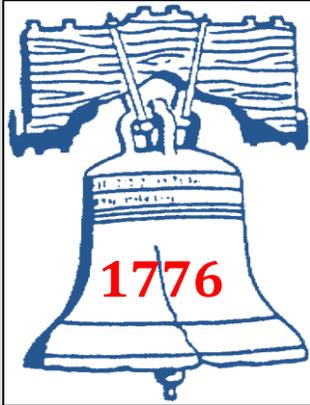


The Newspaper of Local 1776
Association of Catholic Teachers



THE SPIRIT OF

'76

2020 Special Edition

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Fax 215-568-8270 – email (act@act1776.com) - website (www.act1776.com) **DECEMBER 2020**

*“And, though she be but little,
She is fierce.” ~Shakespeare*

*And so begins our tribute to
Rita C. Schwartz,
First Female President of the
Association of Catholic Teachers,
Local 1776
1984 – 2020*

When we first learned that Rita was going to retire on December 31, 2020, we knew all of us would have to do something special for her. In this year of a pandemic with its social distancing and so many restrictions, any type of in-person gathering to celebrate her accomplishments as the fearless leader of the Association of Catholic Teachers for the past 36 years was out of the question. Hopefully, we will be able to give Rita the honor that she deserves in the near future.

In the meantime, this Special Edition of *The Spirit of '76* will have to suffice. Here are two motions that the Senior Delegates and the Executive Board entered into the Minutes of their respective December meetings.

Motion: A. Ronzoni (T. Imburgia)

Rita Schwartz has spent almost 60 years devoting her life to Catholic education. She began her teaching career at St. Hubert High School with a selfless devotion to her students. One of Rita's former students commented, "I will never forget the dedication that Ms. Schwartz showed to her profession. She fostered in me a love of reading and writing that I still have 50 plus years later."

Rita has served as ACT President for 36 years, and she has served on the Executive Board for 53 years. She has served Association members faithfully through school closings and consolidations. During Rita's tenure as ACT President, she has been integral in the important advances we have made contractually. ACT members will never know the countless hours that Rita spent in behind-the-scenes work and how she has given tirelessly of her time to help our schools and our teachers.

David Starr Jordan, the founding president of Stanford University, once said, "Wisdom is knowing what to do next; Skill is knowing how to do it, and Virtue is doing it." There are no better words to sum up the ACT presidency of Rita Schwartz.

Thank you, Rita, for everything. Enjoy your well-earned retirement.

(Carried Unanimously)

Motion: D. McQuiston (K. Toenniessen-Innes)

Be it resolved that the Executive Board of the Association of Catholic Teachers thanks and commends Rita Schwartz for nearly six decades of tireless service to the Association; for promoting the cause of Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia; and for advancing and protecting the rights of Catholic lay teachers in both Philadelphia and across the nation. For this dedicated service, the Executive Board awards Rita Schwartz an honorary lifetime membership in the Association of Catholic Teachers, along with the title of President Emeritus.

(Carried Unanimously)

Rita, we will miss your leadership, your fighting spirit, your advocacy, your boundless energy, and, most of all, your friendship. Thank you for all you have done for each and every one of the members of the Association of Catholic Teachers. The Union would not be the strong, united, and premiere organization that it is without having you at the helm for these many years.

Rita, enjoy this issue dedicated to you. Knowing your great memory, we are sure that you will remember each and every story that is shared.

Enjoy your retirement. You deserve it. Thanks again!

Irene and Ginny

The Early Days

Rita and I met on my first day at St. Hubert in 1969. Rita greeted me warmly then asked “you are going to join the union, aren’t you?” I quickly learned how involved in the union she was and how determined she was to establish the union and the contract with the administration. I was surprised when soon after I started teaching, Rita asked me to come with her to the principal’s office. She assured me all I had to do was listen. When we started the “meeting” the principal pounded his fist and kicked the bottom drawer of his desk shouting “I told my mother you would be in here today!” Needless to say I was speechless but Rita calmly explained why she was there and what she wanted him to do. Surprisingly, the principal then agreed to consider her request and we left the office. The next day Rita informed me that the principal accepted her “demand” and told me that I did well and she wanted me to become more involved in the union. That was the start of a long involvement in ACT and an incredible friendship.

~ Christine DeNuccio, Retired, St. Hubert High School



I first met Rita when a friend brought her to visit at my home. We hit it off immediately. I next encountered her at one of the very first organizing meetings for the soon-to-be Union. She was teaching at Saint Hubert, and I was teaching at Cardinal Dougherty. As high school women teachers, we made our voices heard at that time. Somewhat later, we found ourselves riding on yellow school busses to each school so that all the teachers could cast votes regarding being represented by a union. At the meeting after the voting, Rita and I were present at the counting of the votes, and ACT was born as the teachers voted to have a Union. As an Executive Board and Negotiating Team Member, I have sat through many meetings with Rita and admired her capacity for leadership. Through her perseverance and perception, always laced with a sense of humor, ACT has become a respected force.

As she retires from the Presidency of ACT, I send her all my good wishes and a special thank you for all she has done for the teachers of the Archdiocese.

~Barbara Mills, Retired, Cardinal Dougherty High School

The Early Days

Having taught for 49 years, I worked under Rita's predecessor, John Reilly, and then Rita. I was always in awe of our leaders and of the negotiating teams, contract after contract.

My dearest friend, Ed Stehle, was a part of many negotiating teams and then worked full time at the Union Headquarters. One thing that Ed complimented Rita on (more than once) was her phenomenal memory. He often told me how amazed he was during negotiations when Rita could pull out facts from her memory – past practices, specific hearings, etc. – that always stopped the OCE team in their tracks. So for that and her dedication for decades, I thank her!

*~Tina Amato, (LF, NC, RC and SH)
Retired from St. Hubert High School*



I just want to add my thanks and congratulations on Rita's retirement from active involvement in ACT, Local 1776 from its difficult inception and all her years of service to Catholic Education in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

Remembering that one of my principals equated union organization in our high schools to atheistic communism in at least one of our faculty meetings my first year teaching, I often wondered if they knew of the encyclicals on Rerum Novarum and Quadragesimo Anno. And when my husband's faculty at St. Gabriel's Hall hoped to organize, your efforts led to Catholic Social Services' giving the staff the salary schedule that we had earned years earlier.

I wish you all the best as president of NACST!

*~Cathy Leach, retired in 2006
from Cardinal O'Hara High School*

The Early Days

Dear Rita,

All these many years you have served teachers tirelessly, and by extension students of the Philadelphia Archdiocese with professionalism and dedication. Often you walked a tightrope while trying to balance teachers' needs, administrators' priorities and Diocesan policies. You always seemed to know when a situation called for polite tactfulness and when it demanded blunt candor. Personally, even though I was an administrator, you gave me wise advice and kind support when I once needed it most. Thank you, Rita, for making ACT a strong and respected Union. Enjoy retirement and know your guidance and leadership will be remembered, appreciated, and missed by so many.

*Gratefully,
Helene Regetta
(Retired, ACHS....and seven other high schools)*

"Rita was the heart and soul of Catholic Education since its inception back in the 60's. Without her determined leadership, I wonder if Catholic education in the Philadelphia area would still exist?"

~Jim Mich, Retired, St. Pius X High School

Rita,

With grateful appreciation for ALL you have done for ACT and most specifically for the teachers at Bishop McDevitt High School. You were with us through thick and thin, and your dedication to the Union of Catholic high school teachers never wavered. Enjoy your well-earned retirement!

*Cissy Coyne, Retired
Bishop McDevitt High School*

The Early Days



I've known Rita Schwartz since 1967 as a student at St. Hubert High School, then as a colleague when I also started teaching at St. Hubert in 1974. Since then, Rita has been a mentor, a leader but most importantly, my friend for all these years. Thank you, Rita for everything you have done to make Catholic Education the great institution it is today. Your dedication, your determination, and your ceaseless efforts on behalf of all of us has been nothing short of amazing. You even taught my 7 year old daughter how to picket and the importance of standing up for important causes! Thank you, thank you, thank you for everything...enjoy a very well-deserved retirement!!

Miss Rita C. Schwartz
English, Reading, French
Guidance
From the 1967 Calling Echo,
the St. Hubert Yearbook

Marianne Burpulís
Retired, St. Hubert High School

2017 - Rita and her Peers Recognized for 25/50 years of Dedicated Service

Irene Tori
presents Rita
with a plaque,
recognizing her
50 years of
Service.



Rita's Fight for Justice for all Catholic School Teachers



It was 1974 and, after a few years at Community Legal Services, I had just signed on to represent labor unions at a law firm that would later be called Spear, Wilderman. Two of the very first people to walk into my office were John Reilly and Rita Schwartz. Both burned with a passion for justice for Catholic teachers. In 1968 the Archdiocese had recognized ACT as the representative of its High School teachers. By 1974 it was well past time to have the Archdiocese recognize ACT as the representative of the Elementary teachers as well.

While the Archdiocese made some tentative offers to allow representation elections on a parish-by-parish basis, Rita pointed out that the Elementary Schools were run, like the high schools, as a school system. If ACT was permitted to have a high school wide election, it should be permitted to have an elementary school system wide election as well. So started my education into the world of Catholic education. Ever the teacher, Rita made sure that I became a student of the Canon Law, relevant Papal Encyclicals, and documents "copied" from within the Office of the Superintendent of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

Rita's fight lasted another five years, through a month of hearings before the National Labor Relations Board, years of appeals, a four week trial in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, until, in 1979, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that lay teachers in the Catholic schools are not covered by the National Labor Relations Act. And Rita was in my ear every step of the way! Today, it is fair to say that there is no law, state or federal, that offers protection to Catholic school teachers who desire to engage in collective bargaining. The only thing that offers you a voice in your wages and working conditions is the strength of your union. It is a precious commodity.

I was not often at the bargaining table for ACT. But whenever collective bargaining hit a snag, and a strike seemed to be in the offing, Rita asked me to sit in. Rita and I had different bargaining styles. I would ask the Superintendent and his staff, "why?" "Why do you need to fire teachers without cause?" "What do you gain?" "Where is your sense of Christian justice?" Rita was more direct. "No" or "Over my dead body." The things she said in our caucuses I can't repeat here.

And the years flew by. As the President of the National Association, Rita invited me and my wife, Susan, to attend periodic leadership conferences. My job was to put on seminars for the leaders of other Catholic teacher unions around the country. Sometimes, after you have exhausted your material, it is a challenge to come up with new stuff, as I am sure you all know. So I recall one seminar, talking about the importance of collective bargaining, I enlisted (well drafted, really) Rita to sing with me the song "Seven and a Half Cents" from the musical *The Pajama Game*. The words are worth remembering when contract renewals are up. And it goes like this: Seven and half cents doesn't buy a hell of a lot, Seven and half cents doesn't mean a thing! But give it to me every hour, forty hours every week, and that's enough for me to be living like a king! Ask Rita to sing it for you.

Rita, enjoy your retirement, you've earned it.

Your counselor and friend,

Bruce E. Endy
Author of: *Saving Harry, Justice, Work and Unions.*

The Early Days



When I first started teaching, John Reilly was the President of the Association of Catholic Teachers. The Delegate at the building was being harassed by the principal almost on a daily basis. I first met Rita Schwartz at a meeting at my home with members of the faculty. A meeting was planned with John, the Principal and the Delegate. John and Rita gave us good advice and a strategy for the school year. That was my first introduction to John and Rita.

Fast forward many years in the future – in a galaxy far away – and I found myself the Delegate at the same building. I sought advice from then President, Rita, many times. She was wise, tenacious, and encouraging. She became a friend. She shows up! In her capacity as the Union President, a friend and colleague, one could find her at any local school, the funeral of a faculty member or a spouse, or wherever she was needed.

In her capacity as President of the Association, she has held us together. She has faced the ire of the many Administrations in the local schools and the many manifestations of the Administrations of the Archdiocese. She has the mindset of a “tough as nails” negotiator and a heart of gold for the people she has represented.

In the early days of the Union, women were paid less than the men for the same job. I remember 45 or more in a classroom. Slave labor wages for extracurricular activities was common or forgotten altogether. Those things changed due to the team of John and Rita. I only hope that the younger generation of teachers will consider what has been done for them in the past few years. Otherwise, these things could revert again if we, as a Union are not strong.

***Rita Schwartz is a true warrior.** I wish her the very best of luck and good health in her retirement. I wish Irene success, patience with the younger faculty and smooth contract negotiations.*

*Lucille Pritchard
Retired teacher of 47 years and chairperson
Union Rep for the Association of Catholic Teachers*

***“Until you have a seat at the table, you are probably on the menu.”
~ Elizabeth Warren***

Thank You, Rita

On the highlights film of Rita's long and splendid career, there are, of course, many spectacular moments. These "momentous" occasions include the founding of our union, the countless successful contract negotiations, the steadfast leadership during strikes, honorary degrees, and many other "big" moments.

However, while the big successes burn visibly bright, it is the accumulation of continuous small moments that make up a career and a character; it is what I admire most about her: those "defining moments" between the momentous ones, those moments which are unseen, unheralded and unsung. I've witnessed those innumerable defining moments of tenacity, fidelity, and steadfastness, dedicated to the principles of our union: Dignity and Justice for Catholic Teachers. I've seen those moments when she refused to accept the easy decision and, instead, embrace the difficult, but right decision. I've seen the innumerable moments of not compromising principles and, instead, confronting injustice. I've seen Rita fight with equal vigor and tenacity for all members, whether first year teacher or retiring veteran, giving voice and empowerment to the voiceless and powerless.

Many negotiators across the table, intent on weakening the union's effectiveness, admit that, if they needed an advocate, Rita would be their first choice as Champion. The number of those with differing opinions who respect and admire her shows how her effectiveness, integrity, and commitment have transcended ideological boundaries. I've also seen her defend and fight for those same negotiators when they returned to the union. It's one thing to love your enemies, but it is quite another when those same enemies love and respect you.

To see her passion never lessen through those many years and to witness those quiet "defining" moments between the momentous ones, is to see her resolve and fidelity to the Justice and Dignity for all Catholic Teachers.

Congratulations and Thank You from the Local 1776 of the Association of Catholic Teachers. We wish you many more successful "momentous events and defining moments" while leading the National Association of Catholic School Teachers.

John Zoccola
Archbishop Wood
English Teacher, retired

Notes of Gratitude

Rita,

First off, thank you does not cover the extent of my feelings for what you have done for the Catholic High School teachers through your blood, sweat and tears with the Union.

I came into the high schools from the Catholic grade schools. The difference was immediately noticeable. There was an immediate \$4,000 raise, a prep period every day, free lunch and knowing that there would be a due process if something went wrong. I thought I died and went to school heaven.

Negotiations were always tense, but I felt confident that you always got the best available deal.

The people working with you were always immediately responsive to questions or confusion. They were always good people but the atmosphere you fostered enabled them to do their jobs to the full extent of their gifts.

Thank you for all the years of feeling supported.

I hope you get many years of enjoyment from retirement.

*Blessings,
Rosie Salvo, Retired
SS. John Neumann-Maria Goretti High School*

"I do not think there are enough words to thank you, Rita, for the many years of dedication, sacrifice, and professionalism you gave to our teachers and our union. You will be greatly missed. May you experience a long happy, and healthy retirement."

*Edith Kirk
BCIT Teacher, Archbishop Ryan High School*

Dear Rita,

Congratulations on your retirement! Your tremendous work for our teachers was greatly appreciated. No one could have done a better job.

*With great respect,
Linus McGinty, Retired
Cardinal O'Hara High School*

Notes of Gratitude

What can one person say about a hero who gave so much of her time, energy, creativity, and wisdom for the cause of justice for Catholic teachers, not only in the Philadelphia area but also in the nation?

Before I moved into our secondary system, I taught in our grade schools for 23 years. I saw Rita on TV and was proud of her and scared of her at the same time! It was not until much later that I realized how funny, down to earth, smart, and caring she was. It was a pleasure to meet her at the local meetings and I was extremely glad to have the chance to know this amazing woman off camera and away from the fierceness of negotiations.

Although my grade school experience was good, I knew there was unfairness – no protections at all for teachers. Fortunately, I worked for fair and kind pastors and dedicated principals. But I did vote for unionizing the grade schools and was sorry it did not happen.

When I came to the secondary level, I was amazed. Prep periods that could not be interrupted? Free lunch? And a plan that assured teachers that seniority counted with an orderly process for constrictions and movement? Pay scales that got better each contract and medical coverage? There is more – but the point is that the Union made working conditions better and prevented the unfairness that existed when admins were unfair because they could be (NOT ALL, we know that). And when working conditions are better for teachers, learning conditions are better for students!

Rita, you are an astounding woman and an amazing and untiring leader. You will be missed! Thank you for all you did for us and for always answering my questions promptly, and for never giving up the rights the Union fought to guarantee. I know it was not easy. You may qualify for sainthood!

Congratulations, thank you, and good luck.

Linda Toner
Msgr. Bonner & Abp. Prendergast High School

Thanks, Rita, for a magnificent job and awesome dedication to Catholic education, teachers, and the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The System would not be as strong as it is without your tireless work. Wow! 58 years and so many accomplishments.

*Jim Greene
Father Judge High School*

On the National Scene

"A teacher affects eternity; she can never tell where her influence stops." We've all seen this inspirational quote and in trying times taken comfort in its message. So, when asked to write something about Rita as she exits as ACT president, I've chosen to write about her in her most important role: Rita Schwartz, teacher.

During the first phase of her career, Rita earned her teaching stripes in the traditional way, toiling in the classroom at Saint Hubert's. However, her career did not end when she hung up her chalk and eraser there for the last time and went to work full-time for the union. On the contrary, though she surely didn't know it then, her role as a teacher was only entering a new phase.

I'm proud to say that I was one of her earliest students in that second phase, and I was the type of student that teachers would certainly label as "challenging." Rita and I first met in 1977 while my colleagues and I in the Scranton Diocese were in the process of organizing our teachers' union. Our fledgling group had affiliated with PSEA, and although we proved that we had the overwhelming support of our teachers, the Diocese had dug in its heels and had refused to grant us recognition as long as we insisted on having PSEA as our bargaining agent. Somehow word of our plight had reached Philadelphia and Rita volunteered to come north to offer us some advice. I had taken the lead in our organizing effort and was insistent that we get recognition solely on our terms - screw compromise. Enter Rita. She told us the story of how ACT was formed, and how we could apply the lessons they had learned to our own experience. Being all of 27 years-old, and certain that I knew everything, I gave Rita a very hard time at that first meeting. Later, she would tell me that she thought I was a "smacked ass." As usual, she was right.

But, like any good teacher, she did not give up on me. She patiently persuaded us that by slightly changing our course, we could gain our objective. It worked. From that point on, I never doubted Rita again.

I went on to serve as the president of my local for 32 years. During that time, I talked with Rita nearly every day. I continued to seek out her advice whenever problems arose. Her wisdom was invaluable. In time, I like to think that I learned how to become a fairly good union leader in my own right, but I know that I could never have accomplished that without Rita's tutelage. She was my mentor, and for that, I will be eternally grateful.

(Continued on Page 13)

On the National Scene . . .

(Continued from page 12)

So, what is Rita's contribution? Well, this much I know. I loved being a teacher; truly believing that I was called to the work. But like countless other Catholic school teachers, I could not have remained faithful to that vocation without a union - a union that made sure that I was treated with dignity by my employer, and guaranteed that I would have a just wage to support my family. Rita was instrumental in helping to make that happen. Moreover, she helped to make that possible for a multitude of others. Over the years, I was privileged to have been with Rita as we taught teachers in dioceses around the country how to form their unions, as well as educating local leaders so that they could become effective advocates for those that they served. They, in turn, went on to secure contracts that would guarantee that their teachers also had the wherewithal to continue in the job they loved.

But, what about Rita's impact on eternity? By making it possible for thousands of good teachers to remain in the classroom, she has had a hand in touching the minds and hearts of hundreds of thousands of kids impacted and inspired by those teachers. Being the great teacher she is; we'll never know where her influence stops.

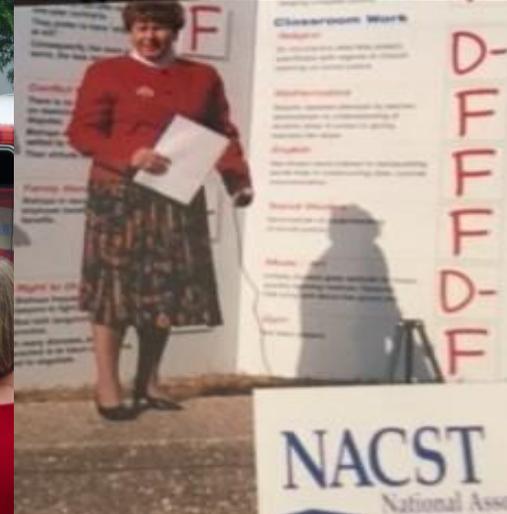
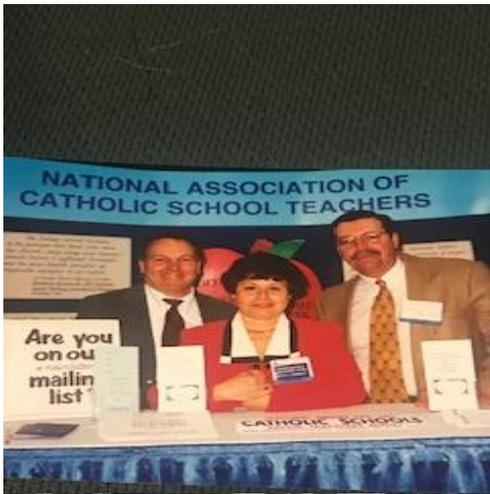
Michael Milz, Retired

Founding President of the Scranton Diocesan Association of Catholic Teachers

Former Vice President of the National Association of Catholic School Teachers



On the National Scene . . .



FIGHTING

FOR

JUSTICE

AND

DIGNITY

FOR

CATHOLIC

SCHOOL

TEACHERS

On the National Scene . . .



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ACT Office Manager Tells All



I met Rita in 1983 when she interviewed me for a secretarial position with the Association of Catholic Teachers. It was my first “downtown” interview. Although I do not remember what she wore that day, I do remember that she was impeccably dressed, and I envied her style. I also remember her hairstyle and how the ends of her hair flipped up perfectly, reminding me of Marlo Thomas’ hair in the show That Girl, and I remember the signature blue eyeshadow she wore that day lined perfectly with brown eyeliner and her painted pink fingernails. I remember being impressed! It’s funny what we remember. I was young, and I remember being nervous and hoping that I would make a good first impression. The thing that I remember most about that day is that Rita immediately made me feel welcomed and at ease. I left the interview hoping that I would get the job. I immediately went home and did what I was taught to do by my business teachers at Little Flower Catholic High School for Girls, and that was I penned a thank you letter to Rita, thanking her for taking the time to interview me. I hoped that my thank you letter and follow-up phone calls would show her that I was truly interested in the position as well as give me an edge over others who may have applied for the position. Guess what? It worked! What I didn’t know then was that this would be the beginning of a long and wonderful friendship.

Over the years, I have witnessed Rita fight fearlessly and tirelessly for anyone in need of assistance. It did not matter who they were – Union, non-union, administrator, religious, elementary, secondary, active, retired, in-state or out-of-state. Anyone who has ever reached out to Rita for help, guidance, or support was never left unaided. Rita knew her job. She did it well, and she did it with the utmost compassion.

Over my last 39 years, a lot has changed. However, Rita is still the fashion icon that I remember; still sporting her signature blue eyeshadow and brown eyeliner, nails manicured and polished, with a memory and stamina to be envied. Most important, though, Rita is the same warm and welcoming person that I met back in 1983, with a wonderful personality and a keen sense of humor. Rita has been someone that I have admired and looked up to over the years, and I know God blessed me when he put Rita C. Schwartz into my life.

Rita, thank you for hiring me in 1983. Thank you for making my workday enjoyable just by being you. Thank you for being the caring, generous, kind, and loving person that you are. And, thank you for being an exemplary role model. I am honored to have worked for you and the Association of Catholic Teachers. I truly wish you a happy, healthy, and well-earned Retirement!

With Deepest Admiration and Respect Always,

Ginny

Notes of Gratitude

My experience working with Rita on a negotiation team was a lesson I tried to uphold as a Senior Delegate and as a person.

Debating over medical coverage and salary increases and all the many protections guaranteed under our contracts was handled with dignity and grace. But most important, Rita fought for the humanity of all the teachers under her care.

*Sincerely,
Maureen Colanzi, Retired,
Cardinal O'Hara High School*

Rita,

Have a safe and happy retirement.

We owe you so much!

Jim Bell

After 50 successful years teaching in the Catholic School System, I retired in 2015. I owed a great deal to John Reilly, the former president of ACT, and to Rita who followed in his footsteps.

I spent the last 16 summers in our beloved Italy, raised 6 children, and I am living in a great senior living facility in Colorado.

Lovingly sending out wishes to Rita to have marvelous years in retirement. Look us up in Termoli, Italy some summer soon.

*Louise Ciabarra
Retired, Abp. Wood High School*

Notes of Gratitude

Dear Rita,

Please accept my sincere congratulations for all your hard work on the Executive Board of the Association of Catholic Teachers, including, of course, your 36 years as ACT President. Your dedicated and successful service to the students and teachers of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia is deeply commendable. You have truly been a positive force in the Archdiocese's Educational System. For one thing, as a result of your persuasive bargaining, the teachers of the Archdiocese were able to work with a decent salary; had you not been successful in this regard, the students of the Archdiocese would sadly have been denied the knowledgeable, respectful and loving instruction given to them by many of their dedicated teachers. Besides this commendable contribution, Rita, you successfully negotiated with the Archdiocese to achieve respectful terms of work for the teachers; as a result, we teachers were able to happily do our job without worrying about some new Archdiocesan rule that would have undermined our continued solid performance as teachers. Rita, the bottom line is that in your role as a member of the Executive Board, including your many years as President, you rendered highly commendable service to the Archdiocesan Educational System. As a teacher at Northeast Catholic High School for over 30 years, I commend your excellent performance and I truly think the students of the Archdiocese, their parents and yes -- even the Archdiocesan Educational Hierarchy -- admire your valuable contributions.

So now, Rita, I hope you will enjoy your retirement. Take some time to relax. I also encourage you to do your best to carry out the plans you had to postpone because of your dedicated service to the Archdiocesan School System.

May the Good Lord always be by your side.

Sincerely yours,

Robert Falkowski, Retired
Northeast Catholic High School

Thank you, Rita, for your tireless dedication to the teachers of the Archdiocese. Your hard work was much appreciated. Enjoy your retirement.

*Dave & Justine Smith
Bonner & Prendie*

“SEMPER FI”

When I think of Rita’s Leadership and Commitment over these past 58 years when it was a privilege to know her, not only for her “caring” for her teachers and students but also as a close personal friend, I’m reminded of these words from a poem by Robert Frost.

“The Woods are lovely, dark and deep
And I have promises to keep
And miles to go before I sleep
And miles to go before I sleep”

The days of the 60’s, & 70’s were indeed dark days for America and the ensuing years of the 80’s onward were deep in the challenges to be faced by our Catholic High Schools. Rita travelled those “miles to go” with courage, tenacity, deep feelings, and an honest and loving concern for the teachers and their students- she walked the “miles to go” with a caring sensitivity and emotional attachment to those in whose service she labored.



Now, a new road lays ahead for her as she moves on with our love, respect and gratitude. As a fellow Marine, I know John Reilly would join me in extending my finest compliment to my friend, Rita. **“Semper FI”** – You were **“Always Faithful”** to your mission in life, Rita. God Bless!

Charlie Dougherty
(Former Member of Congress)

Famous Rita quote . . .

“I have a scathingly brilliant idea!”

A Dog Named Bunky



It was Halloween 1994. Rita got a phone call from a teacher who was also a close friend. He had to go into the hospital, and he asked if Rita would take care of his dog for a few days. I was leaving the office early that day so I could get my young daughters ready for Halloween. Rita said that if I would help her retrieve the dog from her friend's house, she would give me a ride home. When we arrived at the house, *Bunky* was in the living room, sitting in an armchair growling fiercely. I was terrified, so I stayed in the vestibule pressed against the wall. Brave Rita continued to go into the living room toward the growling dog. The next thing I know, our Fearless Leader, who was in a skirt and high heels, was down on her hands and knees crawling toward the dog, asking him "where is your bowl, honey?" "Come on, show me where your things are." I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Rita coaxed the growling dog off the chair, and she crawled on her hands and knees along-side him through the living room, dining room, and out to the kitchen. She was able to retrieve the dog's food and supplies, and they came back into the living room together. But this time, Rita was on two feet.

Rita then asked me to return the keys to the neighbor's house while she got the dog into the car. By the time I got to the car, Bunky was in the front seat, and I had to take a back seat. I sweated the whole ride up Roosevelt Boulevard as Bunky hung over the back seat to growl at me. When he wasn't threatening me, he was walking across Rita's lap while she was driving on this twelve-lane highway. All I could do was pray that I got home safely to take my girls *trick or treating* that day.

Sadly, Rita's friend died while in the hospital, and Rita inherited the dog. She became Bunky's mother for the next six years. During that time, Rita decided to have a Christmas cookie swap. She invited a dozen people to her home for some holiday fun and to swap homemade cookies. Bunky almost sank his teeth into my kneecap that day, but luckily, he got the sofa instead. Boy, was that a fun day! Then there was the Labor Day that I came into the office to run off contract materials and I had to lock myself in the run-off room and stay there because Rita *and Bunky* had arrived at the office first. Did I mention that Bunky was very territorial? Because they had arrived at the office first, Bunky thought the office was his territory to protect; therefore, I was an unwelcomed guest. Rita insisted that if I had gotten there first, there would not have been a problem. This may have been the only time that I ever doubted Rita. I think either way Bunky and I were not meant to be friends.

This is a story about who Rita is. She helps those in need, even if it means inheriting a dog that only she could love. Rita will do whatever she needs to when called upon, to make sure that people and, if necessary, their animals feel comfortable, safe and loved.

If you do not know this already, Rita is an extraordinary human being!

Ginny Crowther
ACT Office Manager

Notes of Gratitude

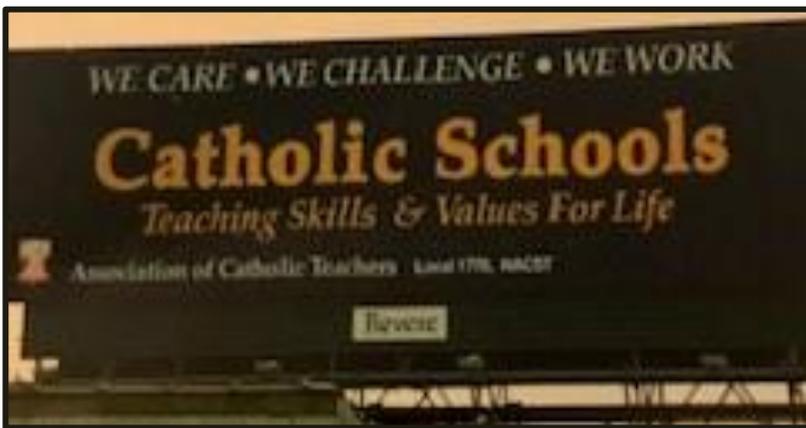
Hello Rita--Mike Wetzel here wishing you the most happiness and joy in your retirement. We worked together for so many years and I have many fond memories of our years from West Catholic for Boys to the merged West Catholic and finally at Msgr. Bonner and the merged Bonner/Prendie. Thank you for all your hard work and dedication to the community of Catholic education. We are far better and stronger due to your leadership and tutelage on behalf of the hardworking, dedicated teachers of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

On a personal note, I want to thank you again for being there during a devastating time for my daughter and me. You were a source of solace and helped us through a most difficult time.

Lastly, even though we didn't always agree on everything, I always knew where your heart was---with the magnificent teachers of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

God Bless and have a wonderful retirement. No setting alarm clocks anymore!

Mike Wetzel,
Retired from Msgr. Bonner – Abp.Prendergast High School
Former ACT Senior Delegate



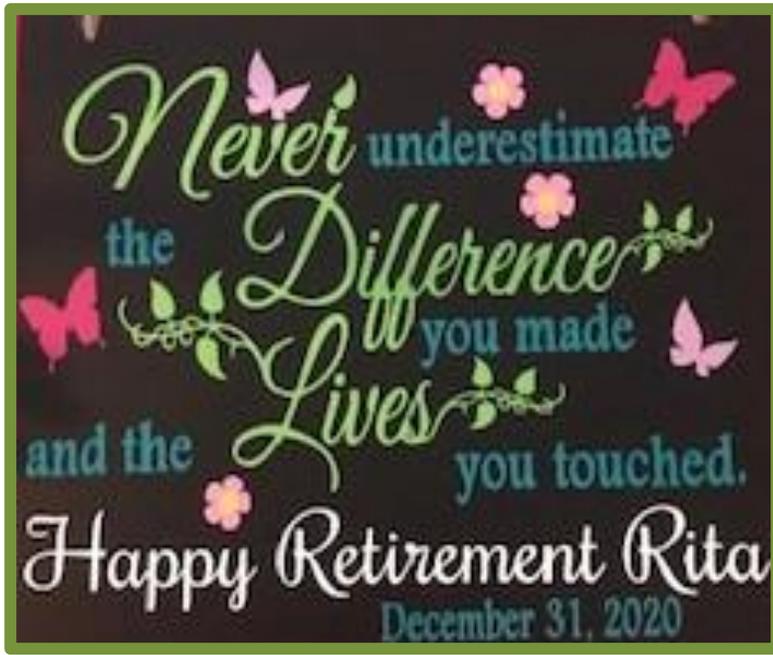
Rita,

I would like to thank you for all of the years that you have dedicated to the teachers' union. I don't think enough people realize all that you have done. I didn't really appreciate it myself until I spent that long year as Senior Delegate. I have always been extremely impressed at how

well both you and Irene have been so knowledgeable regarding the contract and the inner workings of the Archdiocesan High Schools. I think this was true this year more than ever.

Irene, congratulations on your victory. I know that you will continue the great work that you and Rita labored on, over the years. They couldn't pay me enough to do the job that you are doing.

*Mike Fiocco
Father Judge High School*



Rita,

You have helped me in so many ways that putting everything into one letter is difficult. Helping me on sick leave and helping me with retirement forms stand out. It never seemed to be any trouble. Any time you were at O'Hara for a visit or at the cathedral, you did not hesitate to inquire about our health or other matters. Oh, and how did you ever survive all those contract meetings? How many lost Labor Day weekends did you sacrifice? I wish you all the best as you enter another phase of your life. Enjoy doing what you can. Thanks for all you have done.

Sincerely,
Jane Wilson

Thanks, Rita, for your tireless, selfless leadership! Always personable, always professional, constantly fighting for union members. You have always assisted me in a timely manner whenever I had a situation. I wish you many happy, healthy years in this next stage of your journey! I am grateful to have met you, to work with you, and to call you friend!

Jim Coyne
Cardinal O'Hara High School

Congratulations on your retirement, Rita! Enjoy!
Sincerely,
Maria Rossi
SS. John Neumann-Maria Goretti H.S.

Rita,

Congratulations on your retirement -well deserved! Many teachers are indebted to you for your service and looking out for them -including myself. We go back a few years. I remember casting a vote for union representation in Fr. Judge's parking lot in 1967-68. Also thank you for your support in helping me with the 403b plans. Wishing you happiness and good health in your retirement years.

Joseph F. Saskiewicz, MBA, CLU, ChFC, CFP
Saskiewicz and Associates

Notes of Gratitude

As a teacher who was there when the Association of Catholic Teachers began, I am very aware of all the difficulties that faced those pioneers who dared to suggest such a movement. I remember John Reilly and Jim McGrath and all their perseverance and hard work. It was anything but easy. Rita picked up where they left off and has guided our membership through many more difficult situations. Her dedication to all of us has been phenomenal. Talk about "True Grit". So many of us are much better off for her dedication to all Catholic School Teachers.

Rita, thank you for all you have done. Enjoy your retirement.

*Rich Greco, Retired
Archbishop Carroll High School*

Thank you for your years of service to the teachers in our union. You were always there for us whether it was an issue for an individual teacher or a department. I hope you will be able to enjoy the fruits of your labor.

God's Blessings to you for a job well done all these many years.

Sincerely,

*Gerry Bowers, Retired
Cardinal O'Hara High School*

Miss Schwartz was my French 1 teacher at St. Hubert during the '67-'68 school year. It was she who made me want to become a teacher. I envisioned myself teaching French after earning my degree at Chestnut Hill College. (Reality: I earned an English degree at Holy Family College.)

Rita was the Executive-Secretary of ACT when I became a full-time teacher at Archbishop Ryan and a member of the union. I had grown up in a union household, but John Reilly, Rita Schwartz, and ACT reinforced for me the importance of union representation. I got to work directly with my former teacher through various union activities and on one negotiating team.

By the time Rita became president of ACT in 1984 I had moved on to raising my girls and teaching elsewhere. Eventually I retired after 40 years in education, but Rita hadn't. She was and is still on the job.

Fifty-eight years is a truly remarkable run. Thank you, Rita, for the inspiration that became my career and for your devotion to the cause of Catholic education.

Joanne Clothier
Archbishop Ryan 1973-1983
St Hubert class of '69

Notes of Gratitude

Dear Rita,

Thank you for so many years of caring about Catholic school educators. Your tireless service has made a world of difference for us. Thank you for standing up for us and helping us to do what we do - teach - and not have to worry about the behind the scenes because we always knew that you had our backs.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Blessings to you and yours, always,
Gratefully,

Carol Dauerbach
Little Flower Catholic High School for Girls

Only a person of strength can freely take upon themselves the role of a fighter. Rita, though we as members may have only called upon you in times of need or frustration, you responded with clear and supportive direction. For this and for all of the individual attention given to us... I am grateful. Farewell!

Anne Barr
Msgr. Bonner & Abp. Prendergast High School

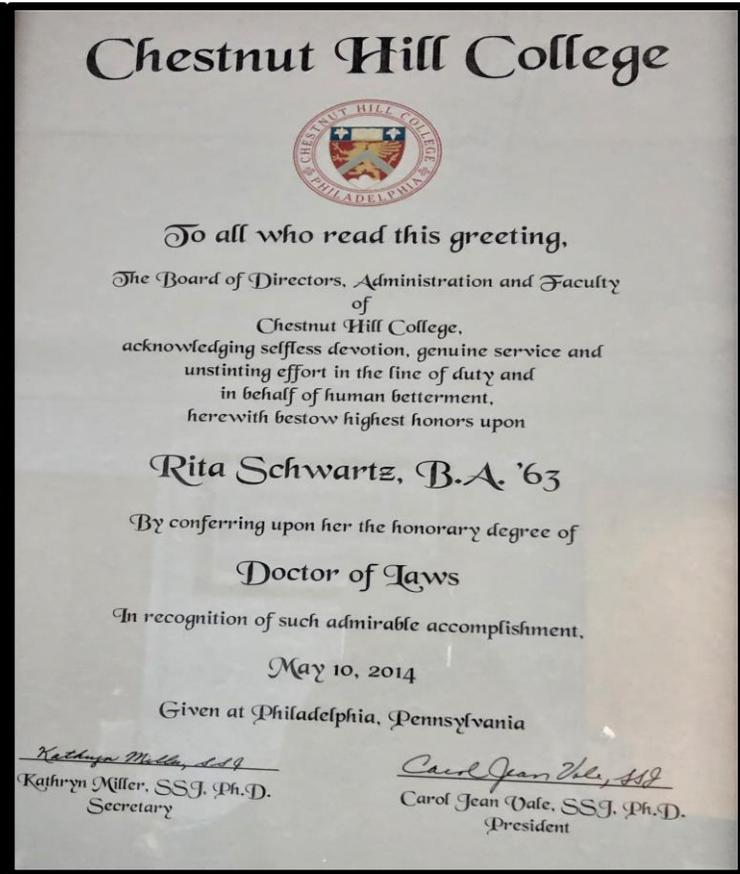
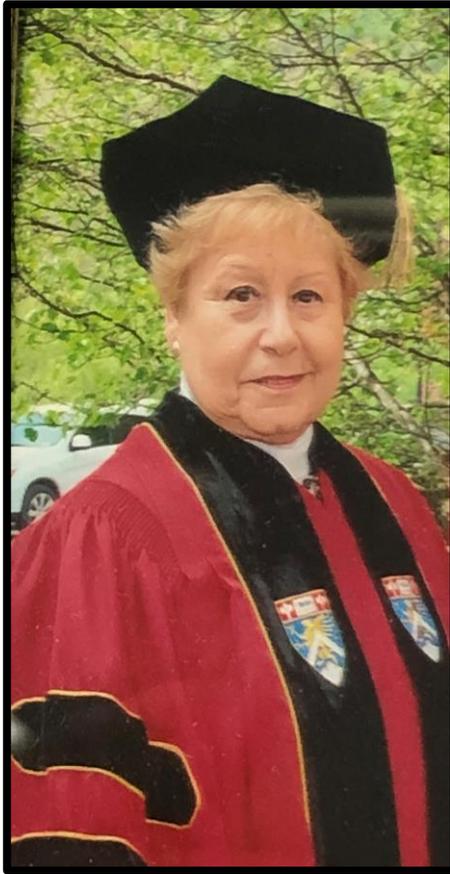
Dear Rita,

The best of health and happiness in your well-deserved retirement! You have truly been the "good and faithful servant" of the Gospels. So many lives have been impacted by your leadership in negotiating the contract for Catholic school teachers and then engaging in the arduous process of re-negotiating it year after year. Not to mention the day-to-day operations and the grievances and myriad other duties! How many of us would have survived in the system were it not for you and your team? Would there even be a system today? I am very grateful also for the times you have assisted me personally. I feel blessed to have been an educator under your aegis.

Wishing you all the best in your retirement.

*Sheila Tobin
MBAP*

RITA RECEIVES HONORARY DOCTOR OF LAWS DEGREE



In 2014, at the 87th Commencement of Chestnut Hill College, Rita received an Honorary Doctor of Laws Degree from her alma mater. Listed below are Rita's remarks when she accepted this well-deserved honorary degree.

Rita's Acceptance remarks:

I want to thank Sister Carol and the Board of Directors of Chestnut Hill College for this amazing honor. In honoring me and my work, you also give recognition to the lay teachers in the elementary and high schools of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia as well as the thousands of lay teachers across the country affiliated with the National Association. These are dedicated professionals for whom I labor. It has been and continues to be a labor of love. God willing, I will continue to work on their behalf for some time to come.

When I graduated from Chestnut Hill 51 years ago, I had no idea where my life would go, but I was well prepared by the Sisters of St. Joseph. My life has been filled with challenge and adventure. I wish you, the class of 2014, that same journey.

Thank you.

Notes of Gratitude

Dear Rita,

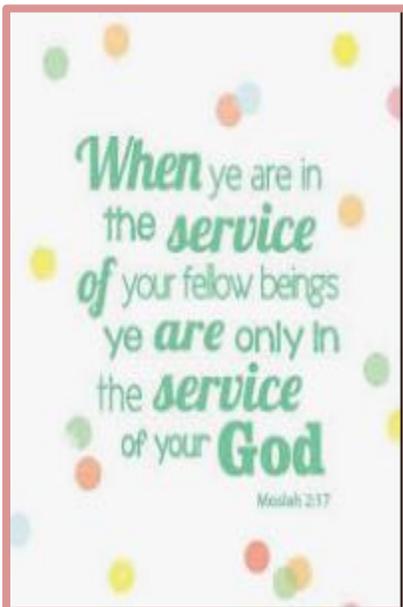
When I found out about your retirement, I was both shocked and saddened. Shocked in the fact that we knew that this day would eventually come, but not sure when and we were not ready to accept it. Saddened in that I am not sure that without your strong leadership ACT would not have had the success in holding the line against OCE. Although I did not see "eye to eye" with you on all issues, you were always able to convince me and others what you and the rest of the team negotiated was for the best result. Rita, you were able to keep ACT united and moving forward and for that I am very grateful. With so many different schools with many different issues it had to be hard to satisfy all of the members all of the time. To be able to do that is a sign of an effective leader. Thank you for all that you did for the union, the schools and yes, also for the kids.

Enjoy your retirement. God Bless you.

Warm regards and best wishes,

Steve Peters, Retired
Archbishop Wood HS
1970--2016

"Labor never quits. We never give up the fight – no matter how tough the odds, no matter how long it takes." ~ George Meany

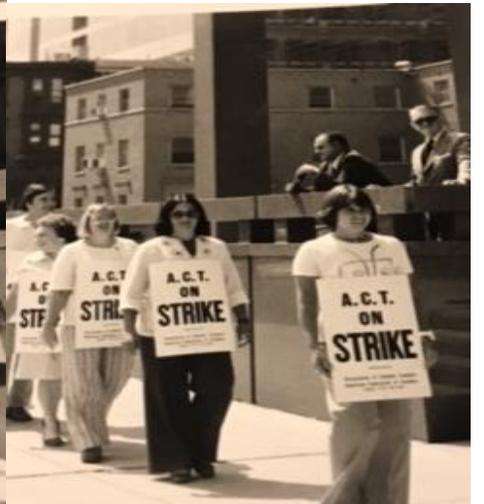
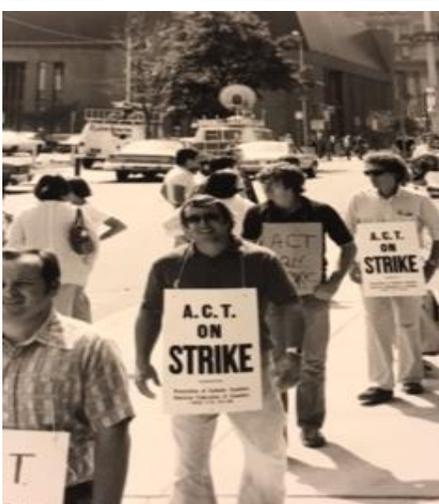
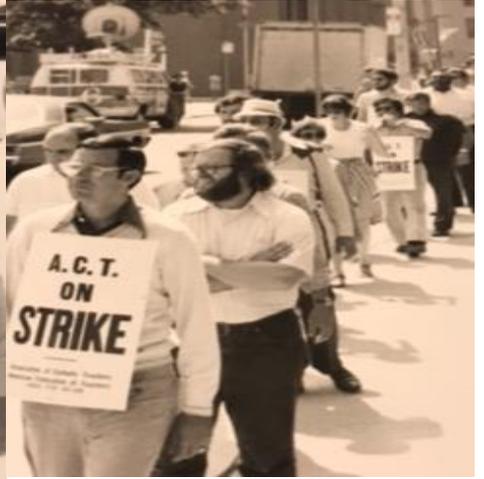
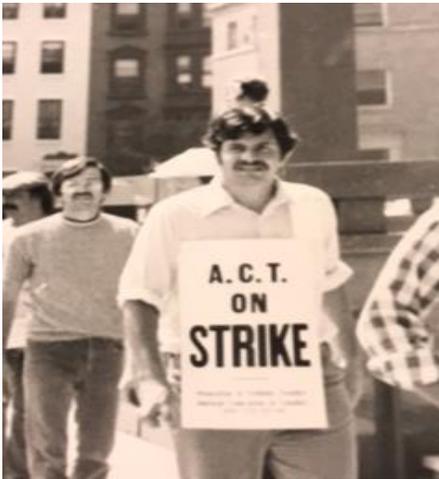


Congratulations Rita,

Thank you for all of your years of fighting the good fight to protect us and keep our Union strong despite so many overwhelming odds. It has always amazed me how you know everyone's name and something about them. This is a sure sign of someone who really cares and is really brilliant to have such a command of so much knowledge. You also have had an uncanny way of knowing and understanding what is happening at every school and have seen things via solutions rather than problems. No school has been too small to have your attention, empathy, and action. No problem was too small for you to listen and offer advice and assistance. Irene and you have truly been a power team and I am very happy that she will be able to continue the work to which you both have been committed. I pray that you enjoy your well-deserved retirement.

***Thank you,
Dolly Burdziak***

"The most important resource of a union is its rank and file." ~ Ray Rogers



"The most important resource of a union is its rank and file." ~ Ray Rogers



"We have come too far, -- struggled too long, -- sacrificed too much and have too much left to do – to allow that which we have achieved for the good of all to be swept away without a fight. And we have not forgotten how to fight." – Lane Kirkland

To Rita With Love

From the moment that Rita told me she would be retiring on December 31, 2020, the words to the song “To Sir With Love” started going through my head, especially the portion

***But how do you thank someone
Who has taken you from crayons to perfume?
It isn't easy but I'll try***

Rita, you have certainly taken all of us, the Association of Catholic Teachers, from crayons to perfume. From the time the Union was formed, you helped us, the very green, brand new teachers of the Union during our crayons phase. Through your continued advocacy for us, you have watched us grow as we embarked on this long journey, eventually moving into the perfume phase, becoming seasoned teachers and committed Union members.

Rita, you have given your life to make all of our lives so much better. Nothing has ever been too much trouble for you, whether it be a weekend or evening phone call, or contacting a teacher during your vacation time. You have always reached out to the teacher who needed to discuss something with you to find out when it is most convenient for the teacher and you to talk. Through good times and not so good times, the teachers could always count on you. You have been our rock, our leader, our confidante, and our friend.

Personally, you have definitely taken me from crayons to perfume. I have learned so much from you as we have worked side-by-side for the last 19 years. Your knowledge, intuition, strength, tenacity, energy, compassion, and humor have guided me and grounded me as I grew in the position of ACT Staff.

We have certainly had our adventures along the way. I think we have probably had more work-related conversations in my car on our way to a school or a meeting than anywhere else. I will always remember this uninterrupted time that helped us to explore possible solutions to many issues. Then, there is always the time that we accidentally drove on to the off ramp of I-476 after a very late night of negotiating during a strike. Thankfully, we had only gone about fifty feet before we realized our mistake and no one was coming off the exit ramp, which allowed us to back up and get on to the entrance ramp.

Most of all, I will always treasure your friendship. You always know what to say and what not to say. You have a quip or a joke for any situation. You can put a situation into perspective like no one else I have ever met.

It isn't easy to thank you for all you have done, but I have tried. I thank you and I thank you on behalf of all the teachers whose lives you have touched. As with any teacher who has been teaching for a long time, you will never fully realize the impact you have had. Just know that you have made the world a better place by all that you have given to me and to the teachers of the Association of Catholic Teachers.

Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Irene

Wishing you a Happy Retirement



Happy Retirement to my dear friend, Rita. I absolutely loved working with you all at ACT and have so many wonderful memories of our days together! Thank you for always believing in me and for encouraging me along as I worked toward my goal of becoming an occupational therapist. You have always been such a glowing example of strength and perseverance. Thank you for being a shining example, for so many laughs and for leaving a lasting impression on me and so many others. I love you! I hope your retirement is as fabulous as you are!

*Christine (Robertson) Roxberry, OT/LR
Hallahan Class of 1993*



ACT Office Staff Through the Years

- UL: Irene, Rita, Ginny
- CTR: Joe Schuler, Rita, Ed Stehle, Ginny & Irene
- UR: Rita, Ed Stehle, Ginny, John Zoccola
- LL: Rita, Joe Punchello, Ginny
- LR: John Reilly, Rita



Wishing you a Happy Retirement

Dear Rita,

Congratulations on your retirement.

Whatever leisure you might allow yourself, whatever journeys you might plan and whatever interests you might pursue, all are well-deserved, perhaps long overdue, for someone who had dedicated herself relentlessly, indefatigably, to the complex needs and mission of the Association of Catholic Teachers.

I thank you for the many ways that you have helped me, both personally and as an ACT member. It has always been a pleasure to be in your company. I consider myself fortunate to be among the many educators who have benefitted from your zeal and vision.

Cordially,
Jim Gildea

THANK YOU

Jim Gildea, Retired
SS. John Neumann-Maria Goretti High School

RITA RECEIVES RECOGNITION FROM THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA AND THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA

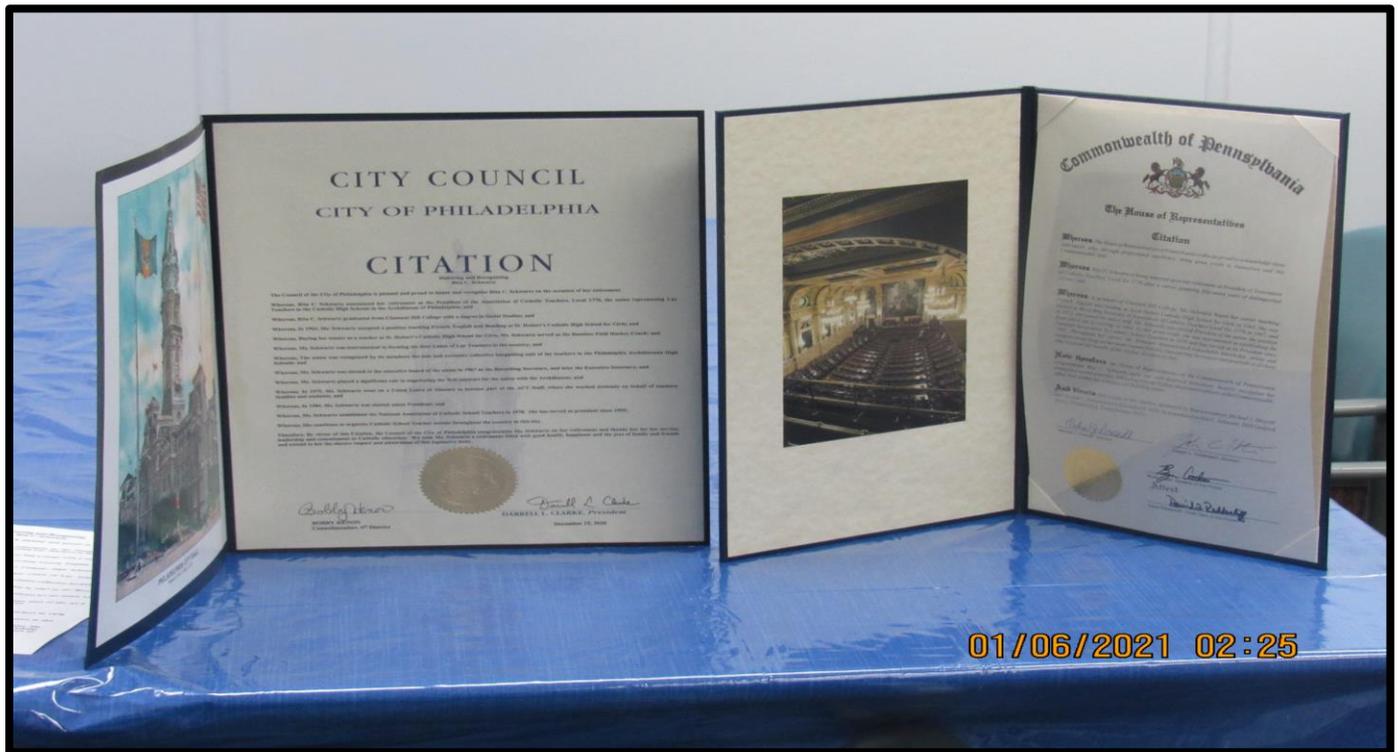
On Wednesday, January 6, 2021, Rita received a surprise visit at the Association's Office from Pennsylvania State Representatives, Michael Driscoll and Joseph Hohenstein, as well as City Councilmember, Bobby Henon, who presented Rita with citations from both the City of Philadelphia and the State of Pennsylvania, recognizing and honoring Rita for her many years of service and leadership in both the City and the State.



Pictured above left to right – City Councilmember, Bobby Henon, ACT President Emeritus, Rita C. Schwartz, PA State Representative, Michael Driscoll, and PA State Representative, Joseph Hohenstein.

*The City of Philadelphia
and the
State of Pennsylvania*

*Thanks you for your leadership and service
and*



*Wishes you a Happy and Healthy
Retirement!*

*“Today you are you,
that is truer than true.
There is no one alive
Who is Youer than You.”*

~Dr. Seuss



*And, Rita, we thank you
for being You!*

*“Hail and farewell Rita for a job well done.
No one could have done better.”*

*Kay Lansing
Retired, Cardinal O'Hara High School*