As our yearlong centennial celebration draws to a close, three former teacher Board members who collectively spent over 30 years on the Board share their reflections on NYSTRS. A current of service runs through their reflections – service to NYSTRS, our members, their students, and the field of education. All three also offer their congratulations to the System for achieving this remarkable milestone of 100 years of providing a secure pension to New York state public educators.

Jolene T. DiBrango

Executive Vice President, New York State United Teachers
NYSTRS Teacher Board Member 2014–2017

“My path to education wasn’t a traditional one. I graduated from Mohawk Valley Community College in Utica with an associates in applied science degree in secretarial science. I was the first in my family to graduate from college. My education and preparation from community college was so excellent that I secured a job right out of school and was hired as the secretary to the principal at a local BOCES.

I enjoyed working in a school and being around that love of learning and energy the students brought with them each day. It inspired me to return to school in the evenings to earn my B.S. in business and distributive education.”

Paul J. Farfaglia

NYSTRS Teacher Board Member 2009–2019

“Many years ago, I met Michael Corn, a former NYSTRS Board member, through the work I did with New York State United Teachers (NYSUT). At the time he was a newly elected NYSTRS trustee. I came to know him well over the course of the next several years while I learned much about NYSTRS and what it meant to be a trustee of the System. Mike helped get me involved with the NYSUT Pension and Retirement Committee, which began my journey into the nuts and bolts of NYSTRS. At Mike’s urging, I attended a meeting of the NYSTRS Board very early in my involvement with the committee.

I became co-chair of the NYSUT Pension and Retirement Committee with David Keefe, and then eventually chair when David was elected to the retired teacher seat on the NYSTRS Board. This position provided me the opportunity to attend quarterly meetings of the Board and provide written reports to NYSUT.”

Joseph P. McLaughlin

NYSTRS Teacher Board Member 1990–2009

“I served on the Board for a little more than 18 years. I also served as Board president for a number of years. My memory of the Retirement System is extremely positive. The service provided to our members was outstanding. Our investments were superior as compared to most retirement systems.

We had great leadership in both George Philip’s time as executive director, and now Tom Lee’s leadership as executive director and chief investment officer.”
After getting married, I moved to Rochester and pursued my master’s degree at night while substitute teaching during the day, eventually securing a position as a full-time teacher. I taught for 25 years in addition to my work on the NYSTRS Board and being elected as the executive vice president of NYSUT. I really view my career as one of service to others: first my students and now my colleagues.

I have been very fortunate throughout my career. My first love was to teach, then to be a steward to an outstanding pension system and now to be an advocate for strong educational policy impacting educators throughout New York state.

My time on the NYSTRS Board was one of the proudest moments of my career. What struck me right away was the level of professionalism, care and expertise that went into every decision at the System. It is managed thoughtfully and expertly by the Board, executive director and CIO, senior management team and the entire staff. Service is at the core of each decision that is made and the member experience is at the center of the collective work. At the national level, when we had the ability to attend conferences, conventions and training, it was apparent that NYSTRS was looked at as the gold standard of plans. I’m so humbled to have been a part of the System as a Board member and wish NYSTRS a happy 100th anniversary!

Jolene DiBrango began her teaching career in 1994 in the Canandaigua City School District and then spent most of her career in the Pittsford Central School District, where she taught sixth grade. She is a graduate of Mohawk Valley Community College, SUNY Oswego, and Nazareth College. She has served as president of the Pittsford District Teachers Association and vice president of the Monroe County Federation of Teachers. She is currently executive vice president of NYSUT.

Jolene T. DiBrango (continued from page 1)

Joseph P. McLaughlin was a teacher for nearly 40 years, spending most of his career teaching English at Harrison High School. In addition, he served as president of the Harrison Association of Teachers, chairperson for the Westchester-Putnam Political Action Committee, and a member of the Board of Directors of New York State United Teachers. He earned his B.A. and M.S. degrees from Iona College.

Paul J. Farfaglia, a graduate of LeMoyne College and SUNY Oswego, was a teacher in the Jordan-Elbridge School District for 35 years. He served as the local union president for 25 years and later served as vice president. He also was a member of the North Syracuse Central School District Board of Education.

Paul J. Farfaglia (continued from page 1)

I could go on and on, but suffice it to say, serving as a trustee to NYSTRS for 10% of its 100 years of existence has been an honor and a privilege. As a retiree of the System, I now can fully appreciate the retirement security provided by a well-run and well-funded defined benefit pension plan. Never take this for granted and always protect this benefit! It clearly plays a key role in attracting and retaining the best educators in the country, making New York state second to none.

Paul Farfaglia, a graduate of LeMoyne College and SUNY Oswego, was a teacher in the Jordan-Elbridge School District for 35 years. He served as the local union president for 25 years and later served as vice president. He also was a member of the North Syracuse Central School District Board of Education.

Joseph P. McLaughlin (continued from page 1)

“We had a great Board who, although we may not have always agreed, we never took it personally. I am both proud and grateful for my service on the Board.”

Joseph P. McLaughlin was a teacher for nearly 40 years, spending most of his career teaching English at Harrison High School. In addition, he served as president of the Harrison Association of Teachers, chairperson for the Westchester-Putnam Political Action Committee, and a member of the Board of Directors of New York State United Teachers. He earned his B.A. and M.S. degrees from Iona College.