

## Take the Test! Good Advice at the MEA General Membership Meeting

**Bendix Anderson**

Attorney Stuart Salles has a message for managers working for the City of New York: Take the civil service exam, even if the exam is being given for a lower title than your current job.

“Passing the exam and being certified from the list grants you civil service status. Without civil service protection, they can demote, reassign, or dismiss you,” said Mr. Salles, legal counsel for the New York City Managerial Employees Association (MEA).

During the February 23, 2011 New York City Managerial Employees Association General Membership Meeting, Mr. Salles shared tips with an audience of MEA members on the benefits of civil service status, how to handle the disciplinary process, and even advice on investigations.

Civil service status is by far the most important protection managers have in tough budget times – even from accusations of incompetence. A manager who has passed the civil service test cannot be fired for incompetence without a hearing before an “impartial judge.” This hearing is not binding. An agency can fire the manager even after a judge rules in the manager’s favor. But with civil service protection, such a decision may be reversed, with the help of MEA’s legal experts.

Civil service protection also limits the ways

a manager can be reassigned to another job. A reassignment must not reduce the salary of the civil servant by more than 20 percent, according to the regulations of the Department of Citywide Administrative Services.

“The disciplinary interview can be difficult,” explained Stu Salles. The person being interviewed must answer questions, whether or not he or she is prepared. The agency has the right to discipline managers for not cooperating with interviews. An



**MEA Counsel Stuart Salles speaks at the February 23 General Membership Meeting; HRA Chapter Director Pamela Ross was among those in attendance**

Mr. Salles told the story of a manager with 28 years of experience, who had never taken a civil service exam. As a result, she did not have civil service protection during the financial crisis, when her agency decided to help close a budget shortfall by eliminating her job.

“It was very difficult to explain to her that she had no civil service rights, no pension to collect at that time, and no guarantee to a position,” he said.

MEA can also help managers who face a disciplinary interview. Anytime an MEA member receives a disciplinary notice, the member should sit down with one of MEA’s legal specialists to prepare for the interview.

MEA legal advisor will usually accompany a member to such an interview.

Managers can also protect themselves before a complaint from an employee is even filed by documenting important conversations. That’s especially true if the manager is questioning an employee’s performance. “Many managers hurt themselves because they do not document,” he said. “A memo is terrific. Emails are gold.”

Mr. Salles also gave some simple tips, like “always tell the truth when you are interviewed by the Department of Investigations.”

Good advice from MEA’s legal staff should help managers stay out of trouble. ●

# Bits & Pieces

## The Little Association that Could

by Linda Barnes

Some of you might remember the story of the Little Engine That Could. This story is about optimism, confidence, and perseverance.

In many ways, this story is analogous to the MEA and its members. For more than 42 years, the MEA has confronted controversial and challenging issues as we represent the concerns of our members and all city managers. But the MEA couldn't do what it does best without the optimism, confidence, and perseverance of our members.

In 2010, we set a goal to make our organization even stronger by bringing at least 500 new members into the MEA. We reached out to as many city managers as we could, engaged with them, and shared information about the MEA and how we can help. The Little Engine had optimism, perseverance, and confidence, and so did the MEA. We exceeded our goal and ended the year with 530 new members!

In 2010, we accomplished great things because the character traits of the little engine were synonymous with our beliefs. No doubt there are even greater challenges ahead for the MEA in 2011. The civil service system that many managers have become accustomed to may undergo serious changes. City administrators continue to struggle to close budget gaps, potentially putting the economic livelihood of managers at risk. Because of these funding deficits, city managers must work harder with fewer resources. Tensions are high, nerves are frayed, and the number of work place incidents is increasing. We



Executive Director Linda Barnes.

are currently developing a strategic plan to help guide our efforts. Our vision to ensure MEA is the "association of choice" for managers in this difficult time.

To expand our presence in your professional homes, we plan to visit every mayoral and non-mayoral agency in the city. We look forward to interacting more with agency leaders to help resolve managerial concerns such as salary compression. We are also improving our ability to use technology to communicate more effectively with you. As long as each of you continue to help us get over the hill with the heavy load, we will say: "We know we can! We know we can!" •

## For The Record

The MEA made several announcements regarding its intent to conduct civil service test preps for the Administrative Engineer open-competitive and promotional exams. Recently, the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) cancelled all administrative civil service exams. The MEA Executive Director has learned this turn of events has occurred because DCAS is currently reviewing new methods for testing managerial capabilities. The MEA anticipates obtaining additional details regarding this issue, during its imminent meeting with DCAS senior staff. Updates will be provided on MEA's web page and hotline. •

# MEA Brings Information to Managers

**Did you know that many City employees may be entitled to an extra pair of eyeglasses every two years?**

That's in addition to the City's regular vision care benefits. Employees in certain agencies who spend more than 20 hours a week working on computers can claim the free eyeglasses through the Davis Vision Care Plan's Video Display Terminal benefit.



"It's a benefit that you could have been using for umpteen years—but who knew about it?" said Stu Eber, President of the Managerial Employees Association (MEA).

Mr. Eber shared this information with the managers at the New York City School Construction Authority in Long Island City on February 1. MEA officers and Executive Director regularly visit offices like this to share information on the benefits that managers have available to them—in addition to the benefits of



Dr. Raymond Croskey and Queenie Wooten spend their golden years fostering growth and development among the City's young adults. "My motivation is to inform these youth that they can reach for the top," said Ms. Wooten.

To help give young people the information and support they need, Dr. Croskey and Ms. Wooten help organize conferences and events through the American College

## MEA Profile

### Croskey and Wooten Keep Giving After Retirement

of Counselors (ACC). Dr. Croskey is the president and Ms. Wooten is a board member of ACC

This spring, they helped create the Young Adult Career Awareness Conference, held March 12 at the Grace Baptist Church in Brooklyn and organized by ACC and the Brooklyn chapter of the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Clubs.

The conference helped more than 100 young adults develop their careers. Topics of discussion include development of interpersonal and communication skills, proper etiquette and dress codes and interviewing skills.

"Empowerment and employment represents jobs not jail," said Dr. Croskey.

Dr. Croskey and Ms. Wooten are both veterans of New York City's Department of Education. Ms. Wooten served 43 years as director of intergovernmental relations in Region 5 of the Bronx. She worked with groups ranging from after school program to job training programs that used space in her schools. Dr. Croskey served 20 years as a health director, managing medical staff for more than 50 schools.

Both are proud members of the Retirees Chapter of the Managerial Employees Association.



Queenie Wooten with Dr. Raymond Crosley

## MEA Brings Information to Managers

joining the MEA. It's a great opportunity for managers to explain their concerns to the MEA before MEA meets with the agency's executive management as well as city officials. Look for the announcement of the MEA's visit to your offices on the website—[nycmea.org](http://nycmea.org), your bulletin boards and emails.

### Here's another benefit available to most City managers—but which few managers actually use.

The Management Benefits Fund offers the Superimposed Major Medical Plan (SMMP), which helps pay for medical expenses not covered by other City health benefit plans. Deductibles vary, though SMMP plans typically cover 80

percent of "out-of-pocket" costs for covered prescription drugs and 90 percent of other "out of pocket" covered medical costs above \$500 a person for those employees with rider coverage. Most dental and optical costs are not part of SMMP. Medicare eligible retirees cannot submit their out of pocket prescription drug expenses.

The forms to apply for these SMMP plans are usually short. "It's takes ten minutes to apply," said Mr. Eber. "You have nothing to lose. Just go to our website—[nycmea.org](http://nycmea.org)—and click on MBF Forms."

MEA has made it a mission to bring information about benefits like these to City managers throughout the five boroughs, in addition to offering test prepara-



tion, financial planning seminars, and legal counseling. The MEA newsletter—like the one you're reading now -- is published four times a year.

MEA also advocates with the Administration for pay increases for City managers. "We want the same percentage raises, if not higher, for all managers receiving satisfactory or better evaluations at the same time, if not sooner, as our staff," said President Eber. ●



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MEA members are the unsung heroes that keep New York City running. Each issue, the MEA Newsletter celebrates one of these members on Page Three in our regular column MERIT, EXCELLENCE & ADVOCACY.

Is there an MEA member you want profiled?  
Send your suggestions to lbarnes@nycmea.org

**We need your email address!**

Please go to [nycmea.org](http://nycmea.org) and fill out our  box on the homepage.

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