

***Waltham Public Schools  
Retirees' Corner Newsletter  
Summer 2021***



**Congratulations to the new retirees**



Jeannette Amiano	English	WHS
Samih Barehim	ELL	McDevitt
Deborah Barry	SAC	Plympton
Orin Biran	SPED Para	WHS
Robert Chiasson	Custodian	MacArthur
Lucille Clerkin	Library Teacher	McDevitt
Mark Good	Environ. Coordinator	All
Judith Fitts	Waltham School Online	Grade 5
Charlie Gullede	Custodian	McDevitt
Robert Kennen	MIS	All
Karen Maynes	Food Services	WHS
Janice McKinnon	PT	Northeast
Britta McNemar	Director	Waltham Family School
Arlene Velleman	SPED/Speech	High School



Harold Arnold	Custodian	Whittemore
Joan "Jody" Bigham	Grade 5	Whittemore
<i>(sister of Susan Bigham, retired from FitzGerald)</i>		
Ronald Bowlby	Volunteer	Stanley
Judy Clarke	Clerk	Superintendent's Office, McDevitt
Mary Ellen Fulton	Grades 1, 2,3	MacArthur, Stanley
Sang Watts	Para	Preschool



The first scholarships to Waltham High students were funded by WHS Alumni Association and first awarded in 1853. Check out the sidebar on our homepage [retireescorner.org](http://retireescorner.org) for all the scholarships that are offered. We are highlighting a few educators with connections to the Fitzgerald School, which was named for a former superintendent, but was originally named for its location in the Warrendale section of Waltham. Thanks to Loxi Keith for preparing the descriptions of many of the scholarships listed on our homepage

### **Theresa Brassil Scholarship**

Theresa Brassil was the first principal of the Fitzgerald School, (known at that time as the Warrendale School.) She came from central Massachusetts and lived on the south side of Waltham in her years in the Waltham Public Schools

### **Ella Robinson Memorial Scholarship**

Mrs. Ella Robinson was a wonderful third grade teacher at the Fitzgerald School. She believed that all children should be well-prepared for life. She instilled a strong sense of citizenship, pride, and work ethic, Ms. Robinson had a lasting influence on many children in the Waltham Community.

### **Soft Touch Band Scholarship in Memory of Paul Rooney**

Soft Touch is an 18-piece Big Band founded in Waltham in 1980 and first directed by Paul Rooney. Members receive no compensation but instead proceeds are used to provide college scholarships in memory of the FitzGerald School fourth grade teacher Paul Rooney for students with high musical participation.

## *What's New*

### **A NEW Waltham High**

Work has begun (or at least a lot of blasting and removing of the hills) at the site of the NEW Waltham High School.

Click this link for a virtual tour of what's coming

<https://patch.com/massachusetts/waltham/heres-how-to-take-virtual-tour-new-waltham-high-school>

### **A NEW Principal at Waltham High**

<https://www.wickedlocal.com/story/waltham-news-tribune/2021/03/15/waltham-high-school-brenda-pena-selected-whs-principal/4595497001/>

## School Department Appoints First Female and First Latina as Waltham High School Principal



Class picture - 1998



2021

Brenda Ortiz Pena was interviewed by our own Regina Pacitti.

Brenda Ortiz Pena is breaking the Waltham School Department's glass ceiling! She was recently appointed the first female and first Latina principal of Waltham High School. It is especially significant as she herself was a bilingual student; Brenda was born in this country, but her parents spoke no English. Brenda also attended Plympton, Fitch, and South Middle Schools. She graduated from Waltham High School in 1998. As of this year, forty-three percent of Waltham High School's students identify themselves as Hispanic.

Brenda has both an undergraduate and graduate degree in social work and a Master of Education in educational leadership. She began her career as a School Adjustment Counselor in Waltham. She then worked as a Dean of Students in Salem. That career direction change grew out of her desire to have more impact on making change. She returned to Waltham High School in 2017 as an associate principal, formerly called housemaster, and her first class just graduated in June 2021. In addition to a School Adjustment Counselor's unique skill of being a good listener, Brenda also brings the perspective of a parent as she is a mother to two girls. Informal teaching is an important aspect of both these roles.

Brenda's focus is on the whole child in a supportive, caring environment for all students. Brenda puts equity at the center of her work. She wants all students to have a voice and be able to advocate for themselves in an acceptable way. She notes the strength Waltham has as a community which really rallies round its members in crisis. She hopes to create a better culture and climate which has positive relationships for all. In pursuit of this goal, Brenda has already begun to meet with groups of the various WHS stakeholders - cafeteria workers, maintenance staff, teachers, secretaries, counselors, nurses, and other support staff. Brenda's style is collaborative but she also wants to extend this approach beyond the building walls because Waltham is a city rich in untapped resources. She is open to including school system retirees in her collaborative efforts.

When asked who influenced her the most as a student in the Waltham Public Schools, Brenda offered five names. She first mentioned her Social Studies teacher, the late Bob Ditri, who taught her in the course *American Mosaic* and was her first gay male teacher. She remembers his tremendous sense of humor and his kindness toward his students. Brenda also cited ESL teachers Stan Straub and Norma Ruiz Bigelow, with whom she remains in contact. Joan Connolly of Title 1 at South was very welcoming and provided Brenda with math and reading support. Brenda concluded with noting Anne Marie Carr-Reardon, who was so welcoming when she first came to Waltham as a SAC, and who held high standards but knew so well all her students and staff.

Brenda began her new role on July 1 in an exciting time. Not only will she be in one of the top leadership roles post-COVID, but she will be at the helm of inaugurating a new state-of-the art high school building which should be opening in 2024. She foresees that this school, by virtue of its design and layout, will be an innovative model in Massachusetts for project-based and problem-solving learning. It should create more opportunities for CTE students who may also have college as a goal but are currently challenged by curricular limitations, particularly with world languages. Brenda also hopes to offer community service to more students. She firmly believes that all students deserve chances to find different pathways to success.

Welcome!



At a recent meeting of the Retirees Corner Committee, one of our members suggested that, even though many of the stay-at-home COVID restrictions are lifted, some of the retirees, due to age or health, are still very much home-bound. You might have a former colleague that you know is in the house. We are sure that they would love to have a call from you, since it may have been awhile since you had a friendly chat with them. If you can, reach out to them. On their behalf, we thank you.



At the same meeting, one of our members stated the obvious – that we are all getting older – and that, sometimes big household projects are a bit too much to do on our own. Maybe you or someone in your family or someone you really can depend on might be able to help with plumbing, electrical, masonry, carpentry, painting, technology, etc.? We would be glad to publish those names and numbers and the general geographic area where they conduct business. Please forward them to [retireescorner@gmail.com](mailto:retireescorner@gmail.com)



Sometimes, as retirees, we wonder what our former colleagues have been doing since their retirement. **Sallie Russ** is one of those retired teachers people ask about frequently.

Sallie graduated from Kutztown University in Pennsylvania in 1965 receiving degrees in English and Reading. She began her teaching career at Pen Argyl Area School District and then moved to Massachusetts in 1968. She spent the next thirty-two years teaching in the Waltham Public Schools, where she spent one year at Whittemore, nine years at Central Junior High School and twenty-two years at Waltham High School.

Sallie has always been involved with students, participating in a number of volunteer activities. She volunteered at Bright Horizons/Children for one year at Mary's House in Waltham. She also donated her time at Walnut Hill School in Natick with their Sages and Seekers Program for one year. Sallie then did the Sages and Seekers Program at Rivers School in Weston for six years. She then did one year at Natick High School with Sages and Seekers. Sallie is presently volunteering at the Natick Senior Center as well as at the Morse Institute Library in Natick.

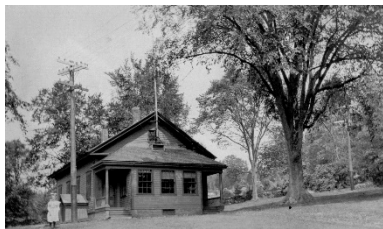
Sallie has been with the Big Sister/Little Sister Program for the past fifty-one years. She became a Big Sister to Sheila Domurat, a young girl of seven. They have continued their relationship for fifty-one years.

Many people are judged by their profession. Not many people carry it over into their personal life!

Do you have a colleague that you would like to spotlight? Send your reflections to [retireescorner@gmail.com](mailto:retireescorner@gmail.com).

***This story and pictures were submitted by Jeremy Hagger, Corresponding Secretary of the Waltham Historical Society. Printed in the Waltham Historical Society newsletter, we thought it might be of interest to members of the Retirees' Corner. Featured in this article is the Pond End School. Most of us have passed this school as we headed to a meeting at WHS, Kennedy, or Plympton. The school is now located at the intersection of Bacon Street, Lexington Street, and Totten Pond Road.) Some of us, who grew up in Waltham, remember it as the Piety Corner Dancing School, where we learned ballroom dancing in our Grade 5/ 6 groups or Grades 7/8 groups with our parents/chaperones watching us from the stage. Later, it was Joanne Sinerate's Creative Movement Studio and we think it was considered in the filming of the most recent movie version of Little Women.***

Gifts to the Waltham Historical Society are always greatly appreciated and eagerly received. Sometimes the humblest appearing contains the best stories. Recently, the Weston Historical Society, through its President, Ms. Pam Fox, gave the Waltham Society a small creased and



brown envelope containing faint and faded photographs and a postcard with its corner missing where some long-ago philatelist had torn off the stamp. The photos include an image of Waltham's old Pond End School (c. 1860-1914) with a young scholar standing outside near the "girls'" entrance (the boys' entrance was opposite), [Fig. 1], and another labeled, "The Pond End School in the background," but mainly showing the dirt road leading up to it. The Society already has excellent images of the school, which was cut in half, moved and currently stands on Bacon Street. The girls' entrance was closed in and used as the location for an inside telephone. So far so good, but now we come to the torn postcard which bears the image of the old and new



Pond End Schools as they were on February 11, 1914, when the postcard was mailed [Fig. 2].

The sender was none other than Waltham's premier historian of the time, Edmund L. Sanderson [Fig. 3], a founder of the Society, machine shop owner, pioneer photographer (that is his "selfie"), tennis player, active member of the Piety Corner Club, and direct descendant of two of the city's earliest residents, the two Deacon Sandersons. He wrote this message on the card:



"The Old and the New.' I am very pleased to accept the invitation of the teachers of the Pond End School for February 14, 1914." [Fig. 4] Now as we know, Edmund Sanderson was a bachelor and never married, but this invitation is for a Saturday party, from the female teachers at the school (and you may know that until after World War II, women had to be unmarried to teach in Waltham schools) and of course it is a Valentine's Day party!



The recipient, Ellen M. Jones, Pond End School, Winter Street, Waltham, R.F.D. [rural free delivery—in Waltham no less], was just as interesting as the sender. [Fig. 5: Ellen is 2nd from left with her family—these pictures courtesy of the Weston Historical Society] Ellen ("Ellie") M. Jones was from Weston where she lived her



entire life in what used to be called "The Jones House," but it is now known as the Josiah Smith Tavern [Fig. 6] which is located across from the Weston Common and is the home of the Weston Historical Society. Ellie was born in 1858 and grew up in the Josiah Smith Tavern which her grandfather had purchased



in 1842. Her father, Theodore, had a carriage painting operation which was housed in the attached barn [Fig. 7]. When Ellie was four, she began school at the Weston East Central School on Crescent Street. Since her father knew all the local stage drivers and teamsters, it was arranged that she should be picked up each day at the Tavern by the stagecoach. More than 50 years ago, Ms.



Rebecca McKenna described Ellie's daily travel to school in the Bulletin of the Weston Historical Society: "Each morning the stagecoach driver on his way from Marlboro to Stony Brook Station would rein in his 4 horses in front of her house to take on the small Ellen. All starched and be-frilled in sedate mid-Victorian mode, her father would help her up to her lofty seat by the driver. One can picture her on a sunny spring day in Weston, full of childish joy as they rumbled down the Post Road. Her blue eyes sparkle, she clutches a dinner pail on her lap, her feet dangle, the ribbons on her corn-colored pigtails and on the back of her round, straw hat fly in the breeze as she sits in demure dignity beside her kind Yankee driver."

When she grew up, Ellie became a teacher employed in Waltham at the Pond End School. Ms. McKenna added, "Ready to retire, Ellie mystified her young pupils by the question, 'Fifty years in day school and fifty in Sunday school; how many years have I taught?' Also, when she did retire, someone said, 'Now you can do what you want to do.' Her reply, 'I've always done what I wanted to do—I wanted to teach.' Since first seeing this torn and somewhat bedraggled postcard, I have wondered how the Valentine's Day party went and found myself speculating as to the various scenarios that might have unfolded for Edmund L. Sanderson and Ellen M. Jones if they had gotten better acquainted!"

## Legislative Report ~ from REAM Newsletter of May 2021



The 50 bills of concern to REAM in the 2021-22 session that our Legislative Liaison at the State House, Charles Stefanini, is keeping us apprised of are moving along, albeit at a slower pace than in pre-COVID times. Besides those described in previous months - the 3% cost of living increase that was enacted and those moved forward intact or essentially as in the previous session with minor adaptations, all since late February have progressed from official filing or refiling to committee assignment (most to the Joint Committee on Public Service, a few to the joint committees on the Judiciary or Health Care Financing). They have all currently reached the stage of “Concurred in Committee Referral” from the other legislative House.

Some of the issues addressed by these bills include increasing pensions for those receiving the very lowest amount of retirement pay, increasing GIC oversight and transparency and exemption of current retirees from increases in health care contribution requirements, raising or lowering the number of hours a retiree may work in public service employment while receiving a pension, GPO& WEP relief, and retirement credit purchases & refunds, among others. We will highlight these bills in specific detail as they go through hearings in the next months and consolidate. Two of these areas are profiled below.

There are new COVID related early retirement bill proposals to inform you of, filed in both the House of Representatives (HB) and the Senate (SB).

## Summary

These bills would create a retirement enhancement opportunity in 2021 and 2022 for teachers classified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as being at increased risk for getting severely ill from COVID-19; provides for such teachers to add up to 5 years to age and up to 5 years of creditable service toward their retirement; caps retirement amount at 4/5 (80%) of average salary; requires acceptance of this act by the school committee and, where applicable, the municipality; requires that schools hire replacements for teachers who retire under this act before the start of the subsequent school year; requires the Public Employee Retirement Administration to conduct an analysis of the cost of the program; requires the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to create a list of vacancies resulting from the act.

M. Patrice Hurley, REAM State Legislative Chair,  
[mpatricehurley@gmail.com](mailto:mpatricehurley@gmail.com)

also from REAM

## Online Classes Available for Retired Educators



AARP's [Virtual Community Center](#) offers a wide range of virtual events and classes at no cost. Retired educators are invited to explore sessions that are designed for learning, self-improvement and fun.

These sessions may be of particular interest to retired educators who remain home bound during the pandemic.



We are again requesting that if you have any interesting stories about your experience in schools about former colleagues, students or administrators, please send them along. There was a multitude of good deeds done over the years and we are sure just as many humorous stories that can be shared. Simply contact us through our email, [retireescorner@gmail.com](mailto:retireescorner@gmail.com), and we will get back to you.



## Summer Reading Suggestions

*Anxious People*

Fredric Bachman (suggested by Marie McKenzie)

*Remember*

Lisa Genova (suggested by Norm MacDonald)

*The Four Winds*

Kristen Hannah (suggested by Maureen Taddeo)

*Surviving Savannah*

Patti Callahan (suggested by AARP)

*The Third Pole: Mystery, Obsession and Death on Mount Everest*

Mark Synnott (suggested by AARP)

***Have a wonderful summer!***

