

Greetings from Past Presidents on the 40th Anniversary



Don Foellner (1979-80)

I can't believe that PACTESP is celebrating 40 years. I was fortunate enough to have participated in the preparatory meetings that ultimately led to the initial charter being awarded by the American Vocational Association. PACTESP has truly been an inspirational driving force in assuring that all students are afforded opportunities to thrive within career and technical education. Observing all of the instructors, support personnel, and administrators that have gained significant insight, molded legislative priorities, and developed strategies to assist students shows the importance and achievements of the organization.

Jerry Wircenski (1984-85)

Hello to all and wishing PACTESP the BEST 40th Anniversary dinner.

Marjorie Blaze (1989-90)

While working for the PA Department of Education for over 30 years, the most meaningful and well-directed association that I ever interacted with was the PA Association of Career and Technical Education Special Populations group. In answering how come? I would have to say it was the group, and each individual in the group, who cared most about ALL children, especially those recognized as needing "extra" help. It was also the best grass roots group to give input, ideas, and thoughts about what works and what does not work to agency staff who were usually tied to an office and/or cubical.

The big difference in helping students succeed, in my opinion, is to have classroom teachers and staff who distinctly like children and possess their own positive self-attitude, which in turn can be passed on to their students who need to achieve their own success. I do not recall ever meeting a member of the Association who did not possess those qualities.

So permit me to say from the happy seat of retirement – Happy Anniversary and much continued success in the future for the PA Association of Career and Technical Education Special Populations group activities.

Ken Deitmen (1990-91)

Where has the time gone? I can't believe it's 2017. Didn't the organization just celebrate its 35th?

My favorite moments were trying to resolve vocational issues for disadvantaged/disabled students while working with people in the organizations who I considered "National" leaders in the field. Since retiring I've been playing a lot of golf and enjoying my four grandkids. I've also had the pleasure of traveling with my wife to numerous destinations.

Best regards to all, enjoy the conference.

John Polto (1996-97)

John is enjoying his retirement years by traveling with his wife. His most recent trip was a cross-country trip visiting all of the nation's National Parks. After John served as the organization's President, he was recruited to continue to work with the PACTESP Board as Treasurer.

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Marjorie Eckman (1997-98)

Congratulations for 40 years of leadership and advocacy for special populations in Career and Technical Education in Pennsylvania.

I had the privilege to serve as Membership Chairperson, President of then PAVESNP in 1997-98, and then I chaired the Life Work Challenge Awards.

While a member of PACTESP I had the privilege to form many professional friendships fostered through the organization. PACTESP has always been a unique group of people bound together by ideas and actions who represented a variety of positions from superintendent, principal, career and tech ed director, counselor, teacher, paraprofessional, educational advocate and Bureau staff.

I do think the ambiance of the Mid-Winter Conferences at the Hotel Hershey was partially responsible for the positive collaboration that members shared. Sometimes we were lucky enough to have big snowfalls while we were there, offering the possibility that we would not be able to travel home on Monday and have to extend our stay. It never happened but the thought of another delicious meal in the circular dining room sounded great. The year I was President, our keynote speaker was delayed due to weather and we had to reconfigure the program on the spot and hope for the best.

I retired from Pittsburgh Public Schools ten years ago, but continue to hold membership in this organization, which helped me in the early years of my job and provided a ready network as we moved into the Transition Initiative. I happily serve on the Life Work Challenge Award committee because the success of our students is what it is all about.

Hello to all and best wishes for continued success.

Susan Witmer (2000-02)

Sue worked at Bethlehem Area Vocational School for 21 and a half years. She started as a Paraprofessional for approximately six years, then became a Cafeteria Coordinator which she held for two years. In 1993, she was also given an extra position as a teacher and Café Coordinator which she held until retiring. The large portion of her students were special needs students which she excelled in serving. She loved what she did with the kids.

Since retiring in 2005, Sue and her husband, Bill, visit their grandchildren, sons and their wives and Sue's family.

Sue and Bill both agree that the years they taught at Bethlehem AVTS were the hardest, yet most rewarding years of their lives. They sometimes think it was more of a "calling" than a job. God bless everyone.