

Happy Holidays from the Management of the County of Westchester and the Westchester Medical Center



By **NANCY KING**

On October 5th, County Executive Rob Astorino announced his 2012 budget projections and they weren't pretty. With a projected shortfall of millions of dollars and a promise

that taxes won't be raised, the CE painted a picture that would include the layoffs of about 250 employees if they didn't start contributing to their health and pension benefits. Like clockwork two weeks later Westchester Medical Center CEO Michael

Israel announced that the Westchester Medical Center (WMC) would follow suit if the employees there didn't also begin to contribute to their benefits package. However, it did seem that his predictions were more dire than Astorino's. At stake in

this case would be 650 jobs ranging from nurses to the most lowly building service workers. The threads that link these two CEO's are numerous. They are both supposedly employed to serve the *vox populi*, they both are charged with balancing a massive budget, they both have scores of employees who provide valuable services and they both have a top level of management that is grossly overpaid while having the vaguest of job descriptions.

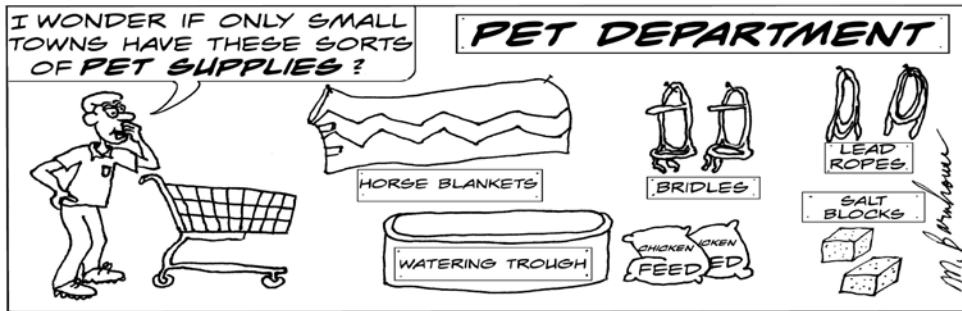
So with 900 jobs on the chopping block, one can only surmise that these budget projections are "save the date" invitations to those union officials who will be getting ready to go to the collective bargaining table.

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In the case of the Westchester Medical Center the nurses' union (NYSNA) is already negotiating, but according to both sides, it is not going well. Management at the WMC claims that they are paying the nurses \$20K in pension benefits or 35% of their base salary. You don't need to be a mathematician to figure that these numbers aren't accurate. If they were, the nurses would be making somewhere around \$300K a year. There aren't too many people who would go to the bargaining table asking for more money if they are making that kind of salary. Whoever is making those sorts of statements for the medical center should take a course in accounting 101.

Both of these CEO's are heads of their own "friends and family networks" as well. CEO Israel has somewhere around 40 people in upper management who operate as some sort of vice president. Together they make over \$10 million a year in salaries and benefits. Israel states that they are worth every penny due to the fact that WMC is a teaching hospital and in order to attract quality staff, to teach (he's on the New York Medical College

Board, too), you have to paint a picture that portrays everything on campus to be hunky dory. That sort of rationalization just doesn't make sense to most New Yorkers. It's almost as ridiculous as the Astorino administration's slogan that Westchester County is the intellectual capital of the state and paying Laurence Gottlieb \$155K a year to come up with that slogan. The Astorino administration has also become top heavy in the salary department. With those who have been elevated to commissioner status to those who obtained their employment through the friends and family network, these folks in the inner circle are costing the taxpayers around \$5 million.

Both CEO's chant that it is now time to do more with less but fail to lead by example. Two years ago the Medical Center closed the Taylor Care Center that housed long-term ventilator patients and those who needed a skilled nursing facility. It was said that this closure was due to a failure. What is even more disturbing is that the Taylor Care Facility has been turned into the executive wing that houses the CEO, all of those vice presidents, their assistants and their assistant's, assistants. If you're getting dizzy, don't

call a doctor, you're not sick...you're in shock. While County Executive Astorino has also made cuts to programs, services and jobs, many of those have been due to attrition or retirement. With those cuts came replacements from Astorino's own stable of friends, donors, donor's children and other members of that ever growing "friends and family network."

The pattern that emerges is that in order to keep those at the very top of the political heap happy, those at the very bottom (or even somewhere in the middle), those who serve us the most and who perform the utmost important jobs are the first to be let go. In comparing these two giant players in the game of Westchester County employment, it becomes easier to understand the Occupy Wall Street protests. These people

are protesting top-heavy corporations and top-heavy government. Maybe they have the right idea after all. Or maybe those two CEO's should check into the WMC and see if they enjoy a thirteen hour wait in the emergency room or wait until their IV has been infiltrated because they were too short staffed to check on it. Nevertheless, the threats and the cuts will continue to come. Even if both union locals give into the demands of management it won't help. County government and the hospital that shares its name have both flat lined.

Nancy King is a resident of Greenburgh, New York.



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