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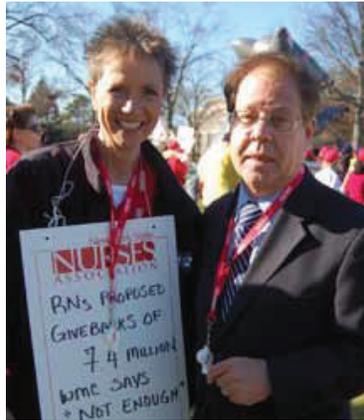
# Medical Job Cuts Angers WMC Staffers



By **ABBY LUBY**

VALHALLA, NY -- Last Monday, November 21, 2011, some 300 nurses and medical staff protested pending job cuts at the Westchester Medical Center. Wearing bright yellow and red t-shirts, members of the New York State Nurses Association and the Civil Service Employees Association brandished signs that read "These Cuts Won't Heal." The large group ramped up their growing ire by shouting slogans and shaking noise clappers as they paraded around two towering inflated rats labeled with the names of Michael Israel, the medical center's president and CEO, and Mark Tulis, chair of the hospital's Board of Directors.

Last month Israel announced that layoffs



Catherine Brand and NYS Assemblyman Tom Abinanti.

employees to close a \$30 million budget deficit and in 2008 the nursing staff was cut from 1500 to 1290 nurses.

The CSEA, who represents 1,600 non-nursing employees, has been negotiating with the hospital board, but according to CSEA Southern Region President Billy Riccaldo, the talks have been strained. "We didn't have too much hope for upcoming meetings with Israel. Our past relationship with him has been horrendous."

But CSEA Westchester County Local President John Staino, a 20 year bio-medical engineer at WMC, said they are sincere in working with the hospital administration to avoid pending layoffs. "We are offering some



CSEA staffers at rally.

give-backs such as forgoing raises next year," said Staino. "But we want some guarantees that we won't lose our jobs."

The medical center has claimed the cuts are necessary to make up for a budget shortfall from escalating costs of state pension funds, employee wages, healthcare costs and malpractice insurance premiums. In a October 26, 2011 letter from Israel to the entire hospital staff, he claims the Westchester Medical Center contributes \$20,000 annually toward the New York State pension for each nurse. The total pension payment by 2014 is



Rally at WMC last week.

expected to reach \$70 million, according to Israel.

Carl Stokes, who has worked as a nurse's assistant for six years in the Behavioral Health Center, was at the rally. "If they make these cuts I would worry about the safety of the patients."

When long time nurses are let go, WMC has been filling their positions with "agency nurses" or "floaters," nurses less familiar with the hospital and the patients. "These nurses are more harmful because they don't know this community," said Don Moyer, an emergency room nurse at WMC since 1997. "They come from Texas, California, and often their only experience usually is working in a small community."

Catherine Brand, a nurse who has worked for 10 years at the Behavioral Health Center that helps troubled adolescents, said new nurses have to be trained. "Training them takes time away from us and away from the patients. The advantage for the administration is that they pay less in wages for the freelance nurses because they don't pay benefits. By letting go seasoned nurses and hiring floater nurses makes it clear that this administration is union busting."

The rally marchers listened to Westchester Assemblyman Thomas Abinanti. "Doctors alone don't provide good healthcare. Doctors need qualified nurses and staff - and that's all of you. We don't want this center to go back to a second class institution."

Abinanti criticized the hospital administration for keeping their high salaries while cutting jobs. "This is class warfare. The guys at



CSEA and NYSNA members at rally.

the top are the one percent who has systematically lowered the standards of this medical center. For a public institution, they are getting paid awfully high salaries." By press time Israel had no comment on the rally or his salary. According to financial reports, Israel earns about \$1.24 million. In a statement last month Israel defended the board's salaries. "Although WMC is a public institution, our salaries are on par with those paid by New York City academic medical centers."

WMC is known for being the only burn unit between New York City and the Canadian border. It is also the only Level One trauma center between New York City and Albany and takes patients from seven counties. The center was formerly a county-owned hospital, but in 1998 the center split from the county and became a public benefit corporation, a move that drastically diminished the county's oversight ability.

"The county is now a separate entity, but they still can place people on WMC's board," said Staino, adding that the governor and senators can also recommend people to the board. Staino is hopeful that both groups can come to an agreement with WMC's administration before the end of the year. "If we can work together, we might be able to save hundreds of jobs. We are having discussions and we will continue to have discussions."

Abby Luby is a Westchester based, freelance journalist who writes local news, about environmental issues, art, entertainment and food. Her debut novel, "Nuclear Romance" was recently published. Visit the book's website, <http://nuclearromance.wordpress.com/>.



NYSNA at rally.

for some 650 hospital employees would probably include 250 registered nurses, 19% of the total current nursing staff. Israel has claimed that the layoffs were inevitable if the unions and the WMC couldn't agree on cost saving measures. NYSNA, who represents 1,500 registered nurses at WMC, has been negotiating with hospital administrators for almost a year. On the table is a possible wage freeze for 2012 and contributions by staff to a health care plan. WMC covers the entire health benefit cost for employees who aren't required to contribute for individual or family coverage. It cost WMC about \$63 million a year to cover each employee.

If NYSNA can't come to an agreement with WMC, 250 registered nurse positions could be eliminated and of those, 139 are bedside nurses while others are nurse practitioners, clinicians and specialists. Israel's first major cut was closing the Taylor Care Center, the hospital's public nursing home that treated long-term care residents. Israel also closed the mobile mental health crisis unit the Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program. In 2003 Israel laid off about 200

LEARNING

# Steve Job's Brain and the American Dream

By **THE USCORP TEAM**



talk shows and influential blog sites with huge

endorsements of a man now being equated to Edison and Ford in terms of his creative output. History will ultimately decide. What is unequivocal is the peak to which Apple ascended after nearly being run into the ground after Job's eviction and his ultimate reinstatement, or the success of Pixar. He was neither a software nor hardware engineer,

They came in their hordes. Friends, frenemies and outright enemies posing as long-lost friends queued to provide the news channels, late-night talk shows and influential blog sites with huge

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