

LEADERSHIP FORUM

The Newsletter of the Association of Educational Leaders, Anne Arundel County

Vol. 2, No. 2
Spring 2004

The man with a suitcase full of skills

Profile of AEL's Rick Kovelant

by Denise Hofstedt

Attorney Rick Kovelant is a plain speaking guy with a knack for negotiations and a will to win. The AEL Executive Director and chief negotiator for the last 15 years, Kovelant is known for his candor and sense of fair play.

A native of New Jersey who has spent most of his adult life in Maryland, Kovelant received his undergraduate degree from Gettysburg College and his law degree from American University.

Kovelant deferred his dream of being a drummer in a rock band to attend "at least one year" of college at the insistence of his parents. During that year, he met his future wife, Barbara, and his rock and roll road show plan was permanently abandoned.

He began his legal career as a law clerk for the legendary Judge Ridgley Melvin of the Circuit Court for Anne Arundel County followed by a clerkship for a District of Columbia Superior Court judge in Washington, D.C. Kovelant says his three years "clerking," where his duties included researching and assisting in the drafting of judicial opinions, taught him the importance of listening to both sides of an issue and the art of crafting a solid argument.

"Rick is accurate and persistent," says AEL Board Member Rocco Ferretti. "He checks and double checks the facts. He might come across as aggressive, but it's because he is so thorough and honest without ques-

tion. And he won't hesitate to tell people if they've messed up."

AEL Board Member Leigh Reid appreciates Kovelant's no nonsense style. "He tells it like it is – even when he knows we don't want to hear it," she says. One of Kovelant's frequent refrains begins "This is why you have a negotiated agreement..." "When issues arise, he reminds us to re-read our agreements. He encourages us to do something about the problem or stop complaining — basically, 'put up or shut up.'"

Negotiations

When it comes to contract negotiations,

Kovelant is the person you want on your team, says AEL President Charles Jansky. "He's tough, fair and he likes to win. He is a good friend and a good person to have on your side all the time. He is the heart and soul for this organization."

Kovelant admits that in a perfect world he would be out of a job because there would be no need for a union. Since neither the world nor Anne Arundel County fit that description, he is glad for the unique challenges of working with AEL. "We are unlike any other union. We must maintain a blue collar mentality in a white collar environ-

ment," he says.

His favorite role with AEL is working with the members. "I bring a different dynamic," says Kovelant. "I can say and do things our members wish they could say and



Rick Kovelant was a hit at his daughter's wedding last year when he sat in with the band.

Dates to Remember

June 2
AEL Spring Dinner Meeting
Yellowfin Restaurant
6:00-9:00 p.m.
See the enclosed flyer for more information.

May 1- June 1
Budget Hearings
Watch for information on the public hearings on the budget.
Plan to attend the meetings.

Transfer process reminder

It is that time of year when Unit II staff may expect information regarding their assignments for the upcoming school year.

Should you have questions about this process or your assignment, please contact one of the following individuals:

- Charles Jansky, 410-222-6469
- Rick Kovelant, 410-792-7440
- Don Smith, 410-349-1764.

Continued on page 2

Representing the finest leaders

While negotiations are continuing and the county budget process is in motion, I would like you to know that I am honored and proud to represent the finest organization of leaders anywhere.

There isn't a day that passes without me reflecting on the Herculean efforts of our assistant principals, our coordinators and our principals.

*President's Column
by Charles Jansky*

We are primarily responsible for advancing instruction and academics, the safety of 78,000 students; the management and supervision of more than 4,500 teachers, 1,300 secretaries and 1,700 building maintenance and operations personnel. Yet, we number less than 290. In addition to our primary mission, there are many time sensitive pressures

and extra-curricular activities that require us to work nights, weekends, vacations and holidays.

We, the Executive Board, are aware of the trials and tribulations associated with the mounting hours required to be a successful administrator in Anne Arundel County. We are making our concerns known through negotiations and lobbying efforts. Will Meyers, a member of our negotiation team, has used the phrase "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work."

The only thing that I would add is with additional responsibilities and additional hours should come appropriate compensation and recognition.

Hope to see you at the Spring Dinner Meeting, June 2 at the Yellowfin Restaurant in Edgewater. ■

Kovelant, from page 1

do. And that's fine, because I have a low tolerance for injustice."

He notes that his greatest challenge of late is the changing leadership within the school system. In contract negotiations, when there is no institutional memory, both sides must start from "scratch," he says.

"We don't want to repeat the mistakes of the past, so we have spent a great deal of time re-educating across the table," says Kovelant. With the tendency of the superintendent to look outside the county and state for high-level administrators — and not to promote from within — re-education is a continuing effort. Another challenge, notes Kovelant, is the current superintendent's recent job interview in Florida. "He is a self-imposed lame duck," Kovelant says. "He has made it clear he doesn't want to be here. And it's clear, his heart is not here."

Regardless of the challenge at hand, Kovelant prides himself on being prepared. Over the years he has researched the roles of educational leaders. "Rick knows the law inside and out," says Ferretti. "And he is always eager to learn more about what AEL members do. He is a talented advocate for administrators."

Larry Lorton, former Anne Arundel County Schools Superintendent and current AEL consultant, recalls sitting across the table from

Kovelant during many negotiating sessions in the late '80s. "He has always had enormous integrity," says Lorton. "Knowing that fundamental integrity was there and wouldn't be compromised, allowed us to get things done."

Lorton has long been impressed with Kovelant's quick wit and flexible manner in dealing with people and issues. "If he needs to be hardnosed, he's hardnosed. If he needs to be personable, he's warm and reinforcing. He reads situations well and responds appropriately," says Lorton.

Ferretti agrees, "Rick has good common sense and a keen sense for negotiation. He knows what cards to hold and has a suitcase full of negotiating skills."

Winning

Through litigation or negotiation, Kovelant likes to win. "He is fiercely competitive," says Ferretti. "He is not going to lose. There is never any doubt we are going to get our point across."

Kovelant is a master at arguing a point, says Ferretti. "He can dissect an argument and tell you which are your strongest points and which are not. He can disagree with you without making you feel bad. We're always arguing about something, but I respect him immensely."

Reid notes, "Rick is a man of principle and integrity. We are lucky to have him represent us." ■

"If he needs to be hardnosed, he's hardnosed. If he needs to be personable, he's warm and reinforcing. He reads situations well and responds appropriately."

Larry Lorton,
AEL Consultant

Some thoughts on so called 'climate surveys'

As the academic year winds down, I wanted to share some of my current concerns, as well as concerns shared with me by AEL members.

Of late, we have enjoyed, for the most part, a harmonious relationship with the Teachers Association of Anne Arundel County (TAAAC). Where possible, we share ideas, philosophies and concerns. Unfortunately, there are serious areas of disagreement and these areas involve the so-called climate surveys that are conducted at schools. It has been and will continue to be AEL's position that these surveys are not sanctioned, and are self-serving and divisive to working relationships. The Board has not sanctioned their use, however, it has done nothing to discourage the same. The anonymity of the participants discourages the very dialogue it seeks to engender. In short, these surveys are not statistically valuable and provide no useful information. They are designed to hurt, not help. TAAAC may believe the surveys empower its membership, but it is mistaken. The surveys allow a few members of a faculty to vent – taking their cheap shots and stalking away.

AEL will continue to resist their use.

As a principal or administrator, you were given the power to lead your school. This was not to be done with the consent and approval of subordinate employees. The evaluation process utilized by your area directors should decide the effectiveness of your leadership skills, not an unwarranted, untested self-serving survey from those you supervise. AEL will continue to voice its opposition to this unwarranted methodology.

The current evaluation process, grievance procedures and board policy are the safeguards of the integrity of leadership ability. If an individual teacher has a problem with your leadership role, then there are policies and procedures in place to grieve or address these concerns. The TAAAC survey is not one of them.

As we reach the close of the school year, we find ourselves still in negotiations. Compensation is always the key issue because it impacts recruitment, retention, and morale. We have advanced several compensation programs that reflect an increase in pay. As I have said before,

public employees fund their own pay raises, as they are not exempt from the increased taxes and fees that fund their salaries. We are also fighting to hold the line on a last minute request by the BOE for a 5 percent "give back" on health care contribution. Again, it makes no sense to accept a pay increase only to pay it back through increasing employee health care contributions.

These negotiation sessions are time consuming and often times intense. Don Smith, Larry Lorton and I are

compensated for our time, but the countless hours spent by Charles Jansky, Rocco Ferretti, and Will Meyers are done gratis. These individuals are always there with a thought, comment and information that moves this process along and makes our tasks easier. AEL should be thankful for the time and interest that these individuals provide so the benefits of their labor can be enjoyed by others.

As we go into the summer our communications become more difficult. If you need to reach me over the summer months for any problems or advice you may wish to share, please call me at 410-792-7440 or my home at 410-841-5493. I hope that when we speak again we have a contract that you find acceptable. Have a wonderful summer! ■

*A Message from Richard Kovelant,
Executive Director & General Counsel*

From the Vandenberg Family to AEL

*Life has such treasures that time's always stealing;
Nothing can ever entirely stay.
While you are young, you can capture each feeling;
Make all the memories you can every day.*

— unknown

Dear Friends,

Thank you so much for your contribution to the Paul Vandenberg Scholarship Fund at Frostburg State University. Your kind expression of sympathy is gratefully acknowledged and deeply appreciated.

Fondly,
Paul's Family

The Association of Educational Leaders

P.O. Box 74

Severna Park, MD 21146

Letters to the Editor welcomed

We encourage members to use this newsletter to share their opinions and ideas. If you would like to express your thoughts on an issue (i.e., "climate surveys") or time saving tip or a creative solution to a common problem, please send your submission to: Don Smith at 410.349.1764 (fax) or Denise Hofstedt at 410.421.5832 (fax), dmhofstedt@verizon.net.

Association of Educational Leaders

Officers, Board and Staff

Charles Jansky, <i>President '03-'05</i>	410.222.6469
Bob Ferguson, <i>1st Vice President '03-'05</i>	410.674.7710
Leigh Reid, <i>2nd Vice President '03-'05</i>	410.544.0900
Louise DeJesu, <i>Secretary '02-'04</i>	410.222.6404
Barry Fader, <i>Treasurer '02-'04</i>	410.222.1660
Rocco Ferretti, <i>Director '02-'04</i>	410.222.1075
Rick Wiles, <i>Director '03-'05</i>	410.222.5460
Reginald Farrare, <i>Director '03-'05</i>	410.674.0032
David Malone, <i>Director '03-'04</i>	410.969.5950

<i>Executive Director Richard Kovelant</i>	410.792.7440
120 2nd St., Laurel, MD 20707	Fax 301.490.7705
<i>Administrator Don Smith</i>	Phone/Fax 410.349.1764
527 Augusta Dr., Arnold, MD 21012	
<i>Editor Denise Hofstedt</i>	Phone/Fax 410.421.5832
dmhofstedt@verizon.net	

Spring Dinner Meeting set for June 2

Join your AEL colleagues at the Annual Spring Dinner Meeting to be held June 2 at The Yellowfin Restaurant on Solomons land Rd. in Edgewater. The cocktail hour will begin at 6:00 p.m.; dinner at 7:00 p.m. and the program at 8:00 p.m.

Bring your non-membership eligible spouse or companion and receive the discounted member price for that person -- \$25.

The cost is \$25 for AEL Members; \$41 for non-members. RSVP by **May 28** to Don Smith at 410.349.1764. Send checks to P.O. Box 74, Severna Park, MD 21146.

See the enclosed flyer for details. ■