

JUNE 2017



Joan Greenbaum, Editor

Academic Year 2016-7 No. 10

psc-cuny.org/retirees

JUNE 5 LUNCHEON. We knew that Blanche Wiesen Cook, author of a highly acclaimed three-volume biography of Eleanor Roosevelt, would be a popular choice for speaker. But we clearly miscalculated the sheer volume and speed of reservation requests. By Monday, May 1, we had 105 reservations. We literally ran out of space and, regrettably, had to turn people away.

If you have a reservation and have received a blue receipt card, please join us for lunch and the presentation at noon. If you're unsure or misplaced your reservation, call Sharon at the PSC at 212-354-1242.

You do not need a reservation for the **10:30 AM COFFEE HOUR** when we will review, discuss and evaluate the 2016-17 year for the chapter and take a prospective look at programs for 2017-18.

Both the coffee hour at 10:30 AM and the 12 PM luncheon (for which you do need a reservation) are at the PSC Union Hall, 16th floor, 61 Broadway.

FALL 2017 PROGRAMS. Our program committee met on May 8 to develop programs for the monthly meetings and the January and June luncheons. We are in the process of aligning speakers, dates and programs. However, we can announce our first two programs:

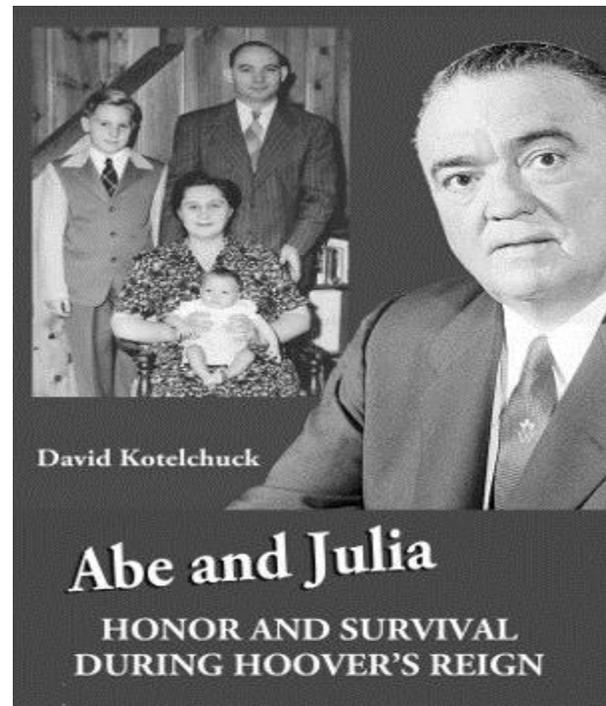
- Monday, September 11—State of the Union(s) and the Attacks on Labor: Tentatively -- Barbara Bowen, Ruth Milkman and/or Stephanie Luce.
- Monday, October 2—Upcoming NYC Election and State Ballot Initiative on the Constitutional Convention.

THE MONTH THAT WAS

SURVEILLANCE PAST AND PRESENT

Joan Greenbaum, Retiree, LaGuardia

Another packed house and lively and intense discussion greeted our two speakers at the May chapter meeting.



Dave Kotelchuck, retiree from Hunter, took us back to the 1950s and the personal and political struggles of his family during the

Red Scares of that time. In retirement Kotelchuck undertook the enormous task of reviewing the 2,200 pages of his parents' FBI files, and then turned the tales of the way his parents were hunted by Hoover into a page-turning book entitled *Abe and Julia: Honor and Survival During Hoover's Reign* (Blue Thread Books). Kotelchuck's presentation was both alarming and heartwarming, as he discussed the way the FBI (pre-computers) followed communists (and people they believed to be communists) with harassment, wiretaps and shoe-leather visits. When men with hats and dark suits came to his home and his neighbors, fear was injected into his family's life. He talked about what it meant to his mother when his father went into hiding, and what it was like for him as a young teenager. For some in the audience this brought about memories that they hadn't talked about in more than half a century.

The problem is not police training, police diversity, or police methods. The problem is the dramatic and unprecedented expansion and intensity of policing in the last forty years, a fundamental shift in the role of police in society. The problem is policing itself.

Alex S. Vitale

The End of Policing

Alex Vitale brought us up to date on some of the new types of surveillance used by police departments. Vitale, professor of sociology at Brooklyn College, gave chilling examples of both the history and current use of policing methods for targeting specific groups. His forthcoming book, *The End of Policing* (Verso Press, August 2017) illustrates behind-the-scenes ways that "broken windows" policing targets black and immigrant groups, as well as how under the City's Joint Terrorism Task Force, Muslims are targeted for intense surveillance.

Going back to explain the development and funding of state and local police departments, Vitale warns us that discussions about better police training, body cameras and minority recruitment ignore the structural issues. Now police "fusion centers" like those between public-private groups and federal and state task forces, have built-up enormous mechanisms for the continued monitoring of any group that is targeted as "other." He grounded current events with policing history going back to the "Italian Squads" following the 1886 Haymarket incident, followed by the "Radical Squads" hunting anarchists and socialists in the beginning of the Twentieth Century. Policing strategies of "intelligence, infiltration and surveillance" were used against CUNY's Muslim Student Association in 2012 and beyond. While the CUNY Law School has won cases against such actions, Vitale's message is to keep our eyes on the structure and funding that creates the "politically chilling" powers of policing. As Mike Frank, a retiree from LaGuardia commented in the discussion, Vitale's research reminds us to look not just at the "deep state," but also at the developing "deep city."

WHOSE STREETS?

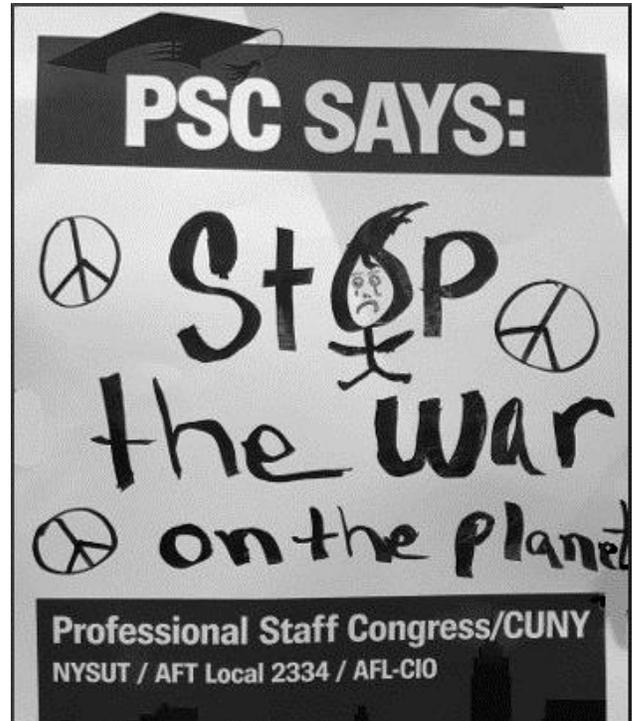
Cecelia McCall, Retiree, Baruch

We were two hundred thousand strong on Saturday, April 29, 2017, a diverse, joyful throng in celebration of the planet and pledged to protect it from the regressive policies of the Trump administration and resist the destruction that will ensue from EPA deregulations that weaken standards for fossil fuel emissions and allow drilling in formerly protected areas.

The People's Climate Mobilization for Jobs and Justice in Washington, D.C. was a follow-up to an equally successful march held in New York in September 2014. Three years ago on that same day, I was undergoing open-heart surgery, but this year I paraded up Pennsylvania Avenue, as a member of the PSC contingent, the sole local to march under the AFT banner. Ahead of us in the labor contingent were members of the American Federation of Government Employees, predominantly from EPA. Along with them and other resisters, we trod a six-mile route from a pre-rally at the Department of Labor to the White House where there was a brief sit-in.

Shoulder to shoulder, twenty abreast, under a brutal sun, resisters voiced their disapproval and derision of an administration that derides science and facts. Our only arms were homemade banners, placards and signs such as "Let Us Pause for a Moment of Science," "Make Earth Great Again" and "Special Prosecutor for Our Special Moron." But for me, the most significant moment was walking past the Newseum and reading the words of the First Amendment to the Constitution etched in its façade: "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, . . . or the right of the people peaceably to assemble . . ." The "swamp drainer" has seeded the swamp with bottom feeders whose bottom line is corporate profit, regardless of the consequences – general

warming of the planet with concomitant famine, desertification, polluted air, tainted water supply, rising seas, loss of homelands and wandering refugees.



PSC sign at the march.

That day the streets of our Capital belonged to us, unimpeded by the police who, if there, were out of sight and undercover. Unfortunately, I cannot say the same for New York City.

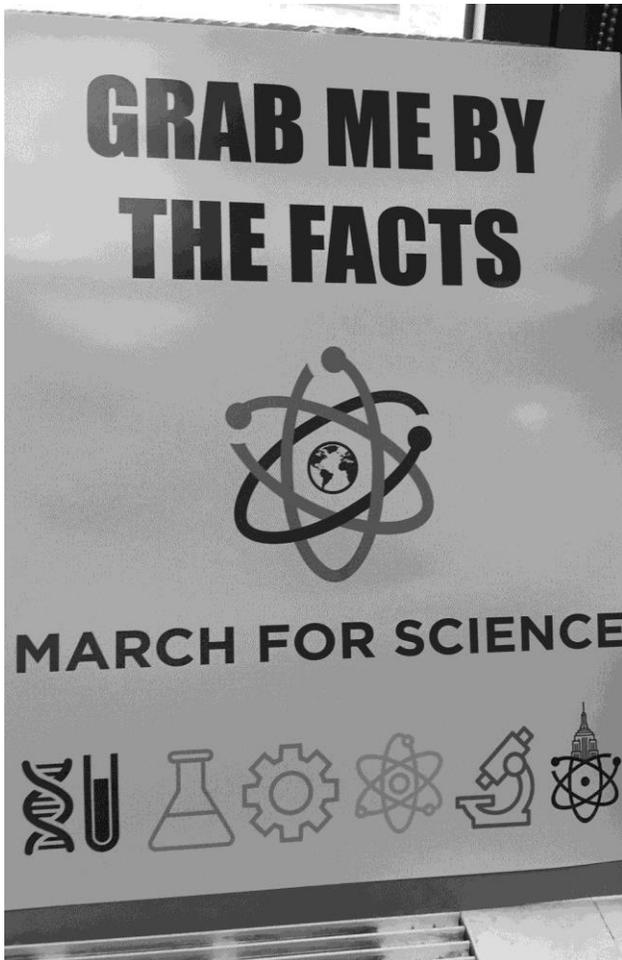
The following Monday, May Day, the PSC was again in the streets, this time at Foley Square to honor International Workers Day. When I left to walk awhile, I met a contingent of about three hundred youthful demonstrators marching peacefully south on Broadway from Union Square to join the rally at Foley Square. They were behind barricades on the sidewalk, flanked by two lines of police in the street, one on foot carrying plastic cufflinks, another on bicycles. So it begs the question: whose streets? There are many more questions about this city's aggressive approach to policing and the inability of New Yorkers to exercise their First Amendment right to

demonstrate peaceably without an intrusive, threatening and intimidating police presence in what is beginning to feel more and more like a police state in a lawless country.

THE NEW YORK CITY SCIENCE MARCH

Dave Kotelchuck, Retiree, Hunter

On April 22, 40,000 people in New York City, including many PSC members, participated in the first such march in defense of science and in support of science research funding certainly since WWII. Tens of thousands more marched in Washington D.C., Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco and dozens of other cities in the U.S. Demonstrations on this Earth Day were also held in 600 other cities and countries around the world.



We marched in response to President

Trump's attacks on and proposed defunding of climate change science research, as well as his proposed \$12.6 billion cut to the Department of Health and Human Services, including a \$5.8 billion cut from the National Institutes of Health alone.

The NYC march went down Central Park West from 79th Street to Columbus Circle and then down Broadway to the Times Square area. Spirits were high, despite rain toward the end of the march. Some of the signs this marcher saw were "In peer review we trust" and "There is no Planet B." One marcher I saw sported a t-shirt saying "Science is real. Your alternative facts are $\sqrt{-1}$." His son was dressed up as Einstein, with a cotton wig and mustache. There were also many physics, chemistry and math jokes among the signs, such as "This is a science sine", etc.

In the end, a good time was *not* had by all. The threats to science are serious. But as Einstein once said: "In the middle of every difficulty lies opportunity." As marchers and protesters, we aim to seize this opportunity.

THE MONTH THAT WAS CONTINUES

In the Culture Corner

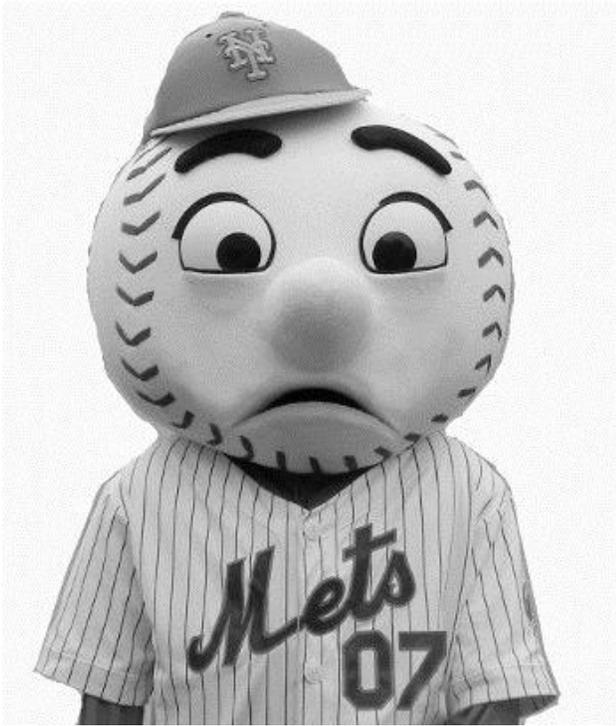
May was blooming with other activities as well, showing that PSC retirees are not the stay-at-home types. Aside from our active union work, we also look to the union to engage with our colleagues in cultural activities we might not have had much time for when working. In just the last month, groups went to a theater event, explored another neighborhood on a walking tour, and went to a Mets home game.

Mets Snatch Defeat from the Jaws of Victory

Glenn Kissak, Retiree, Hunter Schools

A dozen PSC retirees watched a thrilling Mets game against the San Francisco Giants on May 10 at the beautiful Citi Field

stadium. We even got to see the PSC union name put up on the Mets Jumbotron!



We cheered, we talked, we ate the ballpark food, and then we agonized over the events of the 9th inning. The Mets were leading 3 to 2, with good pitching, fielding and a home run from Jay Bruce. But then, with two outs in the top of the 9th, the usually reliable Jeurys Familia gave up four runs and the Giants were ahead 6-3. The Mets came roaring back in the bottom of the inning to score two runs, but that wasn't enough.

Despite the losing score, it was an exciting game and we had lots of fun. Thanks to Marva Lilly for arranging the tickets. See you next year at the game!

Walking Tour: Hamilton's Heights Then and Now

On a drizzly April 24, Alan Feigenberg (CCNY), accompanied by David Chapin, an environmental psychologist/architect at the Graduate Center, led a tour of Hamilton Heights, the area along Hamilton Terrace and Convent Avenue on the ridge above St. Nicholas Avenue, often referred to as Sugar Hill, and sometimes as Harlem.

A group of about 20, including many who had worked years at City College well before gentrification had set in, gathered for a guided exploration of local buildings that reflect the past and changing demography of the area. We were guided in deciphering clues about a building's past and more recent history. We looked at a new (1970s) community service center on 145th St. and Amsterdam Ave. and the way its planning included community constituencies to reflect their needs and desires, then walked down toward Broadway to see the restored PS 186, a 1901 Renaissance Revival building essentially abandoned since 1975. In 1986 the building was bought by the Harlem Boys and Girls Club, which was unable to develop it until just a few years ago when it became a project supported by the de Blasio administration as a site for affordable housing, along with a small number of market rate units and facilities for community, childhood and youth groups.

Steve Leberstein

The Working Theater

This is a company that develops and stages plays on contemporary themes for and about working people. For the last several years the Working Theater has been developing plays in a five-borough cycle. Last year, we went to see "The Block," which was about the Bronx, based on two years of conversations and interviews with residents by actor/playwright Dan Hoyle in his South Bronx neighborhood.

This year we were in Brooklyn, specifically in the quickly gentrifying neighborhood of Bushwick (yes, that's right) with "Bamboo in Bushwick." The play, developed in Bushwick from a realistic narrative, and used some theatrical devices to try to illustrate problematic issues of gentrification. As Marie Lederman (retiree, LaGuardia) noted "art can stimulate thinking about large issues." To judge by the lively audience participation in the discussion

after that performance, it did! We're looking forward to next year's event!

Steve Leberstein

WHY I'M STICKING TO THE UNION



Janus vs. AFSCME, a case designed to strip unions of their members, treasuries and power, is working its way through the courts. It's expected to come before the Supreme Court next year. The Janus case and the Gorsuch appointment are the culmination of a decades-long attack on unions and workers' rights.

With unions under attack, we thought that a series of stories by members would help remind us why we're here and why we're sticking to the union. Here are several, and we look forward to hearing your story for this feature in our September issue.

Irwin Yellowitz

I have been a member and leader in CUNY unions, beginning with the United Federation of College Teachers in 1965, and continuing with the PSC in 1972. That is a long time even for a retiree. Why have I committed so fully?

There are several reasons, but an essential one is to assure dignity and decency. All

large institutions operate according to their perceived needs, which of course are interpreted in the real world though decisions made by individuals that may be motivated by personal concerns. In this process, CUNY workers are often unfairly treated, and without the PSC would have few means to defend themselves. Yes, the union wins important economic benefits that we need and deserve, but it also provides us with greater assurance that our work will be evaluated fairly, that we will gain the recognition due to us, and that our institutions will treat us with respect and dignity. Not all grievances are valid, not all grievances are won, but for many of our colleagues, the PSC has restored their reputations and protected them from improper personnel actions. This has meant so much to so many on the most basic level, and it is one major reason I am sticking to the union.

Doris Hart

When I was hired in 1984 at BMCC, I immediately joined the PSC. As a new faculty member, I felt the union would help me if any problems arose.

I became active, wrote the monthly chapter newsletter and was elected to the PSC Delegate Assembly.

After several years I filed for promotion to associate professor and was turned down. I was angry and filed a grievance. The PSC grievance counselor prepared a brief in my favor and we went to a hearing. My grievance was denied. But the counselor advised me to apply once again. I had made myself known; I wasn't going to accept defeat and they would not deny my promotion again. She was right.

Shortly after, I was asked to be the BMCC grievance counselor and I went for training at PSC. It was a difficult year with the administration at the college. I soon had 21 grievances to prepare for a hearing. The administration incorrectly insisted that

community service was a requirement for promotion. I scoured the PSC Contract and the CUNY Bylaws, but found no requirement for community service. I pointed this out to the administration and said the PSC would take action if this so-called requirement were not dropped.

As a result, thereafter faculty members were no longer affected by this made-up requirement, and many were promoted.

A number of faculty filed grievances because of denial of reappointment or not receiving tenure. So I carefully examined the PSC Contract looking for violations by the chairperson or administration. One major violation dealt with the provision that after a written annual evaluation was given to the faculty member, the chairperson was required to have a face-to-face discussion with the member about the annual report. You'd be surprised how many chairs never did this. This violation of the contract helped win grievances and save jobs. I think of all the faculty members whose lives have been favorably impacted because of the PSC.

Connie Gemson

Some years ago at LaGuardia Community College, I looked carefully at my paycheck. I was an adjunct. By the time I got my full micro-raise, the amount was still very small. I called my college's Human Resource department. The pleasant person on the phone said she would review it.

I paused and said quietly, "I don't know you and you don't know me, but I know you work hard for your money. As an adjunct, I know I work hard for every penny. I belong to the PSC and I know they will help me if there is a problem."

The check was in the mail and in my hand promptly.

Bill Friedheim

On 9/11/01 BMCC lost a 15-story facility with 370,000 square feet of classroom space when parts of World Trade Center #7 collapsed on Fiterman Hall. As a result, by the fall of 2002, 18,000 students and 2,000 faculty and staff crowded into BMCC's main campus, a six-floor building constructed two decades earlier to house a maximum of 8,700 people.

Conditions quickly deteriorated from bad to intolerable when sixteen of twenty escalators and all four elevators failed.



Horror stories abounded. As reported in the December '02 *Clarion*: One disabled student, who lost both legs a decade ago in a Bosnian land mine explosion, typically spends hours each week negotiating the vertical distance between his classes, often forced to leave the building to get from A to B. Asthmatics wheezed and pregnant students gasped as they climbed stairs to

sixth-floor classes.

But the union—in this case the BMCC chapter—had our back. It mobilized the anger of faculty, staff and students, solicited the help of the PSC Health and Safety Watchdogs and reached out to potential allies in the community, the trade union movement, the City Council and the media.

Within a month, we had 5,700 signatures on a petition; faculty and students visited City Council representatives; and a communications team placed articles in the Manhattan community press and *Clarion*.

The union and faculty and student representatives, armed with petitions and excellent research, then met with Vice Chancellor Alan Dobrin, who oversaw CUNY's physical plant. The PSC summed up the meeting in the chapter newsletter, *The Gadfly*:

“What we asked for:

A timetable for short and mid-term repair, ongoing maintenance and long-term replacement

Guarantees of money for repair, maintenance, replacement and more space

What we got: *Everything!!*”

Dobrin and the Dormitory Authority committed \$12 million to the project—a super accelerated schedule of short-term repairs (a few weeks) and longer-term retrofitting (a year).

Students, faculty, governance bodies and labor made this happen. But it was the PSC chapter that conceived and orchestrated the campaign. **The union had our back—that's why I back the union.**

PSC-CUNY COPE



Several weeks ago, all retirees received a letter soliciting donations to PSC-CUNY COPE, the political arm of the union.

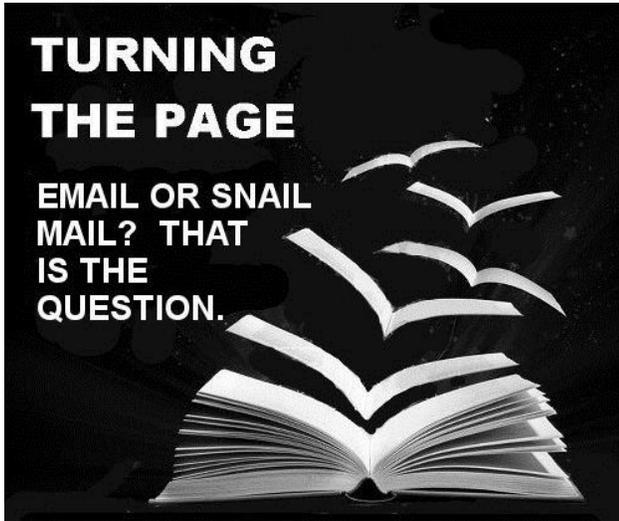
Over the years, contributions to PSC/CUNY-COPE have helped to secure our pensions and health care and advanced policies of equality, dignity, and empowerment for all working people. But much of the political and social progress that we spent a lifetime pushing is now under attack. We must resist in the streets, at the ballot box and in the halls of power. Giving to PSC/CUNY-COPE is one way to empower the resistance. Union dues can't go to political contributions. That's why we solicit donations to PSC-CUNY COPE.

The anti-union, pro-austerity forces we are up against are powerful. We cannot thrive in Albany or Washington on just the merits of our university and the truth of our arguments. We need to increase our power. That takes money—and lots of it.

Retirees responded generously to the letter, contributing \$8,661 by May 25.

Contributions ranged from \$10 to \$200, with a critical mass giving \$80 or more. We fully expect that even more checks are in the mail. If you planned to contribute, but

haven't, you can make a check out to PSC-CUNY COPE and mail it to the Professional Staff Congress, 61 Broadway, New York, NY 10006.



Several years ago, we gave members of the retiree chapter the option of receiving the retiree newsletter electronically (by email) or by U.S. Mail (print). More than half the membership chose to receive it by email. But what we soon found out, using software that checks this, is that a very low percentage actually opened the email and even fewer clicked through to open the newsletter online. Some email providers (e.g-. Gmail) buried our email blasts under “promotions.” One or two providers at times labeled them spam. Last year at the “Coffee Hour” before the June Luncheon , we decided to (snail) mail it to everyone, even those who received it digitally.

But a few members, who have not experienced problems receiving the newsletter when it is sent digitally, have requested that they only get it electronically. We told them that we would re-visit the issue—and now we have.

Effective with the September issue, if you *only want the newsletter by email*, you can choose NOT to receive it also by U.S.

Mail. We have created a form on the PSC website at psc-cuny.org/RetireeNewsletter for those who wish only to receive *Turning the Page* digitally. If you wish to receive it both digitally and by snail mail, you don't have to do anything. Meanwhile, we'd love to hear from you about what you think of our print edition, and if there are columns or features you would like to add your two cents to!

THAT'S ALL FOLKS! We return in September and look forward to hearing from you and seeing you.