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RETIREES
American Federation
of Teachers

AFTerwords

NEWSLETTER • LOCAL 2373
ROWAN UNIVERSITY
201 Mullica Hill Rd., Glassboro, N.J., 08028

Making a Positive Difference in the Lives of Others

Meet Dr. Ali Houshmand, Seventh President of Rowan University

Rowan University has experienced several key administrative changes recently, particularly that of president and provost. Dr. Ali Houshmand became the seventh president in June 2012, after approximately six years as provost/senior vice president of Academic Affairs, CEO, and interim president of Rowan University. Rose Glassberg conducted an interview with Dr. Houshmand on May 9, 2013 so that our membership, many of whom live at great distances from Glassboro, can get a closer look at the new president. The following article is a result of that interview.

Dr. Houshmand was born in Iran to parents who, illiterate themselves, nevertheless stressed the importance of education for Ali and his nine siblings, all of whom completed primary and secondary school in Iran and three of whom completed college degrees.

Dr. Houshmand came to England when he was almost twenty and earned a bachelor's degree with honors in mathematics and a master's degree in Mathematical Statistics; he stayed in England for a total of nine years, but he explained, "I never felt welcome or at ease there." He described an incident after he had finished his master's degree, when he had joined friends to celebrate in a local bar. After he left, he was followed and set upon by a group of skinheads, who broke his jaw. Apparently, this was not a random act since Dr. Houshmand described carloads of skinheads descending on British campuses, in search of darker-skinned students to attack, as a common practice.

In contrast, when he came to the

University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in 1975 to pursue graduate studies in Industrial and Operations Engineering, he immediately felt "at home." He earned his



Dr. Ali Houshmand, the new president of Rowan University, views his administrative role as an invaluable opportunity to impact the lives of others in a positive manner.

M.S. in 1985 and Ph.D. in 1989. He has utilized his engineering and mathematical expertise in the private sector and at the University of Cincinnati. Those skills seem to run in his family; his wife Farah has a Master's degree in Food Science, his daughter Layla is pursuing a Ph.D. in Biomedical Engineering at Michigan, and

his son Kasra is enrolled in a Master's program at Temple University.

Immediately before coming to Rowan University as provost and senior vice-president in 2006, Dr. Houshmand served in similar roles at Drexel University. He measures what we try to accomplish in public higher education against a single criterion: "How does what we produce help society?" He is convinced that concept "is embedded in the culture of this institution."

As examples, he identified our emphasis on teaching and sense of community, so evident in 2011 when Rowan served as a center for evacuees during Hurricane Irene. At that time, faculty, staff, students and townspeople volunteered to help feed and shelter hundreds in temporary arrangements in the gymnasium. He also described faculty who could find ready employment at more prestigious institutions, but choose to come and stay here because they appreciate our approach.

I offered as another example, to which Dr. Houshmand readily agreed, our almost 40-year history of AFT's rarely having to take grievance cases to an off-campus level for settlement, and that the late Nick Yovnellio brought that model with him as president of the Council of New Jersey State College Locals, AFT's state-wide bargaining agent.

Our new medical schools further illustrate our basic philosophy in striving to train family care physicians to practice in underserved areas, an even greater need facing the country as new patients are covered by medical insurance. The medical schools' target of 100% retention has led to

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Nick DiObilda, Professor of Reading, Caps Distinguished Profession with a Flourish

It is no secret that twentieth century educational philosophy owes much, if not everything, to John Dewey and his fellow pragmatists; that philosophy describes Nick DiObilda himself, as well as his approach to his ultimate career path, his work with AFT, and the work he is currently doing with Rowan's Medical School students in Camden.

After graduating from West Chester University as an English education major, Nick taught English for five years in both vocational and comprehensive high school. He left after five years to begin graduate work in reading, "because," he said, "I couldn't teach literature to kids who couldn't read." With the successful completion of his master's degree in reading education at the University of Delaware, he was encouraged to continue in a doctoral program. He completed a Ph.D. in both Reading Education and English Education at Ohio State University in 1972 and came to Glassboro that fall.

At Glassboro, Nick promptly set to work. Join the AFT? No problem for Nick, whose immigrant father and uncles had been members of the Steelworkers Union in Pittsburgh. Within his department, Nick soon established himself as a knowledgeable and active participant, and over the thirty-eight years of his career, teaching courses for both undergraduate

and graduate students, Nick served as director and clinical examiner for the Reading Clinic, department chairperson,



Nick DiObilda retired from Rowan University in 2010, but continues to serve as a valuable resource for the new School of Medicine by tutoring and counseling medical students.

department Senator, and also participated in many department, school, and college committees.

Nick's particular expertise in clinical procedures was evident in his work with special projects, such as the C.H.A.M.P. project (Create Higher Aspirations and Motivation Project) in Camden, originated

for the Camden campus by the late Eric Clark. Nick, who teaches graduate level courses in clinical procedures, describes "Story Storks," a project in which his graduate students visited expectant mothers in the delivery ward to teach them how to read to their children. When the babies were born, each mother received a board book with their baby's footprint on the cover, as a reminder. Over 2000 mothers benefited from this particular project.

Nick's work with the AFT Local on campus also illustrates his no-nonsense approach to getting work done. He spent several years on the Local's Grievance Committee, under the direction of Mel Moyer before serving as assistant chairperson and ultimately as chairperson of that committee, one of the most important committees within any union since it is charged with protecting both the rights of individual unit members and the integrity of the contract itself. From 2001 to 2005, Nick served as president of Local 2373.

Currently, though officially retired from Rowan, Nick is working with Rowan's medical students, again drawing on his skills as a reading clinician and teacher to help Rowan meet its goal of 100% retention of these students. He is tutoring, counseling and working to develop a peer-tutoring program to begin next year, explaining that most medical schools have such a program in place.

Retired as of 2010, Nick became an active participant in Retirees Chapter meetings, currently serving as a member of our Executive Committee. In 2011 and 2012, he held our first two pre-retirement workshops, developing a set of materials that later presenters could build on. Nick said, "I enjoy the Retirees Chapter because union activity was a significant part of my life at Rowan, and I wanted to stay involved with a union. Also, it is most comfortable in retirement being around people who share my experiences and continue to stay active in some aspect of campus life."

While Nick is enjoying his current work with the medical school students—he describes them as highly motivated and hard-working – he is looking forward to being *really* retired and enjoying more of such lovely activities as the recent cruise he and his wife Gloria, a retired nurse, took with their three grown children and two grandchildren. As John Dewey, also a member of the AFT, might or might not have said, "Sounds like a plan!"

—by Rose Glassberg

Generous Contributors to the Annual Holiday Fund Raiser

Once again the Retirees Chapter gratefully acknowledges the contribution of these most generous donors and thanks them for their help in making the annual Holiday Retirees Sale a grand success. Please support our donors whenever possible and remember to thank them in person for their special contributions. The annual fund raiser helps support scholarships for undergraduates at Rowan University.

1. Arnie's Butcher and Catering (two separate certificates).
2. Cafe Aldo Lamberti.
3. Barnes and Noble, Glassboro.
4. Kuzina by Sofia.
5. The Italian Affair.
6. Michaelangelo's.
7. The Pelican.
8. Short Hills Restaurant and Delicatessen (two separate certificates).
9. Sweet Lulu's.
10. Steve Gibbs of Trendsetters (hair makeover worth up to \$100).

Other Donations:

1. Lunch as guest of Dr. Ali Houshmand, President of Rowan University.
2. Two knitted hat and scarf sets and one knitted lap afghan by Roberta Fitzgerald.
3. A gift basket from the Jazzman Cafe by Sodexho.
4. A handmade bracelet and a handmade necklace by Georgette Sahn.
5. Cash donation by Dr. Joanne Connor of the President's Office.
6. The Estate of Muriel Onni.
7. Jars of homemade marmalade and lemon curd donated by Rose Glassberg, both for sale and as thank-you gifts and prizes.



AFTerthoughts from Rose

by Rose Glassberg

It's hard to imagine an uglier or meaner term for retired seniors than former Senator Alan Simpson's reference to us as "greedy geezers." I tried, but it was like trying to transmogrify a warthog: there's just no place to go.

Not only is Simpson's term ugly and mean, it's also untrue. He lays the blame for the current economic problems in the United States, at least in part, on the extravagant benefits retirees receive, far exceeding what they need, deserve, or what seniors in other countries receive.

The facts say otherwise; a recent *New York Times*' special section on retirement includes "How They Do It Elsewhere," an article by Steven Greenhouse (May 15, 2013). Mr. Greenhouse notes that about 58 % of Americans have neither a pension nor 401(k). For fully one-third of those currently receiving Social Security benefits, averaging \$15,000 annually, those benefits constitute 90 % of their income.

In comparing our retirement system with those in other nations, Greenhouse cites an independent study that ranks ours as a C, while Denmark's received an A

ranking, and those of the Netherlands and Australia were each rated as B-plus. Among the problems identified in our retirement system, the study, in Greenhouse's summary, noted "contribution rates too low to assure adequate retirements for middle-class

... if the Chained CPI... is adopted, estimates indicate it could cost pensioners \$600 to \$1200 per year.

Americans and.... also... poverty-level benefits for many low income workers...." as well as "pensions that fail to keep up with inflation."

This should begin to sound familiar to us. The state deliberately did not contribute its share to our pension fund for at least ten years; legislation requiring the state gradually to reach full contributions by the end of seven years was enacted only last year, and we will receive no state increases until the end of that period. At that, we are clearly better off than the 58 % of Americans described above.

Our cost-of-living increases are, by

law, 60 % of the official COLA, but if the Chained CPI the conservatives want and President Obama has said he would accept is adopted, estimates indicate it could cost pensioners \$600 to \$1200 per year. For us, effectively, it means the end of cost-of-living increases; for the group who rely on their Social Security benefit as their major source of income, it means catastrophe.

We are neither greedy nor geezers; nor are we patsies. We are senior citizens, entitled to respect and care and a retirement without shame; our age is not an inconvenience for the rest of society.

Fortunately, we were part of a profession that makes us uniquely qualified to speak up, not only for ourselves but also for others. In a recent letter, I asked you to contact your legislators about the unfairness of the Chained CPI. If you have already done this, thank you – and maybe this is a good time to check back with them. If you haven't yet, now is a *really* good time to start.

I have said this before and I'll say it many times: "*Make Them Hear You!*"

Chapter Conducts Third Annual Pre-Retirement Workshop

At the request of AFT Local 2373 President Karen Siefring and the Executive Committee, the Retirees Chapter held its third Pre-Retirement Workshop on May 8, 2013, for staff members considering retirement.

The workshop was held in Room 144 of the Chamberlain Student Center; a light lunch was provided by the Local. Prospective retirees had reserved space with the AFT Office in order to provide a count both for lunch and for handouts that accompanied the presentation.



Rose Glassberg and Jay Chaskes, workshop leaders, enjoy a humorous moment during the Pre-Retirement Workshop in Room #144 of the Chamberlain Student Center.

Rose Glassberg greeted the participants on behalf of the Retirees Chapter, explaining briefly its history and purpose; Jay Chaskes, in Nick DiObilda's absence on a previously planned family trip, presented the power point document, pausing for questions whenever they occurred. Later, Ms. Vanetta Turner, Director of Pensions and Benefits for Rowan University's Office of Human

Resources, joined the group and was most helpful in answering questions that needed more specific information than either Jay or Rose could provide.

All of the participants indicated their appreciation for the informative workshop and refreshments. The Retirees Chapter looks forward to continuing the Workshop each year, and is happy to provide this service to members of Rowan University's AFT Local.



Steve Hartley, Computer Science, and Habib Jam, Economics, listen intently to information disseminated at the Pre-Retirement Workshop.



Xiaoming (Jim) Zeng, Mathematics; Joy F. Xin, Special Education; Marge Morris, Music Librarian, participate in the third annual Pre-Retirement Workshop on May 8, 2013.

In Memoriam

Maria Elisa Ciavarelli, *Foreign Languages and Literatures, Translator of Poetry, Passes*

Maria Elisa Ciavarelli, 75, of Philadelphia, PA, died on March 19, 2013. She was born in Italy and came to the United States during the 1950s, eventually enrolling at the University of Pennsylvania, where she received her B.A., M.A., and Ph.D.

A member of the Foreign Languages and Literatures Department since 1973, she retired in June of 2008 as Associate Professor. She taught courses in the romance languages, including Spanish and Italian, and was particularly fond of foreign literatures and poetry.

Dr. Ciavarelli joined the AFT Retirees Chapter upon her retirement. She also worked as an interpreter for the Philadelphia Courts. In her free time she enjoyed traveling around the world and greatly appreciated the cultural diversity of the countries she visited.

Dr. Ciavarelli was a longtime member of the Executive Council

of the Italian American Cultural Association. She regularly attended conferences held by this organization, where she presented poetry that she had translated from English to Italian by various well known poets, including Philadelphia poets Maria Fama, Rachel Guido de Vries, the late Mary Ann Mannino, and her former colleague, Antoinette Libro. These poems, in English and Italian, were subsequently published in conference proceedings and in literary journals such as *Philadelphia Poets* and *VIA: Voices in Italian Americana*.

Her parents, F. Constantino Ciavarelli and Angela Moretti Ciavarelli, predeceased her. She is survived by her dear friend and loving companion of forty years, Linde Hegestweiler.

Those who wish may send donations in memory of Dr. Maria Elisa Ciavarelli to the Student Scholarship Fund, Rowan University Foundation, 201 Mullica Hill Road, Glassboro, NJ 08028.

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the use of trained reading clinicians who offer tutoring, counseling and guidance in study skills. A peer tutorial program for subsequent classes of medical students is in process, a real effort at increasing diversity

among these future physicians, without diminishing proficiency.

Dr. Houshmand views his administrative role as an opportunity to impact the lives of others positively. He feels that his life experiences have provided a powerful

rationale for such a perception. During our interview, we discussed the good feelings generated at a luncheon hosted by the AFT on campus with Dr. Jaime Torres, Director of Region Two of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Dr. Houshmand and Provost Dr. James Newell joined us and I had an opportunity to discuss with Dr. Torres our new medical programs. I said I considered the setting an effective first contact with an office we might expect to communicate with again.

It was in this context that Dr. Houshmand described a dream project that he fully expects to see funded some day: a Fellowship House near campus, with at least four different kitchens, where people of different faiths can prepare food according to their particular customs and then proceed to share their food with each other. Perhaps then they might come to understand that the cultural differences between us are only that – and no more.

One can but hope.

—by Rose Glassberg

In addition to this interview with Dr. Houshmand on May 9, 2013, this article utilized information from an earlier interview: "Featured in the Bulls Eye This Month: Dr. Ali Houshmand," by Mike Willmann: *SNJ Business People*. Vol. 5, Issue 10, 2011.

Tanka on Superstorm Sandy

autumn moonlight—
floodwater slaps its way
into deserted streets
seeps into boarded-up homes
drowning hopes and prayers

wind and rain batter
the barrier islands
a roof flies off
a deck collapses
keepsakes float away

after the flooding
the debris of shore towns
stacked miles high
taking a hair dryer
to the wedding album

—by Toni Libro

Tanka is a five-line poem that originated in the East approximately a thousand years ago. Tanka actually predates the haiku, when in the 17th century, the first three lines of the tanka were made to stand alone as haiku. Today the short form poetry of tanka and haiku are enjoying a resurgence, with myriad journals devoted to the modernized forms.

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File Photo for President Houshmand

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SPECIAL THANKS

Dr. Ali A. Houshmand, *President*

Rowan University, Glassboro, NJ 08028



Mark Your Calendars!

September 11

Third Annual Recent Retirees Reception

Join us as we welcome and congratulate our Rowan AFT Retirees for 2013; a special program, retiree testimonials, and delectable buffet luncheon await you!

October 9

To Be Announced

November 13

Political Analysis