



The High School View

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MVEA organizes for 'Fair Pay'

BY NIKEYA TANKARD

Recently, many faculty members at the Martha's Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS) have been sporting yellow pins with large, black type reading "Fair Pay for the MVEA." This action connects to a wider organizing effort by Island teachers around their contract negotiation with the school committee, which is currently scheduled for mediation on April 14.

The Martha's Vineyard Educators Association (MVEA) is the union that represents teachers and guidance counselors along with custodians, administrative support personnel, educational support professionals, and food service workers. Union representatives enter into contract



The school district and the MVEA have entered negotiations.

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negotiations with the school committee every three years.

"This happens in every union in Massachusetts," explained high school librarian Kevin McGrath. "[School committees and teachers' unions] work over a period of time to come to an agreement on things that go into the contract. Teachers are polled from time to time to see what they are feeling is most important in

the contract negotiations, be it the workplace, working conditions, the cost of living. A lot of times it's about benefits."

The triennial contract negotiations began in November, but the school committee and MVEA have struggled to come to an agreement. A major issue being discussed is the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), or the increase in income needed to keep up with

inflation. In 2022, the Social Security Administration increased the COLA by 5.9 percent, a stark rise from the 1.3 percent increase in 2021.

Mr. McGrath said, "Some people may see a very slight increase in cost of living. But when everything else is going up like 4 percent, 5 percent, or 6 percent, it means that your ability to pay for your living expenses means you're really making less money."

The MVEA has issued a statement outlining its reasons for not accepting the school committee's proposed cost of living increases, writing, "Previously negotiated wages have not kept up with the cost of living, so now is the time for a fair increase. Teachers took a 0 percent salary increase in 2010 when the economy was failing, which impacted every employee. The union position is that teachers sacrificed then, and now is the

time to reinvest."

Kate DeVane, chair of the All-Island School Committee, feels that the school committee has a responsibility to consider the interests of everybody on the Island.

"There are a lot of people who are uncomfortable right now," she said. "It's really a question of what the taxpayers can bear as a burden. Every percentage point in a raise is millions of dollars. And so that's millions of dollars that has to be put into the taxes for other people."

History teacher Ena Thulin sees mediation as a possible road to a solution.

"Everyone on both sides is trying to do their best, trying to support their positions, and trying to get along. But sometimes, they can't come to an agreement, so they need additional support," she said.

In addition to the imbalance between pay and inflation, finding housing for Is-

land educators has been cited as another challenge.

Ms. Thulin spoke to her previous teaching experience in Boston, comparing living in the city to the current crisis on the Island. "When you're living in a city, you can live an hour away from where you work and drive and commute. You can find districts that are nearby, where the housing is more affordable, or there are more options," she said. "There are not enough houses [on Martha's Vineyard], and they're out of the price range for what we make."

Ms. DeVane feels that this negotiation cycle is unprecedented, considering the pandemic and the current economic situation.

"I don't think we've ever had this set of circumstances before," she said. "I hope that we will be able to come together with the mediator and come up with something that works for everybody." **HSV**

CTE graduates look to join workforce

BY LILA MIKOS

As the end of the school year approaches, Martha's Vineyard Regional High School (MVRHS) seniors are making decisions about their postgraduate plans. Seniors in the high school's Career and Technical Education (CTE) program must take housing into consideration as they move into the workforce on the Island.

The CTE program offers training programs in automotive technology, building trades, culinary arts, early childhood development, horticulture, and health assisting. Students study the skill sets of each trade, obtain certifications relevant to each field of work, and, if necessary, take steps towards professional licensure. As CTE graduates transition into the workforce, securing stable housing can



Senior Riley Sylvia, a student in the automotive program, is planning to work in plumbing, and remain on Martha's Vineyard after graduation.

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make the difference between a person staying on-Island or moving away.

Horticulture teacher Kyle Crossland has been seeing this issue manifest over his five years at MVRHS. "Early on, when [the students] have the option to stay with

their parents, they do," he said. "If they find a job on the Island in the green industry that pays well, and they can't pair that job with a sustainable living or housing situation, they have to seek jobs elsewhere."

Building trades teacher

Bill Seabourne has seen his students have some success securing housing. "I've had several students who have come through in the 17 years I've been here that now own their own home on-Island, or own multiple homes, because of their success in the trades,"

he said. "A lot has changed in the past two years, and it has become a lot harder to get into the housing market."

Culinary teacher Jack O'Malley also feels that housing poses an issue for students graduating from the program. Many students move to the Boston area, but some have found creative solutions to remaining on-Island.

"Some students I know do have housing," he said. "They were able to build houses in their parents' backyards."

Senior Crystal Zheng, a nursing student, hopes to come back after completing nursing school. "I will definitely be coming back to the Island. I really like that it's such a small community," she said. "I am lucky because my parents have a house, so that is where I will live, but I know that housing prices are a really big problem here. The prices just keep going up, and make it very hard for people."

Fellow senior and nursing student Keissila Cecilio is

also considering the possibility of living on-Island after pursuing an advanced degree. "I think that I would come back and live on the Island. I want to be a doctor, and I know that doctors are always needed here."

Mr. Seabourne added that he thinks some of the trades can provide a viable pathway into the housing market. "Do you ever see an electrician who can't buy a house? Or a plumber? Or a carpenter?" he said. "Some of the most wealthy people who live here year-round are builders. It seems that the trades are really the way to do it if you want to get in early."

Mr. Crossland acknowledges that there is much work to be done in order to address the housing crisis. "It's a dynamic and complex problem to figure out the housing insecurity on the Island. It's not just about building affordable housing, it's about coming up with solutions," he said. **HSV**

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