



Allegheny County

June 2015

Retirees Association

NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 5335 • Pittsburgh, PA 15206-0335 • 412-539-9307

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Patricia Cray, *President*
Joseph Scorpion, *Vice President*
Ken Bell, *Treasurer*
Roger Westman, *Secretary*

Ginny Bowman, *Editor*
Angela Conte
Guy Tumolo

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Something old, something new

We've changed the schedule up a bit this year in an effort to find that combination of factors that might encourage greater membership participation in our activities. For starters, we eliminated two of our spring luncheons, leaving only one, on April 15. For that date, we invited one of Pittsburgh's best-known and best-loved musicians, Joe Negri. It was a most enjoyable entertainment. (Read more about his appearance in another section of your Newsletter).

Ginny Bowman organized a guided tour of the Pittsburgh Botanic Garden for the third consecutive year, and what a treat that was. The Garden represents a successful collaboration between environmental groups and local government (Allegheny County and the

President's Report continued on page 2

IN THIS ISSUE:

President's Report

Jazz Legend Joe Negri

Pittsburgh Botanic Garden

SAVE THE DATES

June 17

Picnic at West Mifflin Park

September 16

Luncheon at the DoubleTree
Learn how our pension fund is doing.

A DELIGHTFUL VISIT FROM JAZZ LEGEND JOE NEGRI

By Marge Lubawy

ACRA members who attended the April 15 luncheon meeting were given a real treat by Pittsburgh's legendary jazz guitarist Joe Negri. As he recounted his life growing up in Pittsburgh and how his professional career developed, he played a wide range of tunes that showcased his skill with the guitar. "I prefer playing jazz," he said, "but I also really like playing songs from the American Songbook." And, Joe entertained the members with some of those songs, as well as with music from the movies and some jazz pieces.

Amazingly, Joe Negri has been charming his audiences for over 80 years. About the age of five or six, he was singing and playing the ukulele on a children's radio program. As he grew into adolescence and his voice changed, he gave up singing and took up the guitar.

Joe attended Prospect School and South Hills High School in Mt. Washington where he grew up. At the age of 16, he joined the local musicians union and began playing professionally. In his senior year, he was invited

to tour nationally with a band, which he did for two years until he was drafted into the Army. When the war ended, he was asked to join the Special Services Unit to play in the band. That is where he spent the rest of his service.

When he returned home, he played locally for a few years, and then decided that he needed to finish his education. Through the VA, he finished high school and went on to Carnegie Mellon University. None of the local universities had a

continued on page 2

PRESIDENT'S REPORT *Continued from page 1*

Commonwealth) to convert old coal mines back into natural woodlands. New projects are undertaken each year, so if you haven't already visited the Garden, watch for its announcement on next year's calendar.

Today was the time set aside to honor our veterans at Calvary Cemetery in Greenfield. ACRA member Donna Brusco and I joined with eight members of VFW Post 274 to place flags on veterans' graves. Post Commander Robert Perris expressed their appreciation for our interest in remembering their fallen brethern.

Up next is our first ever picnic! Could this be the next ACRA annual tradition? You decide. You should have received your postcard reminder by now. Please help us make this a successful event by calling in your reservation to the number on the card.

In the fall we'll be back to our regular monthly luncheon schedule at the Doubletree in Greentree. More information on on the fall schedule will be forthcoming.

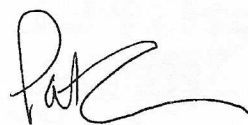
Tomorrow is Primary Day, so that outcome is still to be decided; but I do want to share some thoughts. Over the past three years, Chelsa Wagner has been a consistent advocate for retirees' interests—at Retirement Board meetings, on the record. Every year the actuaries recommend an increase in the contribution rate (of active employees to the pension fund). The RBAC usually resists that recommendation. Ms. Wagner urged the Board to set a precedent and raise the contribution rate by just a fraction of a percentage point. (There's a direct corelation between adequate funding of the pension fund and retirees getting a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA).) She asked tough questions of the Retirement Office about an unannounced change in protocol in last year's election for the vacant seat on the RBAC. Last December, when it looked as though the RBAC meeting would end without considering ACRA's year-long request for a badly-needed COLA, it was Ms. Wagner's assistant who asked, "What are we doing about the retirees?"

Asking tough questions in public doesn't always make you popular; on the other hand, the answers shouldn't cause discomfort. ACRA has never had a relationship with Ms. Wagner or her office. I assume she adopted her positions based on what she felt was the right thing to do. It would be unfortunate to lose that independent voice.

This is not to say that Mr. Flaherty wouldn't be equally aggressive in championing retirees' causes. Should he prevail in tomorrow's Primary, he will have plenty of opportunity to demonstrate his commitment.

Summer's coming! Warm days and plenty of sunshine will be welcome after last winter's brutal assault. Get out there and take a walk. Come to our picnic and say hello to old friends, or make a new one. Before you know it, we'll be sending you a postcard invitation to another great luncheon program.

Looking forward to seeing you soon!



A DELIGHTFUL VISIT FROM JAZZ LEGEND JOE NEGRI *Continued from page 1*

guitar curriculum at that time, so he majored in composition. Since then, he has started guitar programs at Duquesne University, the University of Pittsburgh, and Carnegie Mellon University.

Joe's career in television started at WDTV, now KDKA. He then went to WTAE where he spent 22 years and served as musical director. In that capacity, he met and worked with Fred Rogers who was producing a half-hour children's program at the station. When Rogers left commercial television a year or two later for public television, he asked Joe to join him on a new show for children

that he was producing. Thus, Handyman Negri became a regular for nearly 40 years on Mister Rogers Neighborhood.

Joe plays jazz guitar at various venues around town and teaches guitar as an adjunct professor at Duquesne University, Pitt, and occasionally at Carnegie Mellon. His musical skills, charming personality and gracious appreciation of his audience have made him one of Pittsburgh's most popular musicians. We are fortunate to call him our own.

IT WAS A DARK AND STORMY DAY...

when we left home, but by the time we parked at the Pittsburgh Botanic Garden the rain had stopped and the air felt refreshingly clean. Cautiously, many of us kept our rain ponchos with us; however, they were useless baggage as no more rain fell and later the sun even came out for a while. Being thankful for the clearing skies was only part of our excitement as we marveled at the progress each year has brought to this inviting public resource.



The first thing that struck me was the old white farmhouse near the parking lot which has been totally rebuilt to look like the original, but now serves as the Administration Building. We didn't need to go in there as the huge old chestnut barn across the street welcomed us with maps, pictures, and a short video of the property's history and its planned future. In the video we heard from descendants of the family who most recently lived and farmed there. That time preceded the strip-mining of the 460 acres of land the Botanic Garden has to work with, 60 of which are currently open.

The main room upstairs in the barn would be great place to hold gatherings, weddings or large picnics (I thought of a lively hoe-down). The high ceiling, huge beams and wide-plank siding of the barn give a sense of strength and comfort. The room opens through garage-door size openings to a new patio with a beautiful stone fireplace and perfect spots for family photos.

Our volunteer guide, Lynn Heckman, herself a retired County employee, met us with enthusiasm and an eagerness to show us the progress the Garden had made in the last year. She was joined by Jim Lynch, so we had a guide at the front and end on our group, enabling everyone to hear and ask questions. One significant development was the opening of the accessible trail, making the former trudge up the hill to the dogwood meadow now an easy stroll. Lynn would stop every few yards to point out special trees or plants so the walk was really easy for all. The paths are well maintained; that morning's earlier rain wasn't an issue even so soon after it had stopped.

The timing of our visit was at the height of the dogwood blooms, so we relaxed a little near the gazebo while Lynn spoke of this as the largest known natural dogwood stand. The sight of dozens of trees in flower will stay in my mind for a long time.

So much thought has gone into the planning of the Botanic Garden. Even the trail signs are made of wood, Corten steel and aluminum—three of Pittsburgh's heritages. Several of the trees are marked with parts of ceramic faces made by children to help identify them. Seen here is a cherry tree, but there are others with ceramic apple slices, and an ash tree has a face of a football player that at one time had large black horizontal ash marks under the eyes.

Continued on page 4



Photos and text by Roger Westman

In Memoriam

ACRIE, EDWARD C.03/30/2015
 ADAMS, OCEA03/23/2015
 BOORITCH, SUSANNE.....03/09/2015
 BUTLER, MICHAEL R.03/18/2015
 CHRISTOFARO, JR., MARIO.....03/12/2015
 CLAUS, PAUL N.02/01/2015
 COTTER, ELIZABETH L.....02/03/2015
 DANDRIDGE, JOANNE L.....04/04/2015
 DAVIS, MARY H.....03/09/2015
 DUGAN, JOHN W.04/25/2015
 ENGLISH, JOHN P.....04/21/2015
 FANNING, JAMES D.....04/01/2015
 FARRELL, DARLENE M.....03/30/2015
 FOLCO, JOHN.....02/10/2015
 FRAZIER, GILBERT03/02/2015
 GILCHRIST, DOLORES02/24/2015
 GUY, ALICE L.02/01/2015
 JOHNSON, CURTIS J.03/31/2015
 KAYLOR, JR., JOHN T.....02/12/2015
 KELLY, ROSEMARY L.03/06/2015
 KIEL, DAVID M.02/10/2015
 KLINK, ANNA MAE02/18/2015
 KLOTZ, BETTY J.03/26/2015
 KORNREICH, ALIDA J.04/27/2015
 LAWRENCE, MARY MARTIN03/31/2015

LEDDON, RICHARD A.....02/13/2015
 LEONE, ROBERT T.03/27/2015
 LINCOLN, BETTY M.03/12/2015
 MALIK, CHRISTINA R.....04/25/2015
 MANUEL, JANICE H.03/31/2015
 MARCINIEC, PETER.....03/10/2015
 MC CULLY, ALLEN H.....04/13/2015
 MC GRATH, JOSEPH L.....03/07/2015
 NESTLER, MARJORIE L.04/15/2015
 OPFERMAN, JOAN M.03/04/2015
 O'ROURKE, ROSELLE W.02/28/2015
 PRZYBYCIN, RAYMOND04/10/2015
 PSILOS, KATHRYN L.....04/03/2015
 REILLY, ELLIOTT E.03/20/2015
 RICHARDSON, EVELYN D.02/20/2015
 SCALISE, FRANK.....03/04/2015
 SEIBEL, RICHARD T.....04/28/2015
 STOPPERICH, BARBARA.....03/27/2015
 VESCH, RICHARD D.03/05/2015
 WARD, FLORENCE MAY.....05/02/2015
 WILLIAMS, ELVIRA.....03/25/2015
 WITKOWSKI, THOMAS J.03/11/2015
 WOSHNER, HELEN04/17/2015
 YURA, RELLA ANN.....03/19/2015
 ZEBROSKI, THEODORE T.02/15/2015

IT WAS A DARK AND STORMY DAY... *Continued from page 3*

Since it is now open to the public, the Garden was host to at least three classes of school children and their teachers on field trips on the same day, but the developed portion is so large that we usually saw them only in the distance. Lynn took us to show us the bird's nest, "eggs" and all, meant to simulate what a nest might feel like to a baby fledgling that was the size of a human child. Board member Guy Tumolo joined her there for a photo opt.

There were signs of invasive bittersweet vines that the Garden staff had removed because they strangle the trees by spiraling up the trunks too tightly. On the other hand, the staff leave the grape vines because they do no damage to the trees. In a compromise move, the native poison ivy vines with their enticing furry stems are removed only along the trails to keep inquisitive unknowing hands away.

Once again we meandered down to the pond that was a poisonous gully of acid mine drainage. The large limestone filter cleverly worked into the landscaping has cleaned up the pond. Lynn related that the fish, which live there, are more cautious of rising too frequently to the surface due the big blue herons that now visit to dine.

With that thought of food, we returned to the Welcome Center and our cars and then gathered at the Diner in Oakdale for a chatty home-style meal. A walk outdoors, knowledgeable guides, great company, and good food. Such a delightful experience!