutting a rug on the dance floor. (Look at how worn those dance shoes are in the 2004 photo below at left!)

Jackie became the ATA's administrative assis-

tant in 2000, and was a beloved part of the team until her passing in 2010. After that, Ron's daughter Jacqueline became his recognition dinner dance partner (as seen in 2015 below).

Without the support of his family, Ron would not have been able to support the rest of us. Thank you, Higgins family.

And, thank you Ron. You have made a huge impact on countless people's lives. Now it's time to focus on what you enjoy doing—gardening and hosting movie nights. But don't hang up that velvet jacket and those fancy ties just yet; we hope you'll come back to join us on the dance floor again next year.

-Sam Falk,  
ATA Communications Chair



**ARLINGTON TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION**  
46 Davis Ave., Poughkeepsie, NY 12603



(845) 454-7002 • [www.arlingtonteachers.com](http://www.arlingtonteachers.com) • [ata4547002@aol.com](mailto:ata4547002@aol.com)

## Trivia Challenge

Last month's winner, selected at random from among the correct responses received, was **Kathleen Ehlers** from BES. She correctly identified **\$8** as how much would the average Arlington homeowner will pay per month for the district's 2024 capital bond proposal.

Be sure to look for the next trivia challenge in September and you could win ATA gear too!

# Spotlight On: Eve Papp

Last year Eve Papp and her wife were handing out stickers at New Paltz's Pride March, trying to drum up interest in forming a New Paltz Pride Coalition. This year Papp was at the mic opening the event, with the Pride Coalition's official logo on the Pride Festival's flier. Under Papp's guidance, the New Paltz Pride Coalition not only became a reality, but is an official 501c3 non-profit organization with over 1000 followers on social media.

To Papp, a longtime LMS Earth Science teacher and yearbook advisor, the quest to form the Pride Coalition was personal. She describes that, when she came out as a transgender woman in 2018, "... I was like, I'm out. And then was, like, where is everybody? And then there was the Pride March and festival and I was, like, I found my people. I was so overjoyed. And the next morning I woke up and I thought, where did everybody go?". Although New Paltz is a very progressive town, there was no space for LGBTQ+ people to find others like themselves. Papp is changing that.

"I am so proud of her and how hard she works on this passion project," says LMS science teacher Lauren Apuzzo. "Her students feel immensely comfortable with her and know that they can always come to her and cherish their relationships with her. She is a leader and role model to many, on

top of being a great mentor and teacher at LMS."

That being said, Papp didn't set out to be an activist. The idea to create a resource for the local LGBTQ+ community actually came about from an unfortunate incident in 2020 when a uniformed New Paltz police officer released a transphobic rap video. Papp wrote an open letter on Facebook denouncing the situation. She started going to town board meetings, and ended up connecting with that same police officer and having a

standing and respect." Over this past year, they have held many events to bring the LGBTQ+ community together, from a very successful drag brunch fundraiser, to a Halloween costume swap. Their current goal is to raise enough money to have a brick-and-mortar building. "So we're looking, we're hoping," says Papp,

"Even if we could find a very small office on Main Street where we could have something, we'd love people to be able to just walk in off the street and say, 'I have questions, can you help me?' Or 'I'm looking for community, can you help me?'".

To learn more about the New Paltz Pride Coalition and how to help them meet their goal, visit [www.newpaltzpridecoalition.org](http://www.newpaltzpridecoalition.org).



Photo Courtesy of Eve Papp

LMS Earth Science teacher Eve Papp (right) attended the NYS Pride Brunch at the Governor's mansion on June 5 with fellow New Paltz Pride Coalition board member, New Paltz deputy mayor Alex Wojcik.

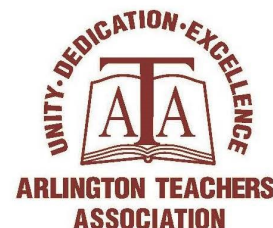
**Learn more about the New Paltz Pride Coalition at [www.newpaltzpridecoalition.org](http://www.newpaltzpridecoalition.org)**

meaningful conversation with him. They came up with the idea to start a center for transgender people who had been kicked out of their homes. Due to various circumstances, that idea didn't come to fruition, but the seed had been planted.

The mission statement of the New Paltz Pride Coalition states, "We are committed to creating a community that is rooted in acceptance, inclusion, under-



## Arlington Teachers' Association Day at the Renegades!



**Hudson Valley Renegades vs. Rome Emperors  
Heritage Financial Park**

**Sunday, July 21, 2024 @ 2:05 p.m.**

***Sunday Family Fun Day--Bring your dog, face painters, balloon artists, and more!***

The Arlington Teachers' Association has reserved the Sloop Beer Balcony area at Heritage Financial Park. *The picnic area opens for our members prior to the game at 1:00.*

We will enjoy an all-you-can-eat grill for two hours. The menu includes hamburgers, hotdogs, macaroni and cheese, salad, cookies, and soft drinks.

*Only \$25 for adults and \$15 for children (under three years old are admitted free)!*

The price includes a ticket to the game, exclusive access to the right field picnic facility, and bracelets for all kids to have access to the Fun Zone.

---

**The Arlington Teachers' Association at Heritage Financial Park  
Sunday, July 21, 2024**

Member's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Adults Attending \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$25.<sup>00</sup> each

Number of Children Attending \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$15.<sup>00</sup> each

Total Amount Paid \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Method: ☐ Check ☐ Cash ☐ Venmo

*Please make checks payable to The Arlington Teachers' Association, or  
Venmo @ata4547002, and include your name and "Renegades" in the memo.*

*Send this form and payment to the ATA Office by July 12 to register.*

*(Form is needed even if payment is electronic. Thank you!)*



# A Life In the ATA: Ron Higgins

## WHY WE MUST SAY "NO" TO SIX CLASSES By Ron Higgins

After over 15 sessions of bargaining, the ATA Negotiating Team has been unable to get the District to agree to reinstate 5 classes for all teachers. The District's sixth class proposal still remains on the table and reads as follows:

"The District at the discretion of the Building Administrator, may assign a sixth period of instruction to special teachers of Art; Home Economics; Industrial Arts; Middle School General Music; Physical Education; Remedial Reading, Writing and Math; and Resource Room Teachers."

The intent of the District's proposal is financial savings:

1. For every 5 teachers assigned to a sixth period of instruction, one full time teaching position or its equivalent will be abolished, resulting in staff layoffs. The District's proposal along with declining enrollment could result in a reduction of 25% of our present secondary staff.

2. Teachers assigned a 6th period of instruction will increase their work load by 20%. Also, those teachers remaining to do supervisory assignments will pick up the extra load. Teachers could also be assigned outside their area of certification. No teacher with low seniority will be safe from layoff.

We must unite to convince the District of the futility of pursuing the 6th period of instruction.

**ATA Officers' Newsletter,  
October 1983**



ATA members picket the superintendent's office in September 1974

No involuntary transfers. A sick bank. Welfare Trust. Free healthcare for life upon retirement. All of these incredible benefits that ATA members enjoy might never have come about if not for the influence of a high school principal named Clark Gage in Waverly, New York in 1960. In that year a young Ron Higgins was about to graduate high school and enter military service, as his father and brother had done before him. Except one day his principal pulled him aside in the hallway and told him that he didn't think the service was the right path for Ron; he was going to call up Syracuse University and get Ron admitted. And he did. And instead of joining the military, Ron Higgins went on to become a math teacher, and then the

ing the military, Ron

Higgins went on to become a math teacher, and then the

ATA's president for 26 years, during which all of those benefits were negotiated.

There was one more instance of serendipity (with a dash of Higgins's early sense of labor rights) that directed Higgins's

path to Arlington. In 1965, upon finishing college, he applied for positions at both Arlington and Tioga Center in upstate New York. He accepted a job in Tioga, but during that first year he was told that the next year he would have to teach not only the usual five sections of math, but also a section of science. Although it was his first year teaching, and he was newly married, Higgins threatened to quit if they increased his course load. That did happen, but Arlington was in need of a math teacher, and although he hadn't reapplied, Higgins was offered a job. He retired from Arlington 38 years later.

That early resistance to teaching more than the usual course load is only the first instance of Higgins standing up for a teacher's rights, though a few years would go by until state labor laws would be enacted that allowed him the power of collective bargaining.

Higgins started teaching math at Arlington Junior High (the current Arthur S. May building) in 1965. When the new LaGrange Junior High building (the current LaGrange Middle School) opened in 1967, he moved there, along with social studies teacher Gadlin Bodner, a New York State Teachers Association (NYSTA) leader. It was Bodner who encouraged Higgins to become a building representative.

That same year the Public Employees' Fair Employment Act, better known as the Taylor Law, was passed. It guaranteed public employees the right to organize and collectively bargain. Prior to that, the ATA was more of a social group, holding events like the children's holiday party that we still enjoy today, and spring and fall dances. There was a mechanism for

what Higgins describes as "organized begging" whereby the group could petition the school board for amendments to things like working conditions or salaries, but if the board refused, there was no recourse.

The ATA's first official contract was ratified in 1968. At the time there were 355 classroom teachers in the district. The maximum amount of money they could earn, after 25 years of service, and with a master's degree, was \$13,893. That was after a negotiated increase of a few hundred dollars.

Higgins joined the ATA's negotiating team in 1972 during an already tumultuous decade. Many new local bargaining units had formed across the state,

***Higgins is retiring  
for good this June,  
at the age of 82,  
after dedicating 57  
years of his life to  
the ATA.***

and there was a power struggle between the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA), which were both wooing these new locals to join them. NYSUT had formed in 1972 from a merger of the AFT-affiliated United Teachers of New York, and NYSTA. The ATA had to decide between aligning with NYSUT and the AFT, or joining the NEA. According to Higgins, many in the general membership were in favor of joining the NEA, but he and the leadership team invited Al Shanker, the charismatic leader of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and NYSUT's vice president, to speak to the membership. Current ATA President Bob Maier explains, "The



Photo by Kathleen Vogt

Bob Maier (left) and Ron Higgins pose at the 2018 ATA Recognition Dinner.

fact that we went with NYSUT propelled us forward. NYSUT and the AFT developed at a faster rate. NYSUT became one of the biggest unions in the country representing teachers. We are the largest labor association (per craft) in the state."

With the weight of the state teachers union behind it, the ATA could now come into its own. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s hundreds of grievances were filed, whereas in recent times there are typically one or two a year. Maier elaborates, "Our generation has been so fortunate because every aspect of our day had to be defined. In the years after the Taylor Law, management would continue to push the envelope because previously they could do whatever they wanted."

Numerous examples of negotiations battles from those decades are described on the front pages of the high school's newspaper, *The Arlingtonian*, and in the ATA's newsletter of the time, *The Catalyst*. In 1974, ATA members picketed the superintendent's office after a nine-month negotiations impasse. In 1983 there was even a student walk-out in support of teachers when negotiations were going so poorly that ATA members resorted to "work-to-rule", which meant no after-school extra help, extracurriculars, or even writing of college recommendations - nothing outside of contractual obligations.

Higgins had ascended to the role of ATA President in 1978, and in 1979 accomplished what he says he is most proud of having done in that role—the creation of a "staff reorganization plan", or

a path through the chaos that came with the need to staff the ever-expanding district. "I had a working relationship with the district and the superintendent," he says, "It's very important to have that."

That same "working relationship" led in the 1980s to what Maier refers to as the "holy grail" of ATA benefits—free healthcare for life upon retirement. Higgins is not only responsible for that, but also the formula that is used to calculate how ATA retirees can cash in unused sick days for health care coverage for their families. When asked about Higgins's ability to negotiate such benefits, Maier says, "Ron is very talented. He would never admit it, never take the fanfare. I've never seen him raise his voice. Such an even keel; very focused, and very methodical to get exactly what he wanted." Maier credits Higgins with teaching him everything that he knows about negotiating as President today.

Another aspect of the ATA that Higgins is responsible for is the union's office. Prior to initiating the rental of office space on

what is better known today as the prohibition of involuntary transfers. Unlike other local districts, in Arlington, teachers cannot be transferred to another building simply because a principal doesn't like them, or a more senior teacher wants their position. When asked how he managed to get the district to agree, Higgins surmised that they simply welcomed

Route 55 in 2000, the ATA operated "all over town", according to Maier: Higgins's dining room table, the trunk of his car, and filing cabinets in officers' houses. Higgins collected that all into one space, making the ATA much stronger. He was even a part of purchasing the current ATA Office at 46 Davis Avenue in Poughkeepsie in 2011, doing the real estate search and working on the financing.

Higgins's time with the ATA did not end when he retired in 2004. He immediately transitioned into the position of Welfare Trust Chair. (He had been there when the Welfare Trust was first created to manage the ATA's dental plan, and then when it was expanded many times over the years to include vision care, general medical expenses, and even hearing aids.) In recent years Higgins has been known as the sharp-dresser who reports on the financial status of the ATA's Welfare Trust accounts at Executive Council meetings, but to Maier he's been much more: "We would have been in a whole different place if it wasn't for Ron. I've been so fortunate that he stayed on for me, and advised me. I see the battles that some of my col-

leagues in smaller locals in the Hudson Valley are still fighting, that I've never had to fight, because of Ron's work."

Higgins is retiring for good this June, at the age of 82, after dedicating 57 years of his life to the ATA. During a recent interview, when asked for some words of wis-

dom to impart to the younger generation about the most important reason why teachers need a union, he paused, and then simply said, "I can't imagine not having one." And it is unimaginable that the ATA could have existed, and flourished, without him.

<h2 style="text-align: center;">ATA OFFICERS' NEWSLETTER</h2>			
<small>PRESIDENT- RONALD HIGGINS 434-5584 1ST VICE PRESIDENT-EUGENE FRANK 432-7305 2ND VICE PRESIDENT-ROBERT LYON 635-2768 TREASURER-VERONICA VIGORIS 432-8500</small>		<small>SECRETARY-BRUCE BEVING 431-5224 EDITOR-WAYNE LEITHNER 431-7885 GRAPHICS-KEVIN REISER 432-4532</small>	
<small>Special Edition #1</small>		<small>ARLINGTON TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION March 30, 1979</small>	
<h1 style="text-align: center;">ATA MOBILIZES TO AID TRANSFERRED TEACHERS</h1>			
<small>A special meeting of the ATA officers and the senior building reps took place at 3:45 on Thursday, March 29, to discuss the services and assistance that will be provided to each of the teachers who have been transferred or reassigned as a result of the District's re-</small>		<small>* The movement of materials, supplies, teaching aids, and personal belongings from one building to another. * Possible aid in setting up the new classroom.</small>	
<small>also focused on the possible establishment of a special transfer aid committee by the Executive Council at its next regular meeting on April 10th to ensure that the handling of the concerns and questions of transferred teachers</small>			



## 2023 — 2024 ATA Officers

### President

Bob Maier

### Elementary Vice President

Nicolle McMorris

### Secondary Vice President

Greg Nieman

### Vice President For Membership

Steve Hertzog

### Treasurer

Dave Cordella

### Chief Negotiator

Robert McHugh

### PR Committee Chair

Kristine Jackson

### Community Action Chairs

Brendan Lawlor

Bill Mueller

### Welfare Trust Chair

Ron Higgins

### Communications Chair

Sam Falk

### Senior Building Representatives

ASM — A'Rehema Leach

BES — Christie Boydston

NOX— Lynette Battle

VFES— Gwen Moschetto

OPS — Nancy Thomas

TRP— Diana Judge

JDWR—Barbara Mackey

TIS — Heather Blatz

LMS — Bill Mueller

UVMS — Jim DeBonis

AHS — John Filor

AHS — Theresa Daleo-Stock

# What's Going On?

"What's Going on" is a monthly feature of The Educator. It highlights noteworthy accomplishments by ATA members. Do you know of a colleague who deserves recognition? Let The Educator know by emailing [sfalk@acsdny.org](mailto:sfalk@acsdny.org). We can't know what's going on at all of your schools without your help!

Congratulations to the following ATA members for their contributions to the Arlington community and beyond.

### Arlington High School

Science teachers Tricia Muraco and Gwen Saylor received Nuvance Taconic IPA Science Education grants from the Community Foundations of the Hudson Valley. Muraco will use hers to purchase suture practice kits for her anatomy and physiology class. Saylor will use hers to purchase programmable micro-bits for her physics makerspace.

Social Studies teacher Courtney Grey worked as an educational consultant for Historic Hudson Valley's new digital graphic novel, *Kofi's Fire*. The story focuses on the revolt involving enslaved people and working-class white people in 1741 New York City, told from the narrative of Kofi, the enslaved man accused of inciting the riots. She worked with the education staff and the content team to create six grade-specific lessons that follow the chapters of *Kofi's Fire*. There are three grade 6-8 lessons and three grade 9-12 lessons. The lessons should be added to the Resource section of this website by mid-June: <https://kofisfire.hudsonvalley.org/>.

### Arthur S. May School

Third grade teacher Judy



Photo courtesy of William Stevens

### Union Vale Middle

Music teacher William Stevens auditioned for, and was accepted into, the International Pride Orchestra. He will be performing with the group in New York City during Pride Month as part of a concert that is raising funds for Sage; the country's largest and oldest organization dedicated to improving the lives of LGBTQ+ older people. The concert will feature three world class conductors, soloist Thorgy Thor of RuPaul's Drag Race fame, and works by LGBTQ+ composers. The event will take place at the Manhattan School of Music on Thursday, June 27 at 7:30pm. Tickets and more information can be found at <https://www.internationalprideorchestra.org/concerts-events>.

McGuire received a Fund For Excellence In Education Grant from the Community Foundations of the Hudson Valley. She was able to purchase resources for her students to explore their own cultures and compare them to others through Historic Huguenot Street and The Red Trunk Project.

Speech Language Pathologist Allison Cortellini-Whitted organized a blood drive in honor of Danial Matatia (second grade teacher Kaitlin Matatia's son) that led to enough blood being donated to save 170 people.

Physical Education teacher Christopher Keenan was the

chairperson of the Southeastern Zone of NY-SAHPERD's Elementary/Middle School Leadership Awards Ceremony. It was held at Arlington High School on May 4. Teachers from Dutchess, Putnam, Rockland, and Westchester counties honored students who demonstrated leadership qualities and positive participation throughout their classes this year.

### Vail Farm Elementary

First grade teachers Ann Marie Howard and Mihaela Fisher transformed their classrooms

See Great on page 7

# Arlington Marches With Pride

ATA members connected with GLSEN Mid Hudson (Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network) to march in the Poughkeepsie Pride parade held on June 8 this year. For the past two years, I have had the privilege of attending Poughkeepsie Pride. Both years, I have been welcomed by the LGBTQ community, and I've been educated on many LGBTQ issues. Partnering with GLSEN and teachers from surrounding districts, we have been vocal about supporting our LGBTQ students, families, teachers, and community members.

Poughkeepsie Pride couldn't have been a more perfect day to celebrate. The light breeze, the vibrant colors, laughter, and the sheer joy on the faces of people being their authentic selves was inspiring. Attending this event really brings into perspective how important representation,



Photo by Matt Zydel

**ATA members joined others from the Arlington community at the Poughkeepsie Pride parade on June 8.**

and visibility of the LGBTQ community is in our classrooms.

Happy pride to everyone!  
May we all have, or soon discov-

er, the inspiration, support and courage it takes to be our true, authentic selves.

-Michael Ferrara, JDWR

## Congratulations To the 2024 ATA Retirees!

**Letitia Burack - AHS**  
**Jean DeBonis - UVMS**  
**Philip DeMartino - NOX**  
**Carrie Green - TIS**

**Elizabeth Handman - AHS**  
**Wendy Kane - ASM**  
**Darren Kittle - JDWR**  
**Mary Beth Mathews - UVMS**

**Renee Mavros - UVMS**  
**Deborah Pollack - LMS**  
**Anna Quinones-Leigh - ASM**  
**Jill Sitler - UVMS**

## ATA Members Do Great Things

*Continued from page 6*  
with the addition of flexible seating. They were able to do this through the acquisition of grants from the PTA, the Arlington Education Foundation, and the Community Foundations of the Hudson Valley.

Over Spring Break fifth grade teacher Gwen Moschetto was part of a group of 20 people from all

over the country who took a nine day trip with the Trafalgar Tour Company to the deep south in order to learn more about the history of African Americans. She visited Memphis, Clarksdale, Jackson, Birmingham, Selma, Montgomery, and Atlanta and attended seminars at Jackson University, the Selma Public Library and the courthouse in Sumner,

Tennessee where the Emmett Till trial occurred. She also walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge and traveled by bus the 52 miles to the Montgomery capital building. In addition, she visited the Lorraine Motel where Martin Luther King, Jr. was shot, as well as his childhood home and place of burial.

# Dates to Remember



## JUNE

- 22nd—High School Graduation, Heritage Financial Park, 10 a.m.
- 25th—Last Day of Classes (Half Day), All Elementary and Middle Schools  
Board of Education Meeting, 7 p.m., CAO
- 26th—Last Day of School



## JULY

- 5th—Board of Education Reorganization Meeting, 5 p.m., CAO
- 21st—ATA Day at the Renegades, 1 p.m., Heritage Financial Park

## 2024-2025 EXECUTIVE COUNCIL SCHEDULE



September 17  
November 19  
January 21  
March 18  
May 13

October 15  
December (no meeting)  
February 18  
April 8  
June 17



# Announcements

**Like us on Facebook or Twitter or check out [www.arlingtonteachers.com](http://www.arlingtonteachers.com) for forms, photos, calendars, and more.**

Photos of the June 21 Recognition Dinner will be posted on the website when they are available.

***Thank you to Nancy Thomas (OPS) and her husband for helping with the landscaping at the ATA Office this year!***

Anyone interested in learning more about National Board Certification should reach out to Stefanie Rice or Colleen Napora at AHS.

### Summer Hours

***The ATA officers are still there for members over the summer. While the office will not be physically open, President Bob Maier checks the ATA's email and voicemail a few times a week in July and August. Messages can be left at 845-454-7002 or [ata4547002@aol.com](mailto:ata4547002@aol.com).***