

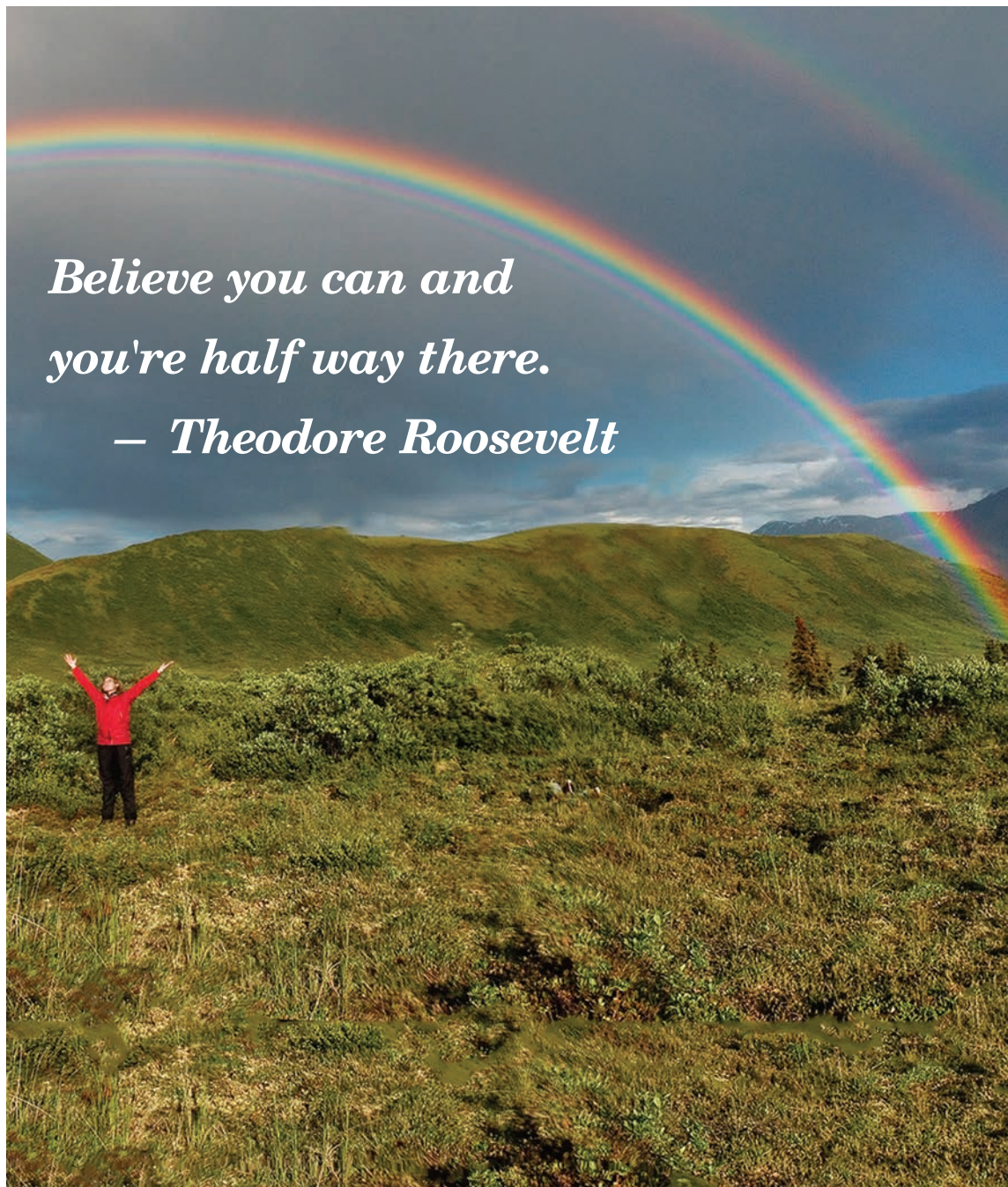


# MFT Educator

*A Union of Professionals*

September 2015

[www.mft59.org](http://www.mft59.org)



*Believe you can and  
you're half way there.  
— Theodore Roosevelt*

*Perpetual  
optimism  
is a force  
multiplier.  
— Colin  
Powell*

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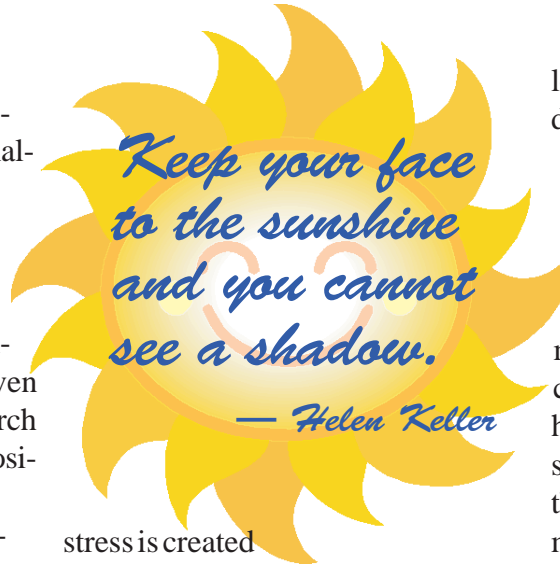
**Minneapolis Federation of Teachers & ESP, Local 59**

# Supporting each other to strengthen our schools and our profession

By Lynn Nordgren

Teachers and Related Services Professionals have some of the most challenging (and rewarding) jobs in America. Because of these challenges, we get so busy just trying to make it through the day that we sometimes forget to support one another or stop to have a little fun – even in the smallest of ways. New research is reinforcing the importance of a positive and supportive culture for both students and staff (you knew this already but it is always good to have some research to back us up). There is even a new branch of psychology called Positive Psychology – the study of happiness. Okay, I can hear the pessimists out there gagging. Try to keep reading along with the optimists...

Brain studies from the John Hopkins School of Education show that when information comes into the brain it must first be processed in the emotional center before being processed in the cognitive (thinking) center. If we short-circuit this pathway, chronic



stress is created and can impair long-term memory and deep learning. Promoting positive emotions and positive experiences helps certain transmitters and chemicals in the brain come to life and that contributes to learning. (Google: John Hopkins: The Brain Targeted Teaching Model). Just having a few laughs, hearing a compliment, or integrating art, music, dance, drama, and games can help brain transmitters work better. It is good for all of us – not just students. Being positive even improves our overall health!

There is nothing that can lighten the

load and improve culture like big doses of trust, respect, fun, and good will mixed in with the sharing of creative ideas and the solving of problems together. Yes, it takes time to make this happen but simple supportive gestures or positive comments to colleagues (and students) can start the ball rolling and become habit forming if kept up. On my 65 site tour last school year, it was clear there was a great deal of stress in many MPS sites. Eliminating adult bullying is one strategy that needs more attention in order to take down the stress. For the change in culture to really work, it takes each of us to make it happen. What can you do at your site to make it a more positive place to work and learn?

MFT, along with all of you, will help work on the problems to find the best solutions. Meanwhile, it is critical to not let these problems get under our skin and unravel our nerves. By working together, being pro-active, and staying positive, our physical and mental health will remain strong and our culture productive.

Thanks for all you do day in and day out – you truly ARE amazing! ■

**MFT Educator is a publication of the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers, ESPs, Local 59, AFT, AFL-CIO, NEA and Education MN**

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From your president

## Here we go . . . !

By Lynn Nordgren

There is something very energizing about the first days of school. The promise of a new beginning and the hopes that it will be a great year for all is enticing. Whether it is the wide-eyed kindergartner finding their way to the beginning of a twelve year journey, or a sixth grader figuring out the new world order of middle school, or an anxious-to-get-on-with-it 12<sup>th</sup> grader knowing this is the last year before they are on their own . . .

and every other grade our students experience, there is a freshness in the air. In this new beginning and in the end, it really becomes about helping our students find self-determination for aspiring to learn and building good relationships along the way that will lead them to self-actualization in life. That's not the stuff measured on tests but what really counts in developing a successful life.

So, how do we keep this energy alive during the school year? Teachers and Related Services Professionals know when we push up our sleeves and give it all we've got; when we truly see who a student is and where they are coming from both inside and out (not always easy but it's there); when we are about doing what's needed for students not just what's on a pacing schedule; when we build strong relationships with the parents – who are key in all of this – we know amazing things happen. When our leaders become our partners who listen and support rather than

command and control; when the education professionals get to fly and can build real energy around learning and supporting students; when leaders are truly collaborative in meaningful ways, a collective synergy materializes and student learning thrives. When families participate by being supportive both in and out of school around the importance of learning and when they see themselves as partners in

about trusting and believing and making efforts to bring it to life. We cannot wait for each other to get started – we must all start together.

With all the bashing and blaming that has gone on over the past decade, it is time to adopt a new energy in our district and in our city. Instead of only talking about the pipeline to prison, let's talk about a pipeline to prosperity. Let's start sharing our achievements and celebrating our successes. Let's be proud of our amazing schools – schools that welcome and serve all students no matter how they arrive or what they need. Success begets success so let's lift our dialogue and attitudes across the district in every school and every office so we see each other as valuable assets to the work of educating students and building the future of our society.

To get started, the MFT is going to work diligently with District leaders to try and move our collective work in a more positive direction. MFT will also share the successes of students, staff, and schools so let us know about them and we will broadcast them across the city. It is time to show the wonderful things taking place in MPS as we build that pipeline to prosperity. It's time to change the culture in MPS and who better to do that than all of us together. Wishing you an exciting year full of promise. ■

### Week of Action Roundup

Here are a few highlights from the recent MFT "Week of Action" from May 4-9:

**Dowling** issued invitations to staff each day to participate in events, and held fundraising drives. On Wednesday, a union meeting / staff party was held which was well attended. The topic of conversation was "why my union is important to me". The event was jointly held with the Social Committee.

**Transition Plus** held a union meeting with updates and teacher feedback. We're told the breakfast was good, too!

**Anwatin** held a union meeting, which gave a great morale boost for the end of the year, talking about rights and responsibilities, and trying to get on the same page with new administration on site.

**Jenny Lind** held a fundraiser for MFT's "Beds, Blankets and Books" campaign.

**Roosevelt** held a union meeting at the school, providing bagels to the staff to thank them for their support of teachers. Engineers and clerical staff were especially appreciative of the acknowledgement given to them by teachers.

**Thanks for all you do to keep our union strong!**

the education of their child, we know students can be more successful in all areas of their lives. And, when students see themselves as an integral part of the learning process that it is also their responsibility, the whole equation comes together.

Sound unrealistic? Not really. It's just common sense. It is about each and every one of us creating and sustaining the attitude that we all matter, every voice is important, we are all a part of the solution, and we each have a responsibility to work together to make great things happen. It is

*Aim for the moon. If you miss, you may hit a star.*

– W. Clement Stone



From your business agent

# Sick leave pool: A valuable benefit

By Bonita Jones

Think for moment about what would happen if you got ill or seriously injured and couldn't work for one month? For two months? Do you have enough sick days to cover a lengthy absence?

The Sick Leave Pool is a valuable benefit negotiated by MFT. The purpose of the Sick Leave Pool is to provide additional sick leave days to teachers suffering from a catastrophic accident or illness. It's designed to be a financial bridge between a teacher's sick days and Long Term Disability (LTD). LTD coverage doesn't begin until a teacher has been absent for 90 consecutive duty days. As a result, anyone who doesn't have 90 banked sick days, should strongly consider becoming a member of the pool.

New teachers can join the pool within 30 calendar days of their hire date, and each year returning teachers can join within the first 30 calendar days of the school year. If you join, you'll donate a day or more and then be eligible to use, if needed. Upon joining, you'll be required to donate the number of days that you would have donated had you been a member of the Sick Leave Pool from the time you were first eligible/hired. However, don't let this cause you to hesitate because there isn't a draw each year. In the past 10 years, pool members have only donated 7 days, and in the past 20 years there have only been 12 draws.

After exhausting your sick days, pool benefits pay 80% of your salary. Being on paid status also ensures you maintain active rates for health insurance. As a member of the pool, you can concentrate more on getting well and less on the financial burdens that an unpaid medical leave would create.

Since the benefit is meant to coordinate with LTD, tenured teachers can access up to 85 days for a physical injury or illness for one occurrence, and a total of 185 days in a career. The benefit for mental health, not requiring hospitalization, is limited to 60 days for one occurrence and 93 days during a career. And during the probationary period, the benefit is limited to 30 days total regardless of whether the absence is due to physical or mental health reasons.

Although this has been a longstanding ben-

efit, every year MFT receives calls from teachers who never signed up for the pool and must depend on Sick Leave Donations from individual teachers. While the the donation program offers the same financial benefit, these teachers must rely on their colleagues' generosity and ability to donate days specifically to them, and often they don't get the number of days they need.

The Sick Leave Pool is valuable and an important benefit. It not only provides you *Sick leave pool* - cont. on p. 5

The Student Council at Seward Montessori School display a check for \$3,038 for The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society's "Pennies for Patients" program. The students raised the money during MFT's Week of Action May 4-8.

The student's/school's goal was to raise \$1,000, but they tripled that goal by raising over \$3,000! Congratulations to Sue Backus's students for being the class to raise the most money and winning a pizza party for raising \$267!



Thank you to all the students for a job very well done!



Have a story or idea for the Educator?

Have questions you need answered? We'd like to hear from you. Send an email to: [subac001@live.com](mailto:subac001@live.com)





## Sick leave pool - from p. 4

with a safety net, your contributions provide assistance to your colleagues when they need it the most.

To find out whether you're already a member of the pool, or you're interested in joining, contact the Lynsey Sahli, Benefits Analyst at 668-0512 or Lynsey.Sahli@mpls.k12.mn.us.

If you have questions or are still unsure what this benefit entails, contact Bonita Jones or Mike Leiter at 612-529-9621 for more information.

The deadline to apply to the sick leave pool is September 25<sup>th</sup>. ■

# Minneapolis Special Education and Loaves and Fishes



The MPS Department of Special Education at the Davis Center has been connecting with their neighbors outside of the classroom for the last couple of years. Staff members from the department have been volunteering their time and money at Loaves and Fishes, a local non-profit. The mission of Loaves and Fishes is simple:

*"To provide nutritious meals to people who are hungry across Minnesota in an atmosphere of hospitality at site locations where the need is greatest and to develop joint ventures/partnerships with like-minded organizations assisting guests with additional basic needs key to becoming self-sufficient."*

There are 22 Loaves and Fishes dining sites in the metro area, five in Minneapolis, with one of them being at the River of Life Church. Meals are served five nights a week at River of Life and its location, just across from the Davis Center parking lot, made it a logical place with which the

department could develop an on-going partnership.

This site serves, on average, 200 people a night, many of them children, with most of these attending Minneapolis Public Schools. We know that having a strong relationship with an adult at school is a key factor in students attending and being successful. The Department of Special Education brought that same idea to the decision to be part of Loaves and Fishes - build relationships, one at a time, with our students and families.

It is vital to point out that Loaves and Fishes is a community meal - open to all. It is not about "us" helping "them" so much as people getting to know each other in the community in which they live and/or work. It's a pretty simple concept - and also a great reminder that our students come to school with rich and challenging backgrounds - just like we do. Sitting down and having a meal together with students and families isn't going to solve all the issues we tackle each day at school, but it is a step toward working together. Come and join us on any month with a fifth Wednesday - you might learn something new about one of your students, or even about yourself. ■

**"TEACHERS  
in America make  
moving forward  
possible."**  
— Rep. Keith Ellison

## MFT shows appreciation for its members

Every year for the past six years, the MFT has held some great parties to thank and celebrate its members for all the hard work they do for students. The parties are fun, relaxing and include yummy food, live music, wonderful party-goers and amazing prizes. The past two years have been held on the beautiful river setting of the Nicollet Island Pavilion - across from downtown Minneapolis. During the last event, we played a rousing game of "Let's Make a Deal" and gave away over 30 great door prizes - flat screen TVs, Kindles, a hammock, a party size popcorn maker, generous gift cards and more! One game show participant said, "It's like going to a wedding but you don't have to bring a gift or worry about what to wear!" MFT plans on continuing the get-togethers so watch for flyers and emails about future fun coming your way and *enjoy the photos on the next pages.*





# Faces in the Crowd—MFT





# Spring Fling Highlights





## Meet the *Futureboys*

There's no better feeling than your dreams coming true and that is exactly what happened for a group of middle school students at Hmong International Academy. The after school group calling themselves The Futureboys spent the school year blending academics with inspiration through service learning, performing arts and college/career preparation. Students developed business skills through a teen business curriculum paid for by a grant through the MPS Equity and Diversity department. They had the opportunity to go on a college tour in partnership with the Get Ready Program. In addition to academic learning, students went to the Hollywood Dance studio to practice a choreographed dance routine. The project wrapped up with an original song titled "Dreamin' Big" and a music video to go along with it showcasing the inspired learning students took part in.

Minneapolis Public schools middle school teacher Michael Bratsch engaged students in learning by giving them choices and creating new opportunities for learning. This strategy allowed students interests to guide the way. "Students are learning without even realizing how much they are learning, and it is going to impact them for a lifetime" he said.

On May 14<sup>th</sup> they hosted a community celebration at Hmong International

in which over 250 students attended. Parents, district leaders, and members of the community all showed up to this event making it a special day for The Futureboys as they showcased the learning that took place.

"The Futureboys is a program that is getting remarkable results and positively impacting student's success in school," says Bratsch. He hopes to bring this program to more school sites, as the requests for this program are in high demand.

The mission is to provide learning opportunities for students by combining interest-based learning, performing arts, service learning, grade level academics, and college and career readiness experiences.

Tion Brooks made this comment to summarize his experience as a Futureboy: "Before I was a Futureboy, I used to get into trouble. I used to get suspended, get into fights, and cause trouble. Since I have joined the Futureboys, my attitude, my misbehaving and getting into trouble a lot has stopped. Now look at us, we are the voice of our generation. I can speak for the other Futureboys when I say we're all in this together to change the world for the better." ■



## 2015 AFT TEACH conference

By Susan McNaughton

Each time I have attended the American Federation of Teachers TEACH Conference in Washington, D.C., two ideas have struck me. The first is the unity of vision from the AFT and Education MN, to our local, MFT 59. The second is the shared experiences of educators worldwide in the face of privatization, high stakes testing, and increasing childhood poverty. It was rewarding to have the opportunity to attend this conference with 13 other MFT teachers and ESPs.

I connected to the theme, *Reclaiming the Promise: Your Voice Matters*, when I heard educators from many states and countries present the issues they are facing or the successes they have had. The issues weren't anything new, really. It just reminded me that we are in this together; facing the same challenges. Any moment, when we raise our voice, it speaks for others in the same boat.

I came home with some books to read: *This is Not a Test* and *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*. Below are some resources to use and share.

1. EL resources from the DOJ and DOE are available at [www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ellresources.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ellresources.html)
2. Free EL materials at [www.ColorinColorado.org](http://www.ColorinColorado.org)

TEACH conference - cont. on p. 9



## TEACH conference

— from p. 8

3. State-wide poverty maps by county are available at [www.aft.org/growth-child-pov-erty-mapped-county-50-states](http://www.aft.org/growth-child-pov-erty-mapped-county-50-states)
4. Access to free or low-cost books by registering at [www.firstbook.org](http://www.firstbook.org).
5. Take the Quality of Work-Life Survey for your first time at [www.surveymonkey.com/r/QWLTEACH](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/QWLTEACH)

Finally, if you wish you had been there, visit [www.aft.org/education/aft-teach-2015](http://www.aft.org/education/aft-teach-2015) for video clips of the highlights. Since the conference is held every two years in Washington, DC, you could attend in person in 2017. Watch for nomination forms for those who wish to receive funding to attend. Elections for those paid spots are held at an MFT membership meeting. Anyone, however, can attend the conference even if not funded by the MFT or Education MN. It is well worth the time and effort. ■

### Legislative Update

## Why we need you even more

Happy Fall, Educators! We hope you all have had interesting, fun and restorative summers. To our new educators: *Welcome to MFT!* To our returning educators: *Welcome back!*

MFT will be concentrating more than ever on growing our collective power through organizing in the

2015-2016 school year. A new Supreme Court (SCOTUS) case called *Friederichs vs. California Teachers Association* could make it extremely difficult for us to organize in the future. If *Friederichs* passes, it would be impossible for MFT and all other public-sector unions to collect what are

known as “fair-share” dues from individuals who do not sign up to be full share members. Fair share dues compensate MFT for representing ALL MPS teachers during contract negotiations and grievance procedures. NONE of the fair share dues money goes towards political advocacy or campaign contributions; that money comes from voluntary Committee on Political Action (COPE) contributions. Given the current makeup of the Supreme Court, it is highly likely that SCOTUS will rule against CTA and MFT in the process. This could make “Right to Work” a national policy. Right to Work laws

so far have only been passed in individual states, most notably Wisconsin by Governor Scott Walker. Wisconsin teachers lost their collective voice in their union, and as a result have lost millions of dollars in education funding (over \$12 million in Milwaukee alone) which has led to less support staff to help students with social and emotional needs,

larger class sizes, and a sharp decrease in teacher pay- wages have dropped 10% for teachers in Wisconsin under a similar policy.

This is why your membership in MFT is more important than ever. We need to protect and strengthen our collective power to withstand this ruling. MFT is counting on

you to stand up as a union teacher or related service professional to tell your colleagues, friends, and family the value of belonging to a union. Our goal is to have each site in MPS at 100% union membership by the end of the year! We need YOU to become a full-share member of MFT if you are not already and contribute to COPE to fund policies and candidates that will strengthen teaching and learning in each of your classrooms. We have just over a year to organize before the *Friederichs* case could become a reality. Stand with us! ■



**Check your pay-check to see if you are a full share member or a fair share (you pay only partial dues and are not considered a member). If after MFT 59 on your pay-check it says “FS”, you are fairshare. If it says, “MBR”, you are a full share member with full union**

**Not currently a full-share member?**

**Go to [mft59.org](http://mft59.org), click on “Become a Member!” and fill out the form!**





## Why Wear Union BLUE on Wednesdays?



Every Wednesday, MFT members should wear union blue (**royal blue**) to show the following:

1. We believe in solidarity and unity because together, we can make a difference!
2. We will always stand up for what's best for students and our profession.
3. We have strong and important voices that need to be heard on the issues facing the school system, students, families, and the city.
4. We have solutions as well as ideas for innovation to continuously improve education and student outcomes.
5. We support the efforts of MFT leadership – if we see you in blue, we know you are behind the efforts to:
  - reduce class sizes, student loads, and caseloads
  - streamline the workload for effectiveness
  - support students and their needs
  - improve the quality of our school system overall
  - stop the over-testing of students
6. We want to be recognized. Union blue becomes an easy way to identify Minneapolis Federation of Teachers members (as well as, our affiliates – Education MN (state union) and the national organizations – the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association).
7. We stand together even if we are not always in agreement; we stand with each other for the good of the whole. It is a great feeling when everyone wears blue - a sense of pride is created that in turn builds synergy.
  - build trust and collaboration; increase collaboration
  - improve the culture and climate throughout the district
  - and, more...



A shirt, sweater, tie, scarf, jacket - anything **blue** works. You can also find MFT Gear Wear at [mft59.org](http://mft59.org)

**Let's wear blue on Wednesdays!  
Send a photo of MFT members wearing blue – whether a few of you do or the whole staff – take a snapshot and email to [subac001@live.com](mailto:subac001@live.com)**

**We will put the picture on our [mft59.org](http://mft59.org) website!**



*“You cannot have a positive life and a negative mind.”*

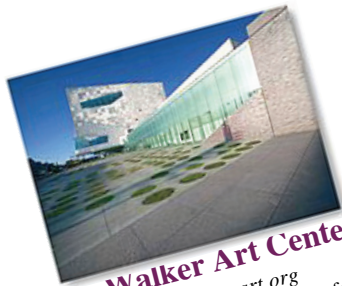
— Joyce Meyer



# Calendar of Events

MFT is committed to keeping you informed and up-to-date on current issues. If you want to know more about MFT and current events, visit our website at [mft59.org](http://mft59.org)

In an effort to keep you informed about current issues as well as your personal well-being, we have created a basic list of events happening in or around Minneapolis this Fall to encourage you in take time for yourself and/or your family to relax outside of work. It is a necessary, healthy human function to enjoy life outside of work with your friends, family and co-workers. Too often, we get caught up in the craziness of our jobs and forget to take a break and just enjoy life. Please take the time to look at the calendar of events below and find time to relax and enjoy life during this busy time of year.



### Walker Art Center

[walkerart.org](http://walkerart.org)  
Gallery admission free Thursdays from 5-9 p.m.  
Gallery admission is free on the first Saturday of each month. Families can enjoy live performances, films, gallery adventures, and hands-on art-making from 10 am-3 pm.  
Activities recommended for ages 6-12.

### Minnesota Renaissance Festival

[renaissancefest.com](http://renaissancefest.com)  
Open Weekends Aug 22-Oct 4; 9 am-7 pm  
Festival Fairgrounds,  
12364 Chestnut Blvd., Shakopee MN  
Damsels and princes step back in time to a place where Old English wasn't so old and "Greensleeves" was the number one song.



### Mill City Farmers Market

[millcityfarmersmarket.org](http://millcityfarmersmarket.org)  
May 9-October 31, Saturdays  
704 South 2nd Street  
That fresh Minnesota food you hear about?  
You can get it here from 8am to 1pm.



### Church Basement Ladies

[plymouthplayhouse.com](http://plymouthplayhouse.com)  
June 18-November 15  
In 2005, the first Church Basement Ladies Musical opened to wild enthusiasm. We're bringing the original back to celebrate ten years of laughter, toe-tapping music and touching memories that will once again make you laugh and cry all the way home.



### Minneapolis Institute Of Art

[new.artsmia.org](http://new.artsmia.org)  
On the third Thursday of every month, join us to experience the MIA's diverse art collection through unique programs, drinks, and live music. MIA is also open daily and is free to the public.



### Hennepin Theatre Trust

[hennepintheatretrust.org](http://hennepintheatretrust.org)  
Hennepin Theatre Trust, owner of the historic Orpheum, State, Pantages and New Century Theatres, is an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to arts-inspired community cultural development. They achieve their mission by presenting a rich mix of live performances, creating inspiring arts education experiences and advancing a thriving Hennepin Avenue cultural district in downtown Minneapolis.



# We need your feedback!

It's been an eventful year here at the *MFT*. We've restarted the Educator, which is dedicated to keeping you informed about issues surrounding the Minneapolis Public Schools and the work you do so well on behalf of our students.

As you prepare to begin another school year, we'd like you to take a few moments to let us know how we're doing.



What articles would you like to see this year? What items matter to you? Do you like success stories; do you prefer articles on the workings of MPS, or a combination of both? Do you want to know more about the legislative side of things, or is activism more your thing? Take a moment to let us know.

We'd also like to know if you have the time to write for us. Would you like the opportunity to help tell your stories to your fellow professionals? In short, we want to know what matters to you. We want to create a team of writing teachers who can carry a message

either to the public at large, or to your co-workers, about the important work you all do.

This is *your* publication. To make it as successful as possible, we need to hear from you. Please contact Sue Backus, MFT First Vice President at [subac001@live.com](mailto:subac001@live.com) with your comments and suggestions. ■



## FOLLOW THE MFT ONLINE!



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