

# The Principal Issues

## Ex-school chiefs dine, mull problems for dessert

By Rebecca Raphael

For more than 25 years they have come to the Blue Bay Diner in Bayside to solve the problems of the world.

The group arrives at 10 a.m. Tuesdays and Fridays, and by noon they have, for the most part, been successful.

All former New York City school supervisors or principals, the men collectively have dedicated more than 400 years to the New York City Public School system. Most retired in the 1970s, and two as recently as the early 1980s. A kind of fraternity for men over 70, with no formal name, dues, attendance, committees, elections or officers, the club's only prerequisites for membership are respect for each other and their former profession.

Coming from Queens and Nassau County, they discuss world events, their latest round of golf, the day's headlines, their wives, grandchildren and problems. They bemoan the deterioration of the public school system, talk about inflation and the rising cost of automobile maintenance.

They argue about investments, debate issues such as affirmative action and share their concerns about growing older. They love to kid around. And they listen to one another.

"It's an opportunity to ventilate," said Bill Stein.

Jacob Raphael, whose 10-year attendance record makes him the most recent addition to the group, recalled one friend who shared his grief about losing his son to AIDS.

"We listened. There was nothing we could do, so we just listened. I think that's what makes our group so peculiar, so unique," said Raphael, a high school principal for 22 years.

When the man repeated the same story later, Raphael said, the group listened again.

"Everyone's got a peckel of troubles," said Seymour Weinstein, who the men call Sy. "It's nice that we can help one another," added the former principal of PS 205 in Queens.

After about 60 years since they started their careers in education, what do they still have in common?

"Time," said Weinstein, who, at 79, is one of the youngest in the group. Looking to see if his breakfast was on its way, he added, "Lots of time — that's what we have in common."

"Oh, come on, that's not all — it's a support group," countered Abe Scharf, a white-haired man who spent 12 years as principal of PS 127 in eastern Queens. "We were all once considered important people, we supervised important people, so we can relate to each other. That's important as you get older. Younger people find it difficult to understand."

The group's views range across the spectrum when it comes to issues such as Social Security or health care re-

form, but, they pointed out, there is always a respect for one another's opinions.

Most look back fondly on their days in education — when the Board of Examiners still existed, when they considered teaching a competitive and non-politicized field and when educators were respected by society.

The Board of Examiners, which tested, licensed and monitored educators, was abolished in 1990, but these old-timers think of it as the backbone of an educational structure that worked.

Pointing out that many of them have two master's degrees, Norman Shapiro said: "It took a lot of preparation and credentials to become a teacher in our day."

"Ninety-nine percent of the time they get that table," said George Fourniotis, who has been waiting on them for the past 10 years.

"Sometimes one of them comes as early as 9 to reserve it," Fourniotis, who knows the men by their first names, said that he's got their ordering habits down. The men, who had their exact change counted before even receiving a bill, always get separate checks.

"We lived through the Depression," said Shapiro, who has been with "the gang" for 21 years. Pointing his finger he continued, "You young people don't know what that means. I'll drive out of my way to get gas somewhere that's a couple of cents cheaper."

Shaking his head in disagreement,



Newsday Photo / Alan Rata

Some of the retired school leaders who have been part of a group that has been meeting at the Blue Bay Diner in Bayside for more than 25 years, with George Fourniotis, who has been waiting on the group for 10 years

Weinstein rolled his eyes and mumbled. "We don't all do that."

The group is composed of men only. On occasion, when their wives accompany them, the women sit across the room.

"You have to understand, there's an honesty here, and we have 'in' jokes," said Scharf. Soft-voiced and matter-of-fact, he added, "The women wouldn't understand them and they would stifle our conversation."

At least one of the women doesn't seem to mind. "I think it's kind of nice that they have their own little club," said Molly Weinstein, Sy's wife of 53 years. "He likes to feel like he's 'one of the boys.'"

When the men aren't sitting around the corner table at the Blue Bay, they keep busy.

One member is still in the classroom teaching poetry at Adelphi University, and another volunteers at nearby senior citizens' homes. But the biweekly breakfast is the staple around which they schedule other plans.

Referring to their respect for one another, their educational backgrounds and motivation, and their ability to listen to one another, Raphael lamented, "You know, we are a vanishing breed, an endangered species."

Rebecca Raphael is a freelance writer.

### JAMAICA / Students and Guns

"Who You'd Least Expect," a play set in a fictitious high school that deals with guns in the hands of minors, opens April 9 at 8 p.m. at the Black Spectrum Theater at Roy Wilkins Park, 177th Street and Baisley Blvd. The play, which runs April 9-11 and April 16-18, presents solutions to the problem of guns in the schools. Group rates are available. Call 718-723-1800 for reservations.

### FOREST HILLS / Intro to Computers

Some of the many uses of computers will be explained at an "Introduction to Computers" workshop at the Forest Hills Community House, Saturday at 9:30 a.m.

The workshop will be held in the Family Computer Room, 108-25 62nd Dr. For reservations, call Dennis Redmond at 718-592-5757.

### CAMBRIA HEIGHTS / Baseball for Youngsters

Boys 5 to 16 and girls 9 to 12 are invited to join one of Cambria Heights' Little League teams.

The Cambria Heights Sports Association has opened its registration for its 49th Little League baseball season, which kicks off with a parade April 24 at noon.

The fee for each child is \$85, which includes a team uniform and baseball cap.

For information, call the CHSA office at 718-525-4494 or visit 116-49 223d St. Tuesdays between 7 and 9 p.m., Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

### JAMAICA / Women's Day Fetes

A prayer brunch and a concert will highlight Women's Day celebrations at Calvary Baptist Church scheduled for April 10 through April 18.

Guest speakers include the Rev. Suzan Johnson-Cook, founder and senior pastor of the Bronx Christian Fellowship, and the Rev. Carolyn Knight, assistant professor of homiletics at the International Theological Center in Atlanta.

Johnson-Cook will speak at 10 a.m. at the prayer brunch, April 10, at Antun's in Queens Village.

Knight will speak at the April 18 services at 7:30 and 10:45 a.m. Calvary Baptist Church is at 111-10 Guy R. Brewer Blvd. For information, call 718-297-2301.

### JAMAICA / New Resource Center

Covenant House will open a Queens Community Resource Center today for 16- to 21-year-olds at 159-17 Hillside Ave. The 10:30 a.m. ribbon-cutting will mark the culmination of a five-year plan to open centers in the Bronx, Manhattan, Queens and Brooklyn, the homes of most Covenant House youth.

"Our goal is to help older adolescents, even before they know they need us," said Bruce Henry, executive director.