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✧ Mantoloking ✧

Resident works with retiree group to protect pensions

By Maryrose Mullen

In an uncertain economic time, one Mantoloking resident is working to improve the conditions of fellow Verizon retirees throughout the state.

Mantoloking resident Jack Brennan is a member of the Association of BellTel Retirees. The organization represents 230,000 Verizon employees both nationally and internationally, and focuses its effort on protecting employees' pension and earned benefits.

The Association of BellTel Retirees formed nearly 15 years ago, following what members perceived as the failure of their former employer to provide pension cost-of-living adjustments they were told to expect every few years in retirement.

Since its founding, the group that originated as a small cluster of frustrated retirees has grown to number more than 112,000. The organization united interests of former union and management retirees.

Mr. Brennan is the chairman of the organization, and oversees a 12-man board that represents 25,000 former Bell Atlantic employees.

Verizon was founded as the



JOSEPH J. DELCONZO, The Ocean Star

Mantoloking resident Jack Brennan chairs an employee organization that is in negotiations over retiree benefits with Verizon, which provides telephone service to much of the area, including many of the homes along Route 35 in Mantoloking [above].

Bell Atlantic Corporation, which later inherited seven of the Bell Operating Companies from AT&T. In 1996, the company merged with New York-based NYNEX, with whom BellTel Association President C. William Jones was employed. In 2000, Bell Atlantic merged with GTE and changed its name to Verizon Communications, Inc.

Mr. Brennan says it is the company's responsibility to maintain the promises made to retirees at the time of their employment.

"Pensions have slipped in recent years due to the economy," he said.

Mr. Brennan became involved with the organization following his early buy-out from Bell Atlantic after 38 years as a staff manager and labor relations representative with the company.

At the time of his employ-

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Chairman, Association of
BellTel Retirees**

ment, Mr. Brennan claims he was promised a full pension upon retirement at the age of 55, as well as full health benefits. Following his buy-out, he left the company without a pension, but still received benefits. He was approached by the association shortly after.

"We met with [Mr. Brennan] and said, 'We have this organization. Would you like to join with us,'" Association President and co-founder C. William Jones

said. "He has a lot of good experience that he brings with it. He's very well connected in the Bell Atlantic side of things, and he's been instrumental in attracting more board members."

Mr. Jones added that, while he, "runs things," he and Mr. Brennan "work closely together" and Mr. Brennan "makes sure everything's on track and helps any way he can."

At the time of his early retirement, Mr. Brennan contemplated seeking another job. Now, he volunteers with the organization for 35 hours per week.

"Our mission is to protect our benefits that were made with Verizon at the time of our employment," he said. "We're afraid these benefits are going to be taken away, and we want to prevent that."

Mr. Brennan said the group does proxy work with the company every year, and the

collaborative efforts of the association have paid off.

"We're one of the few retiree groups that has had success with Verizon," he said. "We've made big roads."

Some of those big roads include three consecutive pension increases for retirees and a lump-sum pension payment of up to \$20,000 for tens of thousands of retirees.

Mr. Brennan said he believes the group's main priority is to spread the word about the issues retirees face.

"We want to keep moving forward and get these issues out in front of people," he said. "We want people to know that retirees need help. Many companies have thrown retirees under the bus, and that needs to be stopped."

According to Mr. Brennan, many retirees have seen their benefits diminish over the years, while others have had to contribute to their funds.

The group, along with sister organization protectseniors.org, is working to pass the bill HR-1322 in Congress, which would protect retiree benefits and pensions.

Raymond McConville, a representative from Verizon, stated this week that, "Verizon greatly values its retirees, and provides them some of the most competitive benefits packages in the country."

Mr. Brennan added that he has no ill will toward his former employers, but only wishes for them to fulfill their original promise.

"We want Verizon to be a successful business — we just want to make sure they take care of us in the long run," he said.