

Today

MEA-MFT

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A publication for members of MEA-MFT



From left: Mary Verploegen of Havre, Faculty Member of the Year; Kevin Bock of Helena, Public Employee Member of the Year; Deana Elder of Billings, ESP Member of the Year

'We're all public employees'

MEA-MFT celebrates Members of the Year

MEA-MFT honored our 2014 Members of the Year with a celebration March 28 in Helena. Members of the Year are leaders in their professions, their communities, and our MEA-MFT family. The 2014 honorees are:

Deana Elder: Education Support Professional (ESP) of the Year. As a computer engineer, Deana Elder keeps technology on track in the Billings Public Schools. She can relate to most jobs her members have, she says, because she has worked many of them herself.

This has helped her work for her members as president of the Billings Classified Employees Association (BCEA). "It's about making everyone's job a little better, with benefits and training," she says. Elder also serves on the MEA-MFT Board of Directors.

Elder and her husband are raising her grandson, a student with mental illness, and she is a fierce advocate for people

with mental illness, teaching parent/caregiver classes and helping educators understand mental illness.

Elder was introduced at the celebration with a letter from past BCEA president Karen Moses that began with this quote from Oprah Winfrey: "Lots of people want to ride with you in the limo, but what you need is someone who

will take the bus with you when the limo breaks down." Moses continued, "When you need to run a phone bank and no one wants to come, Deana is there. When the old computers don't work, she fixes them. When employees don't know what to do, she teaches them...."

"When facing the challenge of passing a \$122 million school bond, Deana rolls up her sleeves and leads by example: collaborating community wide, planning, and volunteering. She educates and engages her members to register, walk, talk, vote, and triumph.

"And while the votes are tallied and the 'limo-riders' celebrate, Deana is back on the bus, working on ways to thank members and voters...."

"Deana is that rare friend who will not only take the bus with you, she will pull you out of the ditch, find the bus route, and figure out a way to come up with the fare."

Kevin Bock: Public Employee Member of the Year. When Kevin Bock learned that he had been named Public Employee Member of the Year, he characteristically credited his local union. "We have a great team," he says. "It's more about my team than me."

Bock believes in teamwork. He be-
(Continued on p. 16)

Moved, motivated, fired up: RA 2014

"Super informative & super encouraging." "Energy, excitement; people were buzzing." "Like a family reunion." "It makes you feel proud of what you have done in your union and what your union can do for everyone."

That's how some delegates characterized the 2014 MEA-MFT Representative Assembly (RA). Delegate Scott McKenzie of Missoula called RA 2014 "fulfilling"
(Continued on p. 3)



Enthusiasm abounds at Rep. Assembly '14

Doorway to leadership - open at the knock

BY ERIC FEAVER
MEA-MFT PRESIDENT



To scroll through our history and see how our member/leaders are engaged, go here: www.bit.ly/meamfthistory

Want to be a leader of women and men personally and professionally dedicated to public education and public service?

Want to be a leader of folks just like you working hard every day, all over Montana, doing work that matters?

Want to grow into leadership roles in state government?

Want to be the next superintendent of public instruction?

Maybe someday, governor?

If you want to be a leader, to work with other leaders from across our state and nation, to deliberate, debate, and decide on issues good for all ...then you can.

Just get active in MEA-MFT. Become a member/leader in our union.

It's as simple as that!

Need proof?

Read this issue of *MEA-MFT Today*. It's all about MEA-MFT member/leaders past, present, and future who have worked and will continue to work together to build the largest, most progressive union in Montana and add significant value to our state.

Need further proof?

Fourteen members served in the 2013 state legislature. Do you think their engagement with MEA-MFT may have played at least some part in their elections?

Seventeen members are right now running for the 2015 legislature. Many of them will be elected or re-elected. Three additional members are hold-over senators. MEA-MFT members almost always make GREAT legislators.

Four members are right now serving on the seven-member Montana Board of Public Education. The Board of Public Education is constitutionally empowered to make the rules that govern our public schools, teacher preparation, licensure, and professional development. How do you think they got in position to be appointed?

Three members constitute half the membership of the Teachers' Retirement Board of

Directors. Do you think these member/leaders make a difference in the administration of the retirement pension plan we helped amortize and save in the last session? Hmmm . . . how might they have gotten on board?

Or how about our member who serves on the nine-member board of directors of the Montana Public Employee Retirement Administration? Do you think her appointment just fell on her head?

Then there is Denise Juneau, our superlative superintendent of public instruction, the third member in a row of great member/leaders to serve as the most important leader of p-12 education in Montana. Remember Nancy Keenan? Remember Linda McCulloch, now Montana secretary of state?

And how about Angela McLean? Teacher. National Board Certified. Served on the Board of Public Education and Board of Regents which she chaired before Governor Steve Bullock smartly chose her to be the first MEA-MFT member to be our lieutenant governor. Do you think her appointment was just dumb luck?

MEA-MFT member/leaders lead this state.

Many of our members choose to lead from within our union. They run for and hold offices locally; accept appointments to local, state, and national union committees; serve as delegates to our state and national representative assemblies; design and provide member specific professional development; sit on our board of directors; become state officers...doing all these things to position our union as the leader in full-throated defense and promotion of quality public schools and damned good government service for all Montanans.

MEA-MFT is rich with member/leaders, as these pages attest. But we always need, and are looking for more leaders. **What about you?** Engage yourself, and when you do, opportunity to do more will come knocking.

When it does, open the door, and say YES! ■



Some of the RA Bozeman delegates, from left: Kelly Jones, Christine Rasmussen, Laura Hovland, Rachel Srenar.

Moved, motivated, fired up: Rep. Assembly 2014

(From p. 1)

and uplifting.” He added, “I think everyone came away moved, motivated, and fired up to do the work that needs to be done.”

That was pretty much the consensus among the more than 300 locally elected MEA-MFT members who served as delegates during RA 2014, held March 28-29 in Helena. Delegates spent two packed days conducting the business of their state union, celebrating successes, and gearing up for the work ahead: fighting for the rights of working people, against all odds. Here are some RA highlights:

Officer elections. Delegates re-elected Eric Feaver as president, Tammy Pilcher as vice president, Rich Aarstad as secretary-treasurer, and John Bercier as director-at-large.

Business. Delegates passed dues and budget proposals. They also debated several new business items, including one they passed that dedicates MEA-MFT to support Medicaid expansion.

VIPs. Delegates heard from several dignitaries, elected officials, and MEA-MFT endorsed candidates, including: Lt. Governor Angela McLean (an MEA-MFT member), Supt. of Public Instruction Denise Juneau (another MEA-MFT member), U.S. Senator John Walsh, U.S. House candidate John Lewis, Maury Koffman of the NEA Executive Committee, and others.

Facing the storm: In one of the more moving moments of RA, delegate Scott Stiegler of Florence told fellow delegates he is growing his

hair to donate for wigs for cancer patients, in honor of a close family friend in the last stages of cancer.

After Stiegler spoke, delegate Cecil B. Crawford, a member of the Blackfeet Nation, got up and announced that he wanted to donate his braids, right then and there, for Stiegler’s project.

Someone produced scissors, and to the thunderous cheers of fellow delegates, Stiegler cut off the braids and handed them to Crawford, who promptly handed them back. Later Crawford said, “That was the hardest thing I’ve ever done. Our hair is sacred.”

In another RA moment, Crawford gave a farewell speech as he stepped down as MEA-MFT’s director-at-large. He told delegates that sometimes the Blackfeet are called the Buffalo Nation.

Like the buffalo, MEA-MFT always turns to face the coming storm, he said.

“MEA-MFT is scared of nobody and no money. I love that.” ■

Cecil B. Crawford hands his braids to Scott Stiegler to donate for cancer patients, amid a standing ovation on the RA floor. For more info on Stiegler’s project: stieglers@florence.k12.mt.us



Faces & voices at Rep. Assembly

“Seven weeks ago I was teaching in Anaconda and serving on the Board of Regents and enjoying my life. Then Governor Bull-ock called....

“I could not be more proud than to say I am a member of a union of professionals. This is an extraordinary union, and you do work that mat-ters.” **Lt. Governor Angela McLean**, MEA-MFT member

“RA charges you up. You get to know many people: state workers, k-12, etc., from around the state. It makes you feel proud of what you have done in your union and what your union can do for everyone, that people who come behind you can drink from the well you helped dig.” **Chris Alsager**, Helena delegate



RA delegates from Lockwood. From left: Lynette Larson, Jenny Fox, and Stephanie Miller.



Student delegates Erin Gammon, Tim Denney, and Julie Woolington discuss new business items.



Wayne & Karin Stanford get a standing ovation for their years of work in MEA-MFT.



Higher ed delegate Dave Shively of Missoula shows his credentials before voting for MEA-MFT officers.



From left: Probation & parole delegates Tom Fulton (Miles City), Mike Touchette (Helena), and Joe Dompier (Billings) and Montana Women's Prison delegate Fred Sparks (Laurel).



Delegate Shelby Moody of Cut Bank, one of the sergeants-at-arms, rings delegates into session.



Angela McLean



John Lewis



John Walsh

Lt. Governor Angela McLean; candidate for U.S. House John Lewis; and U.S. Senator John Walsh all spoke passionately about their support for public services, public education, and the rights of working people.

“As a millennial myself, I get frustrated when people say millennials just don’t get it. We do get it. But we get it in a different way.... The millennial generation is full of union activists, dying to get into action.” **Maury Koffman**, NEA Executive Committee member

“We’re putting No Child Left Behind, behind.” **Supt. of Public Instruction Denise Juneau**, MEA-MFT member

‘How was your first RA?’



Jim Junker: “RA was excellent. Like a family reunion.” Junker and Trista Vick-Majors were the first-ever RA delegates from MEA-MFT’s new Graduate Employee Organization local (teaching & research assistants) at MSU Bozeman. Junker is president of GEO; Vick-Majors is vice president.



Mike Early: “RA was really interesting. Most of my experience has been in the private sector. Government (jobs) are far more in need of collective bargaining rights than the private groups.” Mike is a state employee member, Dept. of Public Health & Human Services, Technology Services Division.



Jessica Malek (right): “[RA is] super informative. It’s encouraging that they’re trying to get young members involved. If we’re invested in our kids and our careers, we have to be involved.” Andrea Paul (left): “Coming here has given me more of an emotional pull. We come into the profession for a reason; it’s nice to hear that echoed.” Jessica and Andrea both teach in Great Falls.

Staff changes at MEA-MFT



Tom Gigstad retires after 31 years of service to MEA-MFT members.

Tom Gigstad, 'bedrock of MEA-MFT,' retires

Tom Gigstad is a quiet guy. But like E.F. Hutton, when he speaks, people listen. With 31 years as a field consultant under his belt, helping thousands of MEA-MFT members across the state, Gigstad knows his stuff.

Gigstad retired this June. "The real history of this organization is about to walk out the door," said MEA-MFT President Eric Feaver on the eve of Gigstad's retirement.

"The word for Tom is 'bedrock,' said MEA-MFT Executive Director Erik Burke. "If there's anything you need to know about anything, Tom's the guy you go to."

Gigstad began his career in 1974 as a high school history teacher in Frazer. ("Actually, I was the whole social studies department," he said.)

He was elected president of his local union at his very first union meeting. He served as president and chief negotiator until 1978, when he went to work in Glendive as a field consultant for the Montana Education Association (now MEA-MFT). He has been a field consultant in MEA-MFT's Missoula office since 1983.

One of the most memorable events of his career, said Gigstad, was when "I was canned as a nontenured teacher in my second year of teaching for union activity."

"It was a zoo," he recalled. "The school superintendent had engaged in sexual harassment of female staff before there was even a law against it. I probably filed as many grievances as there were teachers. Management decided they'd had enough of me."

The union secretary and another teacher were sacked along with Gigstad. Their statewide union, MEA, filed an unfair labor practice complaint on their behalf, and they were reinstated. Gigstad has dedicated his life to getting fair treatment for MEA-MFT members ever since.

"I've seen Tom gently preparing members for their arbitrations, patiently, diligently defending each and every member," said MEA-MFT Research Director Diane Fladmo. "He would always come early, stay late, and work, work, work."

Now that he's got some time on his hands, Gigstad hopes to fulfill a longtime goal of reading Homer's *Iliad* in the original classic Greek. "First

I have to brush up on my Latin, then tackle the Greek," he said.

All the best in your new adventures, Tom. You are one class act.

Heather Diehl hired as field consultant in Missoula office

Heather Diehl has been hired to replace Tom Gigstad as Northwest 1 field consultant in MEA-MFT's Missoula office.

Diehl is no stranger to union work or to MEA-MFT. She comes to us from the Montana Nurses Association, where she worked as a field representative. She was a field organizer for MEA-MFT during the 2012 elections, working with Missoula area members to help elect Steve Bullock and Denise Juneau.

Diehl previously worked at Missoula Head Start as an education assistant. She served as a leader in her local MEA-MFT affiliate, where she led her members in a successful campaign to stop the employer from slashing services for Head Start families and jobs for staff.

She is married to another public employee: Missoula fire chief Jason Diehl. She has two grown children and a two-year-old grandson. For fun, she and Jason like to kayak and spend time at Flathead Lake.

"I'm thrilled to be back at MEA-MFT," she said. "It feels like home." Welcome, Heather!

Shauna Reichelt joins Billings team

Shauna Reichelt recently was hired as the administrative assistant in MEA-MFT's Billings office. She previously worked for 17 years as the Billings Education Association's office manager and bookkeeper.

MEA-MFT and BEA run in Reichelt's family: Her daughter is an active member who works as a teacher and school librarian in Billings. "She was 11 when I went to work for BEA," Reichelt said. "Growing up in BEA pointed her toward activism."

Reichelt and her husband, John, love to camp, kayak, and bicycle. Every year they participate in a biking fundraiser for multiple sclerosis, riding from Billings to Red Lodge and back.

"I'm excited about working for MEA-MFT,"

(Continued on p. 7)



Heather Diehl, former MEA-MFT Head Start leader & field organizer, steps up to the plate as Gigstad steps down.



Shauna Reichelt replaces Pat Johnson as administrative assistant in the Billings office.

Staff changes (from p. 6)

Reichert said. "I really enjoyed working for BEA members. Now I get to broaden my horizons in the type of members I work with." Welcome, Shauna!

Pat Johnson retires

Shauna replaces Pat Johnson, who kept the Billings office running smoothly for many years, and the Missoula office before that. She served MEA-MFT members for over three decades. Thousands of members knew her as the calm, capable voice on the phone who pointed them in the right direction to get help with their workplace problems. We miss you, Pat. ■

Eric Feaver: 30 years and going strong

This year marks Eric Feaver's 30th year as president of MEA-MFT. He is currently the longest-serving president of any state affiliate in NEA or AFT.

For three decades, Feaver has dedicated his professional and much of his personal life to

MEA-MFT members and the Montana people our members serve.

Under Feaver's leadership, MEA-MFT has grown in the number of members and local affiliates as well as in strength. He has been a powerful force for working families in Montana and nationally.

What you might not know is that Feaver taught English and social studies in Helena from 1974-1984. From 1984-2000, he served as the last president of the Montana Education Association (MEA). When MEA merged with the Montana Federation of Teachers (MFT) in 2000, Eric was elected the first president of MEA-MFT.

He has a BA in government, history, and economics from the University of Oklahoma; a master's in American history from the University of Maryland; and an honorary doctorate of education from MSU Bozeman. He served in Vietnam in the 4th Infantry Division as an army combat medic in 1969-70.

This June, Feaver received an AFL-CIO lifetime achievement award at the Montana State AFL-CIO convention. ■

Representation without hesitation: our members at national events

While most MEA-MFT members enjoyed burgers and fireworks over the Fourth of July, a couple dozen MEA-MFT members traveled to Denver to represent their fellow members at the annual NEA Representative Assembly. They joined thousands of other delegates from around the nation.

Several more of our members traveled to Los Angeles in mid-July for the AFT annual meeting.

Our national affiliates are both leading the charge to strengthen America's middle class and fight the forces that would destroy unions and privatize all public services for corporate profit.

More at nea.org and aft.org. ■

NEA RA delegates from across the nation raise their hands for working people and the public good.



Important membership information

In accordance with MEA-MFT Policy 603, members who wish to withdraw their membership from MEA-MFT must do so between August 1 and September 30.

Policy 603.1. Withdrawal from continuous membership must be by written notice to the MEA-MFT president. Such notice must be given between August 1 and September 30. After consultation with the local affiliate, MEA-MFT may take appropriate action against persons who attempt to cancel continuous membership outside the cancellation period.

Welcome, Box Elder ESPs!

As we go to print, the education support professionals in Box Elder have just voted to form a union and affiliate with MEA-MFT. We welcome them to the family!

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Strong and getting stronger: MEA-MFT's Dept. of Revenue (DOR) local topped 75 percent membership recently. Shown here, DOR delegates at this year's Representative Assembly formed the biggest DOR delegation ever.



Dept. of Revenue local tops 75 percent membership

Due to the MEA-MFT state employee organizing project and a lot of hard work, our Department of Revenue Local 4993 recently exceeded the 75 percent membership mark. That's huge.

"We are excited to reach this milestone," said Kevin Bock, president of the local. "We know we have more work to do. We'd love to have all our co-workers belong and participate. We've got momentum on our side." Congratulations, DOR!

More on the organizing project: MEA-MFT state employee members have now knocked on more than 900 doors and had more than 330 conversations with co-workers about building power and solving problems in our workplaces. Learn more by contacting MEA-MFT Organizing Director Morgan Smith, msmith@mea-mft.org. ■

State employee pay plan bargaining begins

Bargaining for the next Montana state employees pay plan is underway. MEA-MFT state employee members are at the table with our union sisters and brothers in AFSCME and MPEA, working to improve terms of employment for Montana state employees.

The process is called "prebudget bargaining." It allows state employee union members and the governor of Montana to bargain a pay plan prior to the next legislative session and take the negotiated deal jointly to the legislature.

Our bargaining team kicked off the 2014 prebudget negotiations by meeting with Gov.

Steve Bullock's representatives June 11. They had preliminary discussions about wages, employer health insurance contribution, per-diem, and longevity. Bargaining will continue in late July.

We need to hear from you. What are your priorities for bargaining? What ideas do you have to improve our success and our union? Participate by filling out the Prebudget Negotiations Questionnaire at bit.ly/MEAMFTPBN. The more voices we have, the stronger we are! ■

Fourth state employee health center opens in Missoula

Great news for state employee members in the Missoula area, and also for k-12 members in the MUST insurance pool: The State of Montana opened a new health center in Missoula this summer. This is the fourth health center for state employees. As of July 1, MUST participants may use the health centers too.

The Missoula facility on South Reserve Street offers primary care services and wellness coaching at no cost to state employees and MUST participants.

The other three health centers in Helena, Billings, and Miles City have drawn rave reviews from MEA-MFT members who use them. The centers provide employees with easier access to health care and reduce overall costs for taxpayers. The centers were launched by former Gov. Brian Schweitzer.

Learn more and find out how to schedule appointments at any of the four centers here: benefits.mt.gov/pages/health.center.html ■

Degrees not Debt: Tackling the problem of student debt

Everyone deserves a fair shot at higher education. But student debt has become a barrier to the American Dream for too many families. That's why MEA-MFT's national affiliate, NEA, has launched a campaign called "Degrees not Debt" (nea.org/degreesnotdebt). The campaign reports these troubling facts:

As college costs skyrocket and federal student aid lags, too many students must borrow huge amounts of money to pay for higher education.

Last year, new college graduates owed a crushing \$27,000 each, on average. At these levels, student debt isn't just a burden, it's a barrier to millions of middle-class Americans seeking college degrees and career preparation.

Over the past 30 years, states have dramatically cut funding for public colleges and universities, forcing institutions to close programs or dramatically increase tuition.

As costs rise, students borrow more. Or worse, they simply don't go to college.

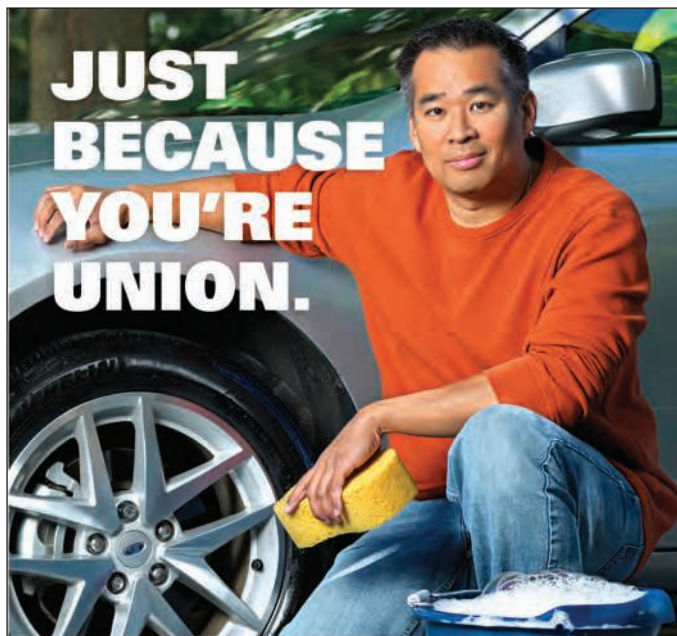
America will need 22 million more college-educated workers by 2018, and likely will fall short by 3 million.

What's the answer? NEA's Degrees not Debt campaign seeks to increase student aid, make student loans more affordable, and encourage public service through expanded loan forgiveness.

In Montana, MEA-MFT has fought for years to improve higher education funding at the state level. In recent years, we are taking a new tack: We are pushing to direct Montana Lottery money to higher education student aid.


"We worked in the 2013 legislative session to pass such a bill," said MEA-MFT Executive Director Erik Burke. "It didn't fly, but we plan to try again in the 2015 session. It often takes more than one session for a new idea to get traction. We are talking with Governor Bullock's administration about the idea as the state budgeting process continues."

Watch for more as this project unfolds. ■




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Nominations open: 2015 ESP of the Year

The MEA-MFT Education Support Professional of the Year must be an active MEA-MFT member with at least three years' working experience in a Montana school as of January 15 of the award year and continue as an employee with the district during the elected year and the school year following.

Nominees must be exceptionally skillful and dedicated, with the respect of colleagues, parents, and students.

Nominations must come from a school district employee, local union, student, or parent.

To nominate: Submit nominee's name, work site, local affiliation, address, e-mail address, phone number(s), and e-mail address of the person nominating. Include a brief paragraph about the nominee. Mail nomination(s) to MEA-MFT ESP of the Year, 1232 E 6th Ave, Helena, MT 59601. Or e-mail dgraveley@mea-mft.org.

Nomination deadline: September 20, 2014.

Our members lead the charge for better teaching & learning

Montana has some of the best teachers in the nation. And the nation knows it. That's why so many Montana teachers/MEA-MFT members are involved in improving the profession at the national level. Here is a sampling:

Montana Master Teachers: Melissa Romano's Twitter page announces her as "Mathemagician! teacher, union leader, professional development facilitator/developer and mother!"

She's also Montana's latest winner of the Presidential Award for Excellence in Math Teaching. Now this Helena teacher is a Master Teacher with the NEA/Better Lesson Master Teacher project. So is **Kara Nelson** of Bozeman.

As master teachers, Romano's and Nelson's daily math lessons for fourth-graders are posted on a free online network to help other teachers benefit from them. They are two of 130 k-12 teachers nationwide whose lessons for math and English Language Arts are posted on this web site: cc.betterlesson.com.

Montana TOYs in action: Recent Montana Teachers of the Year (TOYs) are leading the charge for quality public education nationally and internationally. **Anna Baldwin** of Arlee, 2014 TOY, recently was chosen as one of 39 teachers nationally to win the 2015 California Casualty Award for Teaching Excellence, one of public education's most prestigious awards.

Baldwin will be honored at the NEA Founda-

tion's Salute to Excellence in Education Gala in Washington, DC in February. Five finalists will be chosen from among the 39 educators to receive a \$10,000 cash award (the 2015 Horace Mann Awards for Teaching Excellence).

Baldwin is also an NEA Teacher Ambassador, developing training materials on Montana's Common Core Standards. She attended the Education Commission of the States National Forum in DC., and she went to Alabama in July for the Teaching Tolerance Advisory Board.

Eileen Sheehy of Billings, Montana's 2013 TOY, is one of the five national Horace Mann award finalists for 2014. She is also one of 33 award-winning American educators chosen as a 2014 NEA Foundation Global Learning Fellow. The honor included field study in China this June. "The trip was riveting," Sheehy said. "The impact of China on my students is going to be their future. Especially because of our economic connection, we *have* to know about China."

2012 TOY **Tom Pedersen** of Helena was a Global Learning Fellow last June and visited schools in Brazil.

When 2010 TOY **Anne Keith** of Bozeman attended the national Elevating and Celebrating Effective Teaching & Teachers (ECET2) conference in Utah recently, she was so inspired that she wrote and received a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to hold the first ECET2-Montana.

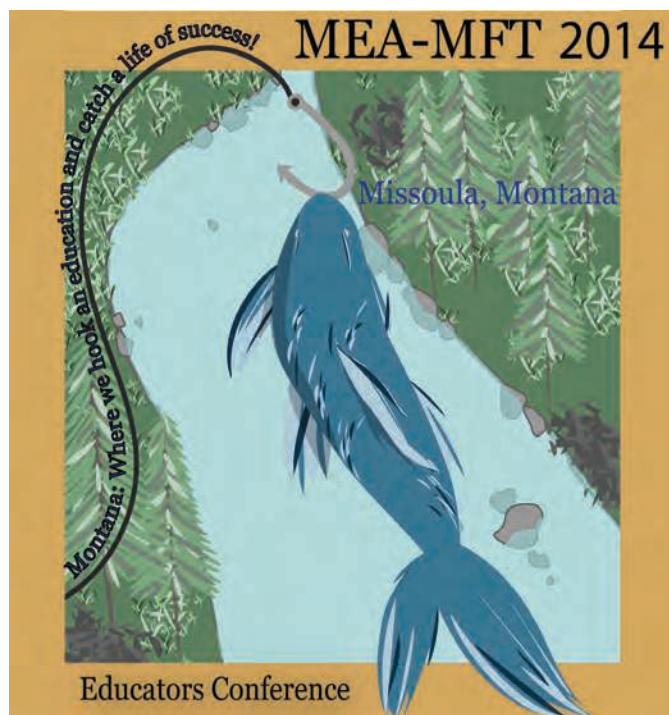
The Montana Professional Teaching Foundation and MEA-MFT helped fund this event, which took place in Billings July 22-23. The conference gave teachers from around the state tools to collaborate with, learn from, and support each other to make sure students thrive.

Helping new teachers succeed: The **Bozeman Education Association (BEA)** recently received a major grant from the NEA Great Public Schools Network.

The one-year grant will allow BEA to create a New Teacher Advisory Program, with two full-time-release teachers working directly with Bozeman's early-career teachers. The goal is to give new teachers the skills and tools they need to thrive in the teaching profession. ■

Eileen Sheehy, one of many MEA-MFT members making an impact for educational excellence this summer, traveled to China on a Global Learning Fellowship.





2014 Educators' Conference logo designed by student Tessa Johnson, Sentinel High School, Missoula. Teacher Cindy Schultz.

Something for everyone:

2014 MEA-MFT Educators' Conference

October 16 & 17, Missoula

Update your skills, network with other Montana educators, hear nationally acclaimed keynote speakers, and earn renewal units at the 2014 MEA-MFT Educators' Conference. Every year, this conference brings inspiration, information, and top-quality professional development to Montana teachers.

Find it all online: Conference program (arriving in August), where to stay in Missoula, and much more: mea-mft.org/educators_conference.aspx

It's your right to attend the MEA-MFT Educators' Conference! State law calls for closing schools the third Thursday and Friday of every October so Montana teachers can get the professional development they need to renew their licenses. Our conference is your best opportunity to use those two days well.

Early childhood education: Gov. Bullock plans to address Montana's shortfalls

Montana enjoys high quality public education, kindergarten through grad school. But we lag far behind other states in providing quality education opportunities for our youngest citizens: our preschoolers.

Governor Steve Bullock plans to address that gap in the 2015 legislative session. His program, "Early Edge Montana," will provide state funding for public preschools for four-year-olds. While the details are still to be worked out, MEA-MFT members are pleased with the proposal.

"We know that investment in the preschool years is one of the best investments any state can make. Some estimates are that every dollar invested in preschool saves \$7 in the form of less intervention, higher graduation rates, and less crime," said Shannon Bender, who represents our local Head Start unions on the MEA-MFT board.

Bender works for Opportunities, Inc. Head Start 0-5 in Great Falls, which serves five counties. She continued, "This is a long-time goal of MEA-MFT: to provide quality preschool education for our Montana kids. We are glad the governor's program will be a joint project with public schools, and we are hopeful that the

proposal will include funding for Montana's Head Starts." Montana is one of seven states that does not provide any state funding for Head Start. In the last three legislative sessions, MEA-MFT has worked with state legislator Edie McClafferty, an MEA-MFT member in Butte, to propose bills providing state funding for Head Start. McClafferty has been the chief sponsor of those bills.

"So far the legislative majority has failed to pass our bills, but we will keep working on this until we get the job done," said MEA-MFT Political Director Terry Minow. "We're not giving up on our youngest children." ■

Got a great idea? Apply for a Karen Cox Memorial Grant

Each year, thousands of Montana teachers raid their own bank accounts to buy school supplies and learning experiences for their students.

MEA-MFT's Montana Professional Teaching Foundation (MPTF) created the Karen Cox Memorial Grants to help these teachers. Grants are small (\$500) but mighty.

Deadline: Grant applications must be received by December 2 of each year. Find an application form and information here: mea-mft.org/our_foundation/programs/karen_cox_memorial_grants.aspx ■

NEA Foundation grants

The NEA Foundation funds and shares successful strategies to educate and prepare students for bright and rewarding futures.

Many MEA-MFT members have received grants from the foundation. You could join them.

Deadline for the next round of grants is October 15, 2014. Learn more at the foundation's web site: neafoundation.org/



The NEA
FOUNDATION

Hall of Fame inductees Pat Williams (left) and John Board swap stories at the Hall of Fame celebration.



On the shoulders of giants

MEA-MFT launches Hall of Fame

‘After seeing the devastating impact of mine closures on his hometown, Williams created adult education programs, job training, union apprenticeships, and worker retraining, helping hundreds of thousands of people support their families.’

This spring, MEA-MFT members inaugurated the MEA-MFT Hall of Fame to thank our heroes: the pioneers whose work and dedication have made our union the stronghold of hope that it is today.

The first three heroes to be inducted into our Hall of Fame have all been titans in MEA-MFT’s history and Montana’s progressive movement. They are Pat Williams, John Board, and the late Jim McGarvey.

The three were honored at a celebration in Helena March 27, on the eve of MEA-MFT’s 2014 Representative Assembly. Speakers regaled the crowd with touching and hilarious tales of these three heroes. Here are some highlights:

Pat Williams: “Living proof that elections matter”

Pat Williams’s entire career has been about supporting public education. He began in Butte as a teacher and retired from the University of Montana as a professor. In between, he served nine terms in the U.S. Congress, fighting tirelessly for education, pre-k through higher education.

As a Butte native who saw the devastating

impact of mine closures on his town, Williams knew education was the only path to economic vitality. So he worked to create adult education programs, job training, union apprenticeships, and worker retraining, helping hundreds of thousands of Montanans and other Americans support their families. Williams was repeatedly honored by both NEA and AFT as a champion for public education.

He also sponsored landmark legislation like the Family and Medical Leave Act, which has helped countless families in times of crisis.

“He is living proof that elections matter, values matter, communities matter, unions matter, leadership matters,” said MEA-MFT Executive Director Erik Burke, as he introduced Williams.

“This union has been one of the prides of my life,” Williams said. Even in these difficult times for labor, he added, MEA-MFT has grown and been a force for progress in Montana. MEA-MFT has helped make Montana “a progressive beacon in the Rocky Mountain West,” he said.

“When you want to know your direction in the worst fog, you can look around and see this beacon blinking off and on.”



The late Jim McGarvey

Jim McGarvey: Organizing was in his DNA

Calling Jim McGarvey a “great personal friend, mentor, and indefatigable political tactician,” Dick Barrett presented McGarvey’s family with his Hall of Fame honor.

Barrett, a retired professor, state senator, and long-time leader in the Montana Federation of Teachers and MEA-MFT, said, “Everything I know about unions, I learned from Jim. And Montana is filled with people like me whom Jim mentored.”

McGarvey built MFT from scratch, beginning in 1972, and led it for 28 years. He was a chief architect of the 2000 merger of MEA and MFT. He later served as president and executive director of the Montana State AFL-CIO.

“Jim was always out there organizing, finding new members, recruiting and training new leaders, building a bigger and stronger union,” Barrett said. “He was born with the phrase ‘the organized organize the unorganized’ encoded in his DNA.”

The union always came first for McGarvey, Barrett said. Case in point: when MEA and MFT merged, McGarvey took a back seat as vice president. “Jim, and Eric Feaver too, were putting the best interests of the union first,” Barrett said.

“That was the way Jim lived his whole life, and it’s why we are welcoming him into the MEA-MFT Hall of Fame tonight.”

John Board: Trail-blazer

“No MEA-MFT Hall of Fame would be complete,” said MEA-MFT Field Consultant Jerry Rukavina, introducing John Board, “with-

out the addition of our advocate, our trail-blazer, our friend, and my broad-shouldered junior high English teacher, John Board.”

John Board was one of MEA-MFT’s key pioneers. He served as president of the Montana Education Association (MEA) from 1976 to 1984, and became MEA’s first full time president in 1980.

Board offered the celebration crowd a snapshot of what life was like for teachers in Montana when he started teaching in Great Falls in 1959. Back then, he said, teachers had to sign a loyalty oath to get hired. The Great Falls school system required job applicants to declare their religion. Catholics had little chance of getting hired. Teachers who got pregnant lost their jobs after three months and had little hope of getting their jobs back.

“Nothing was gained without a struggle,” Board said. He became the epicenter of that struggle, fighting for teachers’ rights.

MEA-MFT members now have almost everything members didn’t have when he began teaching, Board noted. “But the struggle continues, and it always will. You are now in danger of losing everything that has been gained. Just look at what happened to public employees in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and Wisconsin.” ■

More stories and photos at mea-mft.org/Articles/on_the_shoulders_of_giants_mea-mft_hall_of_fame.aspx

‘McGarvey built MFT from scratch, beginning in 1972, and led it for 28 years. He was a chief architect of the 2000 merger of MEA and MFT.’

Jim McGarvey’s wife, Suzanne, son Tim, and daughter Seana accept Jim’s Hall of Fame award.





Your vote matters... because elections matter

Summertime is sweet and all too short in Montana. Barbecues, camping, boating, fishing, picnics...the list of fun activities is long.

But for MEA-MFT's recommended candidates running for office, summer activity means hitting the doors, talking directly to voters about the issues that matter to working people.

Want to help? Here are three ways you can help the candidates who stand up for you, your family, and the people you serve:

1. Go door to door with your favorite candidate. Montana legislative elections are often won by fewer than 100 votes. The proven way to break through the noise of paid ads and flyers is to knock on doors and talk directly to voters. Candidates need people to walk with them or give them a ride between doors in rural areas.

2. Write a check. Even a small donation goes a long way in Montana elections. Candidates need money to communicate with voters. You can help.

3. Talk to friends and family. MEA-MFT members are respected members of their communities. Let people know who you support and why. Need talking points? Contact Terry Minow, tminow@mea-mft.org, for suggestions.

MEA-MFT members make the difference: Jennifer Kirby of Missoula was one of hundreds of MEA-MFT members who contacted fellow members on behalf of recommended candidates in the 2012 elections. We're gearing up again: for Election 2014.



Our members made the difference: Great candidates won in the primaries!

MEA-MFT members were instrumental in electing recommended candidates in a number of primary elections this spring.

"Our members cast the deciding votes in about a dozen contested primary races this year," explained MEA-MFT Political Director Terry Minow. "MEA-MFT supports candidates, regardless of party, who support our members and the work they do. Our members get that, and they vote. In fact, they vote in higher percentages than any other group in Montana. We're proud of that!"

Local MEA-MFT members interview legislative candidates, then send their recommendations to MEA-MFT COPE (Committee On Political Education, made up of MEA-MFT's elected board of directors). This spring, COPE recommended legislative candidates in about two dozen contested primaries. MEA-MFT mailed postcards to members explaining why these recommended candidates deserved their vote.

"Our members make the difference in elections," Minow said. "We couldn't be happier with the results. We believe we are on a path toward a more responsive legislature in 2015."

Halfway there: Our members will make the difference in November!

MEA-MFT members and other working people will make the difference in crucial statewide races this fall. Your fellow MEA-MFT members recommend the following:

John Walsh for U.S. Senate: John Walsh is a strong voice for working people. He works to make sure corporations and the wealthy pay their fair share of taxes. He is the only Iraq veteran serving in the U.S. Senate.

Because John Walsh stands up for working people, he is **under attack by dark money** and national political action committees. There is no doubt he will be outspent.

Walsh's opponent, Congressman Steve Daines, voted to shut down the federal government rather than work for real bipartisan solutions. Montana deserves better. That's why MEA-MFT COPE members recommend John Walsh. (Continued on p. 15)

Recommended candidates in statewide races



John Walsh for U.S. Senate



John Lewis for U.S. House



Justices Jim Rice & Mike Wheat for re-election to the Montana Supreme Court

John Lewis for U.S. Representative: John Lewis has traveled to every Montana county, helping solve problems for Montanans as a staffer for former Montana U.S. Senator Max Baucus. He will bring his experience and dedication to Congress to help working Montanans succeed.

Lewis wants to make the economy work for all of us, not just the wealthy and big corporations. **Watch for attack ads** against Lewis from, you guessed it, dark money groups funded by billionaires and big corporations.

Jim Rice & Mike Wheat for Montana Supreme Court: MEA-MFT COPE members unanimously recommend your support for Supreme Court Justices Mike Wheat and Jim Rice for re-election in these nonpartisan races.

These two good men have outstanding records as fair and impartial justices on the Montana Supreme Court.

Want an easy way to remember their names when talking to friends and family? Remember: “Go with the grain — vote Rice & Wheat!” ■

Ballot issues: two bad ones down, one left to kill, one sad loss

Montana’s list of bad ballot issues recently got shorter, thanks largely to MEA-MFT.

Jungle primary gone: Legislative Referendum 127 would have thrown out Montana’s primary election system and switched to a new and untested “jungle primary,” where the top two vote-getters advance to the general election.

MEA-MFT went to court and got LR-127 thrown off the ballot because the ballot statement was longer than allowed by state law. A technicality? Not really. Voters deserve a concise explanation of what a measure would do, so they can make an informed decision on how to vote.

Bad Charter tax transfer gone: Initiative 172 would have reduced Charter Communications’ taxes by tens of millions of dollars and transferred those taxes right onto the rest of us. Charter eventually negotiated a settlement of its tax liability and withdrew I-172.

MEA-MFT heard complaints from across the state about aggressive tactics by paid signature gatherers, and we were prepared to fight I-172 in the courts and at the polls.

Public backlash against Charter undoubtedly pushed them toward a settlement.

Still on the ballot; it’s up to you: Legislative Referendum 126 will be on Montana’s November ballot. LR-126 would end Election Day voter registration, making it harder for Montanans to vote.

Working with a broad-based coalition called Montanans for Free and Fair Elections, MEA-MFT is talking with members and other Montanans about why it should be easier, not harder, to exercise our right to vote. Please spread the word: **Vote NO on LR-126!**

Working Montanans need health care: Initiative 170, expanding Medicaid, will not be on the ballot this fall. Delaying tactics by opponents left advocates without enough time to gather enough signatures.

MEA-MFT continues to work with Governor Bullock, businesses, rural hospitals, health care providers, human rights advocates, AARP Montana, and other groups to pass Medicaid expansion so working Montanans can get the health care they need. ■



Are you COPEing?

MEA-MFT’s Committee On Political Education (COPE) pools members’ voluntary contributions to elect friends of education and public services.

MEA-MFT does not spend dues dollars on candidate contributions.

COPE works because MEA-MFT members know elections matter.

Want to help? Sign up for COPE and elect candidates who support you and your important work.

It’s a smart investment in your future...and the future of your community!

To sign up, and to learn about MEA-MFT’s member driven candidate recommendation process, go to mea-mft.org/news_issues_action/state_issues/montana_legislature.aspx

MEA-MFT Members of the Year

(From p. 1)

believes in solidarity and the rights of workers to organize and collectively bargain.

Bock works for the state Department of Revenue as a compliance auditor. He serves as president of his local union, the Dept. of Revenue local, and on the MEA-MFT Board.

To Bock, "It's not THE union, it's OUR union." As part of MEA-MFT's state employee organizing project, Bock has spent months getting more state employee members involved in "our union." His own local has grown to 75 percent of membership as a result of this effort.

Bock is not just focused on state employee members, though. "We need to emphasize solidarity, not just among public employee members, but throughout MEA-MFT," he says.

"We all have to be together. If we're not, we'll get capsized. There shouldn't be a division between teachers and public employees. We're all public employees. We're all in it together."

Mary Verploegen: Faculty Member of the Year. Mary Verploegen didn't come from a union family. Her first union experience was at MSU-Northern in Havre, where she teaches computer information systems.

Verploegen grew up on a farm, and her father never talked about unions, she says, but "he was a strong advocate for the underdog." To this day, being active in the union means "fighting for the working people, standing up for the rights that all people should have, and standing up for those who can't stand



Faculty Member of the Year Mary Verploegen of Havre gets a congratulatory hug from her granddaughter at the Members of the Year celebration.

up for themselves."

Verploegen has been a leader in her local union, the MSU-Northern Federation of Teachers, for many years. She serves on the MEA-MFT Board of Directors. She was instrumental in bringing MEA-MFT's higher education leaders from across the state together to form the Coalition of Union Faculty (CUF).

"It used to be that higher education faculty on different campuses didn't talk to each other," she says. "Now we are at the same table together. We have each other's phone numbers. We're friends."

She adds, "I've made friends in every

group in MEA-MFT, and I cherish every one of these friends."

Seeing the attacks on unions in other states, Verploegen says, "I know the fight for working people is far from over. I always see more that I should be doing. At the same time, I know I am only one person. It is the collective group that gives us strength." ■



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