

NYSUT Communications Awards 2017

Class I

Local: Edgemont Teachers Association

Category: General Excellence

Publication/Website: ETA PIPELINE

Issue Date: 20161101

Judges' Comments:

The *ETA Pipeline* has a nice personal touch that is especially warm and welcoming. I would recommend getting more of the photos near the top, even though they may not be the most newsworthy element, they engage the member quickly. This publication has a nice balance of serious information and social news.

Good range of issues and articles represented showing activities involving cross section of members. Be careful about being too overt in expressing personal political opinion, no matter how justified you think it may be, in president's column. It can be a flashpoint in any local union and a stronger approach is to express concerns in a more objective way. Similarly, use the article about the victories of endorsed candidates to offer some perspective on how they were selected and the importance of holding them accountable for representing the interests of local teachers, their families and the community.

Local: Irvington Faculty Association

Category: General Excellence

Publication/Website: The Unionizer

Issue Date: 20160624

Judges' Comments:

Nice clean layout and some good practical information. Material would be stronger by connecting it more directly to the local members...why is it important? How does it help individual members and strengthen solidarity? Use testimonials to deliver the message with more impact.

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Class I

Local: Jasper Troupsburg Educational Support Personnel Association

Category: General Excellence

Publication/Website: Jasper Troupsburg Educational Support Personnel Association Newsletter

Issue Date: 20160317

Judges' Comments:

Short, sweet and to the point. No words, space or effort is wasted here. This entry begins by explaining, "Why a newsletter?" So, presumably, this is a first effort and it gets the door open by quickly touching on a few basic bits of useful information. It still has lots of room to grow and develop a style that suits the needs and tastes of the JTESPA and its members.

Some basic practical information is presented cleanly. It could be strengthened with some explanation of why it is important and relevant to individual members and testimonials to help explain why it would be valuable.

Local: New Hartford Teachers Association

Category: General Excellence

Publication/Website: The Chalkboard

Issue Date: 20161015

Judges' Comments:

This bright and colorful publication, *The Chalkboard*, puts a strong focus on its members, especially welcoming newcomers at the start of the school year. However, it does not stop there, because this net is cast wide enough to include news about the retirees and benefits programs, too.

Very strong entry that connects new members to the union while building a sense of community in the local. Strong layout and graphics and very nice, warm and welcoming articles about the new teachers. The feature could be enhanced with an overview article about the new arrivals to provide some context. This might even be done as part of the president's column.

The story about the senior winning the photography contest is a nice addition; it could even be stronger if connected to her coursework or with a comment from a teacher who serves as a mentor in some way.

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Class I

Local: Schalmont Teachers' Association

Category: General Excellence

Publication/Website: STATIC

Issue Date: 20160701

Judges' Comments:

The summer 2016 issue of *STATIC* is nearly overpowering in its length. It surely has something for everyone, from light-hearted humor to very serious and useful information about new requirements to maintain professional certification. But all of that pales in comparison to the element that takes up the most space. Fortunately, it is focused on the best material: "Throwback Thursday" accounts from retired and long-term members of how they see the value of the STA from their vantage point of decades-long experience. What a great idea for helping new and less experienced members grasp the meaning and value of the union, especially during prolonged contract negotiations. These very worthwhile and individual testimonials not only are great motivators for solidarity and determination in fighting for a new contract, they are a powerful way to help members understand the devastating threat of national challenges facing public employees everywhere through the rampant Right to Work movement and court cases nationally. I especially liked seeing the personal comments garnered from members of another NYSUT local who were previously working for charter or private schools. I hope all of these "Throwback Thursday" accounts are simply gathered in the summer issue, after having been presented individually during the 2015-16 school year.

Overall, I think the size of this issue of *STATIC* has made its overall organization a bit unmanageable. I would like to see the opening page focused more on news and members actions, rather than on photos and names of the elected officers. This issue needs that sharper focus to bring so many varied elements into focus for maximum effect. That said, the *STATIC* is still a show-stopper!

Outstanding entry with much to admire. Very strong focus on the importance of the contract, solidarity in the union and context involving the impact a contract makes for individual members. Strong graphics and clean, crisp layout throughout. Be careful with partisan political messages in the political report. There are many ways to make a strong argument and convince people to vote in their own best interest without making it about political parties per se. Partisan politics can be a lightning rod that negatively affects the unions efforts to bring people together about common interests.

Similarly, when reporting on statewide union activities, provide some more substantive

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insight into the value of workshops, presentations and guest speakers at events. Offer perspective on how what is learned makes an impact for teachers locally in a stronger and more effective union.

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Class II

Local: Faculty Association Suffolk Community College

Category: General Excellence

Publication/Website: The Word

Issue Date: 20160901

Judges' Comments:

Clean, crisp, clear and fairly comprehensive are all fair ways to describe this very good newsletter. It follows a set layout design that balances the text with a single photo that is always in the upper left corner of the text. The articles are good and reasonably interesting. This publication tells the FASCC members what they need to know and includes a couple of opinion columns on the first pages. It is hard to fault such a solid and responsible effort. However, the predictability tends to make it formal and the lack of surprises and the unexpected could eventually dim reader interest. I would love to see the writers of non-opinion news step back from the first person perspective and hold their subject matter at arm's length. It would give an objective quality that would deepen the power of the presentation.

Strong layout and a lot of good practical information here. Much of the information has a human story at its heart, but could present more fully in human terms. For example, use quotes from the people involved as testimonials to their experience for greater impact. Ironically, the article about the first-hand experience at the DNC offers the best example of a true human-interest perspective. It's ironic because the partisan political nature of this feature could be a lightning rod within the membership. Be careful with partisan politics...there are often ways to express and move people around the issues without it being overtly political and that can yield better results.

Again, there is a lot of information here and much of it is well organized and presented...moving it beyond a sharing of information into humanizing it would be worth the effort for delivering a top notch news vehicle.

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Local: UUP Farmingdale

Category: General Excellence

Publication/Website: UUP Unifer Farmingdale Chapter

Issue Date: 20160401

Judges' Comments:

This is a good newsletter with useful information presented in a clear, attractive, but somewhat dated style. The range of subjects is good, but the union should beware that the old-school style risks being dismissed by younger members.

There is a lot of strong, valuable and practical information presented here. Offering a more direct human perspective could strengthen much of it. What does it mean for the individual member? Testimonial or perspective from individuals would strengthen the impact and offer a way to create a stronger sense of community within the TA.

The president's column is very strong in providing some context and perspective about a broader issue and connecting to local circumstances.

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Class II

Local: Hyde Park Teachers Association

Category: General Excellence

Publication/Website: Contact

Issue Date: 20160601

Judges' Comments:

This entry is full of heart and is very personal, with two tributes to friends who recently died, stealing the show. It is anchored by the cover story summarizing the ending academic year and showing the breadth of issues and activities it encompassed. This is a good newsletter that comes across as very direct, unpretentious and caring about members and issues. The photos add to the warm, personal feeling in this publication and they balance the text.

Many strong elements here that work toward building a sense of community in the TA. Nice photos and strong layout. The length of articles and items contributes to readability in many cases. The features offer perspective and connection. Some additional context to emphasize relevance, more use of testimonials and quotes from members and a sharper focus would make this an even stronger communication vehicle.

Local: Nyack Teachers Association

Category: General Excellence

Publication/Website: The Bridge

Issue Date: 20160325

Judges' Comments:

The Bridge is a rich assemblage of news, issues, photos, events and personal updates. Members from throughout the district can find stories and bits to interest them. For me, the story about the WWII veteran speaking to students about his war experiences and the concentration camp he helped to liberate was especially moving and well told.

But the devil is in the details. It needs a bit of polish. Every page is a kind of rule unto itself when it comes to how the text is presented on the page. Some have justified columns, while others are ragged-right. One story is flush right. Some have text in columns and others do not. Generally, it's best to pick a good style and stick to it except where a difference really matters and makes sense. The design also favors a headline with a photo or artwork on the left that comes between the headline and the beginning paragraph. Move the photo or artwork to the right side or to the bottom left

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side so the reader is not interrupted or forced to jump over it. Stories also would benefit from being proofed or simply read aloud to catch the missing words or verbs in the wrong tense, etc.

Good focus and layout that draws the reader in are among the strengths of this submission. There is a lot of good, practical information. It could be even stronger by connecting in a more human way. Comments and testimonials from teachers and the community would be a welcome addition to better deliver the message of the edition. Images of community-teacher interaction would also strengthen the impact of what is being shared.

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Local: Rondout Valley Federation of Teachers and School-Related Professionals

Category: General Excellence

Publication/Website: THE UNION SOUND

Issue Date: 20161201

Judges' Comments:

The Union Sound is full of members' voices speaking up and speaking out with concern for the uncertainty facing the country and education following the 2016 elections. The presentation is a bit staid, but the views expressed in it are not. They are full of pride for the education and caring their co-workers bring to the students, and gratitude for those who appreciate what they do. This is a vibrant publication that lacks color, but not warmth or passion.

Strong layout and thought provoking features make this an impressive effort at first blush review. The impact would be stronger with a more direct connection to how the features relate to the local union. Some of the features provide interesting information but much of it pertains to bigger picture issues without reinforcing the relevance to local union members.

Be careful about framing political issues in a partisan way. It can be polarizing and often there are better ways to connect the dots without the commentary being overtly political. The feature on "Finding Your Voice" would be even stronger with some quotes and/or testimonials from participants to bring it home.

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Local: UUP Potsdam

Category: General Excellence

Publication/Website: UUP Potsdam Chapter

Issue Date: 20161021

Judges' Comments:

Very impressive. This publication is jam packed with a wide range of information and photos. For me, the most impressive part was the open letter to the president regarding contingents. It was moving and made an unflinchingly honest and compelling case for better working conditions and respect for these exploited employees.

Very strong layout and valuable information, covering a wide range of issues and topics make this an impressive entry. There is a good mix of practical information and features that highlight the people of the local. Mixing and matching the features (try to get some of the human interest features into the publication earlier) and humanizing some of the information by showing what it means for specific people would make the effort even stronger. Let individual members voice their perspective about important issues and activities via direct quotes and testimonials.

Still, the overall impact reflects a dynamic and welcoming local!

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Class II

Local: Walkkill Teachers' Association

Category: General Excellence

Publication/Website: IMPACT

Issue Date: 20160401

Judges' Comments:

IMPACT lacks some of the bells and whistles that help to make newsletters and blogs visually attractive and welcoming: namely color and photos. However, it is generally well designed and flows well. But its greatest strength lies in the straightforward presentation of information about members and for members. This information addresses their work lives and their personal lives and how they intersect. The amount of detail is restrained to what is important and useful, and so is number of news items. In short, I love the sense of balance and proportion in this entry.

A valuable effort here to share a wide range of information. There is a large amount of material on some big picture political issues that could be consolidated. The Community Relations and Coming Events features are particularly strong. More features to help humanize the people of the local and show their connection to key issues would make even more impact.

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Class III

Local: Buffalo Teachers Federation
Category: General Excellence
Publication/Website: PROVOCATOR
Issue Date: 20160321

Judges' Comments:

The Provocator spring 2016 issue is packed with news, mainly about serious issues. This is clearly a large local, with many members and schools so the emphasis is mainly on common themes and issues that matter to everyone. It is refreshing to see a page devoted to letters to the editor. However, it would be even more impressive to see some letters from members, rather than just thank you notes from many community organizations benefiting from the BTF's generous donations. The publication is solid, but could use more imagination and interactivity so that members will gain a greater share of ownership.

Strong effort with a lot of information on a wide range of issues and activities that are relevant to members. The newsletter would make even more impact with more humanizing of the features... tell the stories through the words and perspective of members and activists who participated in activities or are affected by the issues. Use quotes and testimonials to make it all more real to the readers rather than just a synopsis of what happened.

Nice photos and good layout throughout.

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Local: Half Hollow Hills TA
Category: General Excellence
Publication/Website: The Communicator
Issue Date: 20160501

Judges' Comments:

This issue of *The Communicator* begins with a call to arms and warns of the enemy at the gate, a message that is echoed by other stories including one on a potential state constitutional convention. A personal memory of a teachers strike helps to remind members of the hardships that were faced by their predecessors to achieve what they enjoy now. It also takes a personal look at the struggles of Verizon workers and shows why these battles must be shared. The newsletter is filled with news and photos that make for a solid and detailed look back at the ending school year and the challenges that lie ahead. It conveys a union local that's full of life.

There is a warm and welcoming appeal in the features presented here. Some of that comes from the tone of the writing but it also results from the "presence" of the people of the local who present the feature. There is a wide range of valuable and practical information presented, some of it in the first person.

More effort to humanize the features and provide local context that reinforces why it is relevant to the members of the local would make even stronger impact.

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Class III

Local: Levittown United Teachers
Category: General Excellence
Publication/Website: The Levittown Teacher
Issue Date: 20161210

Judges' Comments:

This is a bright, e-publication that balances important news with color photos of members. It combines news you can use with information about the changes in national leadership, and the dangerous trends of profit-oriented private schools and colleges.

A lot of valuable and wide-ranging information presented with a clean layout. More emphasis on humanizing the issues and connecting them directly to the local would strengthen the impact. Provide a way for members and activists to tell their own stories about why issues and activities are meaningful. Use first person accounts with photos and/or features with quotes and testimonials to deliver the message about a dynamic local.

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Local: Mount Vernon Federation of Teachers

Category: General Excellence

Publication/Website: The Agenda

Issue Date: 20161104

Judges' Comments:

Something uncommon pops out at you from the pages of *The Agenda*: it's pictures of students. Members are pictured too, but it's rare to see several photos of students in a teachers' union publication. Another thing that surprises is what at first looks like a paid advertisement dominating the front page. It turns out to be a report on a community optician and vision care retailer that works with the schools to help students who need glasses but can't afford them. It's an unusual story with very unusual placement in the newsletter. All in all, this is a good, strong publication with lots of useful information that records and documents the life of the union and its members. The "flag" on the cover looks traditional to the point of being dated and the entire layout and design would benefit from a strong update to look more contemporary. Meanwhile, *The Agenda* is getting the job done and doing it well.

There is a lot to admire in this e-newsletter - wide ranging relevant features with strong ties to the mission of the local. Many members, professional and benefit information receive appropriate attention. (Be careful about trying to prioritize some of the features by importance - highlighting a vendor might not be the best choice for a front-page feature). The overall impact suggests a vibrant local.

You might strengthen your impact by using more quotes and testimonials to help tell their story and reinforce the tie-in to the local.

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Class III

Local: Patchogue-Medford Congress of Teachers

Category: General Excellence

Publication/Website: The Connection

Issue Date: 20160324

Judges' Comments:

The Connection comes across as more of a school newspaper than a union publication because the focus is mainly on the students and their achievements, rather than news about union issues and the members. The major exception, of course, is the letter to parents that begins by sounding like it will provide them with unbiased facts, but quickly goes straight to opinion, with a few facts mixed in. The design could use a fresher more contemporary look, but it is nice to see so much attention given to the students. Since the note on the cover tells parents to see the letter inside, the entire publication seems to be directed to parents much more than to the union's members. It seems unusual that a union publication would even be shared with parents

A strong vehicle with a broader focus than just the local membership, this newsletter delivers a strong message about the education mission in the community. The material is dynamic and impressive. It might be even stronger with more context and development of some of the features to highlight the teachers role more fully.

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Local: Pittsford District Teachers Association

Category: General Excellence

Publication/Website: SPEAK OUT!

Issue Date: 20160929

Judges' Comments:

This back-to-school issue is packed with reminders to join the union and useful information, especially valuable for new teachers in the district. It also features personal accounts of members' activities over the summer. The overall design of the publication makes good use of color screens, graphics and action photos. The shot of members jumping in the air to celebrate their fundraising success for cancer research and treatment was outstanding, even if it had that notorious cell phone soft focus.

An outstanding newsletter from start to finish - strong, colorful layout, relevant and well-presented features, nice mix of practical information and local human interest features that deliver a positive sense of community. The union message is central and organic...it's about people working together.

Photos and graphics are generally strong and might be even better if they were action oriented.

The work here is first rate and dynamic.

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Class III

Local: Smithtown Teachers Association

Category: General Excellence

Publication/Website: Faculty Focus

Issue Date:

Judges' Comments:

This publication from February 2016 hammers the Friedrichs v. CTA nail hard and from a variety of angles. One part that I especially liked, was the piece that used Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" concept to look at the union in the past, the present and the future to capture how it was built so carefully over the decades and could be lost in a single US Supreme Court decision. These stories are paired with articles and lists on the advantages of belonging to the union. These are not the only subjects addressed, and all are worthwhile. Faculty Focus also provides a place for members to advertise items they want to sell or rent out, and there is even a list of investment brokers for members to consider. The publication is notable for its lack of photos, but tries to make up for it with colorful graphics. The overall appearance could be updated, but the content is strong. The focus is on issues, rather than members.

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Class III

Local: UCATS

Category: General Excellence

Publication/Website: Momentum

Issue Date: 20160201

Judges' Comments:

Without the union, you would... It's a thought provoking question that is detailed in three separate stories throughout this issue that focus on pay, safety and worker rights. This is a very effective approach to educating members about the value of their union and why they need it. News of upcoming events and the departure of a valued steward to CUNY are also included and help to raise the readers' awareness of how the union serves its members in many ways. Photos and graphics are used to reinforce the written content and the overall effect is distinctive, especially with the photo grouping on the cover that looks to history, rather than current member action.

There is a strong focus and a palpable NY edge to the information presented here. It is vibrant, determined and practical. The message is direct and non-apologetic. The layout is solid and the graphics make a strong impact. Overall, tempering the message with features and images to create a sense of community and inclusiveness might make for a stronger connection with the individual members.

Local: UUP Oswego Chapter

Category: General Excellence

Publication/Website: In Touch...

Issue Date: 20161031

Judges' Comments:

This UUP Oswego Chapter publication is a strong example of a higher education newsletter that discusses important issues and topics in some depth, with articles jumping from page to page multiple times in some cases. The emphasis is on issues less than on members or students. And text dominates color. Bright, color action photos illustrate the stories and help to break up the monotony of type. The weakest feature is the propensity for jumps that needs to be reduced.

Solid and valuable perspective on a wide range of issues reflecting the expertise and interests of activist members. The layout and sense of community is strong throughout. Connecting the issues more closely to the local community more directly would help to strengthen the impact. Still, a very worthy effort.

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Class III

Local: Valley Central Teachers' Association

Category: General Excellence

Publication/Website: ECHOES

Issue Date: 20161010

Judges' Comments:

Reading the pre-election issue of *Echoes* brings back lots of echoes as one article after another urges members to vote and expresses the writers' personal views on the candidates and also remind readers who AFT, NEA and other unions endorsed for president. In fact, this issue forsakes reporting other news to focus almost entirely on the election. Cartoons on the front and back cover add some colorful art and also focus on the need and duty to vote, even when "perfect is not on the menu." Although it is likely most members agreed with at least most of the partisan opinions, many of them may also object to the one-sided exhortations. It has generally been recognized that members do not want to be told how to vote, but they do appreciate receiving factual comparisons of candidates' views on labor issues, which in this case would include education.

The intentions may be good here but there are a lot of landmines on the political battlefield. Be careful about too overt a political message under the union banner...often it is better to talk about the values and things that locals should be concerned while urging people to make up their own minds and vote. The union should be concerned about building community around shared interests for the long term and that is often best accomplished by highlighting the things that matter most locally!

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Class IV

Local: PSC/CUNY

Category: General Excellence

Publication/Website: Clarion

Issue Date: 20160401

Judges' Comments:

The *Clarion* has a wonderful, authentic urban tabloid style, aimed at PSC members and their students. The black and white presentation adds drama, and the design keeps it from becoming too gray. I love the bold headlines and photos of members acting boldly. There's a good, no-nonsense style to approaching issues, and lots of information about the union, members' benefits and concerns, as well as a look at broader labor issues. This publication has an unselfconscious sophistication that's completely appropriate for its location and membership. The prolonged contract fight dominates the space and the mood, making it more aggressive than warm and welcoming. This issue of The *Clarion* is a bit impersonal, but presumably other issues could include more "people" stories that would warm and soften the impression a bit.

Strong union message throughout, delivered in a way that seems to reflect a sense of dynamic membership activism and solidarity. Solid news with valuable sidebars and context. Well presented for moving people.