



Spring 2019



Connections

NEWS TO KEEP YOU ENGAGED IN THE PROFESSION YOU LOVE

WEA retirees attend safety conference

By Barbara Galler

On Feb. 2, 500 educators met for WEA's "United for Safety" Conference at the Sea-Tac Doubletree Hilton. Appallingly, in this era of so many public shootings and needy children, few if any educators, are invited to join the various state and national commissions that arise to study and offer solutions of such incidents and societal ills. Still, we and our communities often ask: Where is the legislative action to fund more school counselors? Where are more common-sense gun laws? Where is the money to support school programs that teach respect for our differences and offer help for children with mental health or drug issues?

The opening speaker, Washington state Attorney General Bob Ferguson called for more coordination among state agencies to help achieve those actions. Gov. Jay Inslee wants \$155 million from the Legislature to help achieve those actions — and more — in a "whole child" approach to find solutions, noting that the issue is bigger than gun violence. Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal was the featured speaker at lunch. She touched on several issues crucial to improving school climate and safety, including supporting bills for school construction, reasonable gun control legislation, and aggressive oversight on Betsy DeVos' education policies.

In break-out seminars, some attendees examined strategies to find or develop school programs that addressed how to help students and families dealing with immigration, LGBTQ inclusivity, suicide, and depression issues. Other seminars focused on communicating with legislators about school safety, including the role of coordinating state agencies with schools, as noted by Mr. Ferguson and Gov. Inslee.

I attended the all-day seminar, "Engaging our Allies," which focused on the power of stories, whether we listen to them, help our students write them, or share our own. We channeled Joseph Campbell's archetypical "Hero's Journey," which is the basis of most human growth stories. We don't see that humanity in a three-minute news video; we must genuinely seek others' stories and empathize with them by remembering our own stories. This is what creates communities. This is what helps us to engage with our students, their parents, lawmakers, and each other. Recognizing the power of others' journeys of hope, risk, travail, and "re-birth" as better and stronger people is an important way to help effect the best and safest schools.

School safety is one of WEA's legislative priorities in the 2019 legislative session. Keep current on what's happening at www.washingtonea.org/ourvoice/.



The President's Corner

By Neva Luke

WEA-Retired President

As I look out the window, I can finally see my deck, the first time in weeks it hasn't been covered in snow. The weather has been quite unusual for the Seattle suburbs — seems to be reflecting the times we are living in. However, now that it's March, spring should show up soon and that also means the legislative session is in full swing. WEA-Retired, along with WEA, has been very busy working to ensure that our retiree benefits are maintained and improved for all educators — active and retired. As I mentioned in a previous *e-Connections*, WEA has again adopted a Unity Agenda that includes a wide range of legislative goals for all members and students alike. Find it here, www.washingtonea.org/ourvoice/.

This is a long session with a lot of legislative issues, so we all need to keep informed and be active throughout the session, scheduled to end on April 28. The WEA-Retired Lobby Day was Feb. 4. Despite Snowmageddon, a small but courageous group of WEA retirees joined with like-minded Retired Public Employees Council (RPEC) folks for our third annual joint lobby day. After a morning training session, WEA and RPEC members visited legislators of most legislative districts. Many of our retirees joined actives on Feb. 18 for another WEA lobby day. Thanks to all who participated. There are several bills under discussion that are in line with our needs and priorities:

- Medicare Subsidy / HB 1085: Would set the state's Medicare subsidy for retirees to be no less than 50% of the premium for health care in PEBB.
- Plan 1 COLA / HB1390/SB5400: Recommended by the Select Committee on Pension Policy (SCPP). Your WEA-Retired leadership testified supporting this bill at the SCPP hearing and at the House Appropriations committee this fall.
- Working in Retirement: Several bills are in play that would allow more retirees to work in certain roles or for certain total hours after early retirement without penalty. (HB 1388/SB 5430, HB 1139, HB 1362, SB 5801).
- Making Plan 2 the default instead of Plan 3 / HB1308 / SB5360: for those employees in PERS, TRS, and SRS who do not select a pension plan, the default option would change from Plan 3 to Plan 2.
 - Early Retirement / HB1132 / SB5178: Beginning July 1, TRS and SERS employees who are at least age 55 with 30 years of service credit could retire at 60 with full benefits.
- Sick Leave Buyout HB1409 / SB 5414: This bill would increase the maximum number of sick leave hours that can be accumulated by K-12 employees, increasing that cap from 180 to 260 days.

Keep in mind, the legislature has many days to go and there is no guarantee which, if any of these bills, will pass, and if they do, in what format. On the Washington State Legislature website, www.leg.wa.gov, you can sign up to follow a specific bill or bills in certain categories.

Our Legislative Committee, our team of lobbyists, and our active members do a great job lobbying for retiree needs in Olympia. The more voices the better! Want to be alerted when there is a need for retirees to attend hearings or send emails to our legislators? Email me at nluke@washingtonea.org.

WEA-Retired Awards

WEA-Retired can support public education staff and students in Washington only through the hard work and dedication of people who believe in its goals and objectives. It is the practice of WEA-Retired to acknowledge these supporters each year during its annual meeting.

Below are descriptions of the four WEA-Retired awards followed by the nomination form. The completed form should be sent to Kit Raney, WEA-Retired Awards Chair, 13017 19th Ave. N.E., Seattle, WA 98125 or emailed to raneyk@aol.com by April 22.

Pre-Retired Member of the Year

Some active WEA members join WEA-Retired while they are still working in order to retain their member benefits when they retire. Others actively promote WEA-Retired and its programs. These are the members we recognize with the Pre-Retired Member award.

- Encouraging pre-retired membership,
- Helping in their UniServ Council as we set up new WEA-Retired chapters,
- Advertising and setting up WEA-Retired pre-retirement seminars,
- Raising money for WEA-Retired Scholarships, and/or
- Welcoming us wherever we can be a helping hand, or they can offer one.

Retired Member of the Year

There are those who work tirelessly in their efforts to promote the organization: helping with membership promotion, scholarship activities, lobbying, meetings, committee work, among other activities. Many times, these are not names that appear in the newsletter or that others know much about, but they are always there and ready to work to get the job done.

Advocate of the Year

This award is given to people who, although they do not qualify for WEA-Retired membership, provide invaluable help to the organization over time by educating and/or providing support in a variety of ways.

Media

People in the communications field can educate the general public, WEA active members, and WEA-Retired members about WEA-Retired programs and goals. This can be accomplished through publications and communications such as electronic and printed newsletters, blogs, or websites.

Ready to nominate someone? Find the nomination form here, www.washingtonea.org/retired.

Prescription drugs: How to shop around for the best price

By Tom MacRoberts

As retirees we face the constant threat of increasing costs for medical insurance even as our retirement incomes remain relatively flat. We are fortunate to have excellent medical coverage through our participation in the Washington Health Care Authority's plans, but both Kaiser and Uniform/Regence posted significant rate increases in 2017 and 2018. Although we are seeing a slight decrease in rates for 2019, we can't count on that continuing in the future. The single most significant factor that is driving up the cost of medical insurance is the cost of our prescription drugs. Unless we see some significant changes in policy at the federal level, we can assume that this trend will continue in the future.

With that in mind, are there things we can do as consumers to get the best bang for our buck? There are some steps that you can take to find the best prices for drugs in your area. Let's start with the Washington Health Care Authority website, www.hca.wa.gov/about-hca/prescription-drug-program. On this page you will find several programs worth knowing. One of these programs is the Regional Drug Consortium. In 2006, the states of Oregon and Washington started the consortium and through them you can get a discount card that will get you a discount on all drugs, regardless of Tier level.

Another useful page is www.mp.medimpact.com/mp/secure/LaunchProductFrameset.jsp.

This page asks you to type in the first three letters of the drug you have been prescribed. For example, if you type in Lipitor (LIP) it will ask you to choose which dosage. When you do that it will give you the best price for that drug at that dosage. Costco is on virtually every page. The apparent explanation for this is that because of its purchasing power, Costco has been able to negotiate some of the best rates on the market. I also learned that you do not have to be a Costco member to utilize their pharmacy services. You can also find on this site the cost of a cheaper alternative to a drug like Lipitor. When you type in LIP you get quite a few different options. If you were to choose a 20 milligram dosage, it gives you the cost (it's a lot). But underneath Lipitor, it says "Generic Alternative." Click on that and it gives you the cost of Atorvastatin, which is extremely cheap by comparison. Whenever there is a generic alternative it will give that as well as the top tier drug.

Another website that is useful in finding the best price for prescription drugs is GoodRx, www.goodrx.com.

The front page has a search bar and a box next to it that says, "Find the lowest price." Using it, I put in Lipitor. When you do that it takes you to a link that asks you to put in your zip code. When you add that it will give you all the drug prices for pharmacies in that zip code. I used 99204 which is in the Spokane Valley area, and then I put in Lipitor. Interestingly, it automatically gave me all the costs at different pharmacies in that zip, but it also defaulted to the generic for Lipitor. If you play around with it, you will see that you can change from generic to brand. Do that and you will get the varying cost of Lipitor.

Prescription drugs continued.

Most of the pharmacies in our state have agreed to follow pricing as negotiated by the Regional Drug Consortium, which is why you usually see a narrow range in the pricing. One pharmacy refused to comply (there is no mandate that they must) and that is Walgreens. As a result, when you look at the cost of prescription drugs in Washington, Walgreens is usually on the high end.

As the WEA-Retired representative on the PEBB Board, my goals are to monitor the work of the HCA and PEBB, do what is possible to keep the cost and quality of health care for our retirees and to keep WEA retirees informed about these issues.

WEA-Retired Scholarships for active WEA members

WEA-Retired is offering up to ten \$1,000 nonrenewable scholarships to aid WEA members in enhancing skills in specific education areas and/or attaining or maintaining a teaching certificate. The scholarships cannot be used to pay for incurred debt for past classes or reimbursement for pre-paid classes. You must be a WEA member to apply. Applications (cover sheet and letter of application) are online at www.washingtonea.org/retired.

You may also request an application (certificated, classified, or student WEA) by contacting the scholarship chair, Bev Wentz, at barwentz@comcast.net. The completed coversheet and application narrative must be received by April 10 at WEA-Retired Scholarship Committee, 51 SE Bayview Lane, Shelton, WA 98584. Scholarship recipients will be notified by May 4.

WEA-Retired members are busier than ever



Pictured: WEA-Eastern and Spokane retired luncheon, WEA-Retired Lobby Day and WEA-Retired Board meeting.

Member Spotlight: A trip to France ... part two!

By Marjorie Njaa



Paris! The city of lights. The city of love. Paris usually figures prominently in the romantic travel fantasies of many people I have met. Me? Not so much. My past visits to Paris lasted only a few days at a time. I enjoyed the museums and historic places, but I couldn't say I was "in love" with Paris. After all, it isn't Rome! (Lucky me that I can even compare the two!) However, this past summer, my husband and I agreed to meet our friends in Paris to spend two weeks as "temporary locals." In those two weeks, I learned to appreciate the many charms that Paris hides from the whirlwind traveler.

We stayed in an apartment outside the typical tourist areas of the city but within walking distance of the Metro and the Seine. From our apartment we were able to walk to bakeries, the market, and restaurants, as well as an entrance to the Promenade Plantee, a magical garden-walk located about 30 feet above street level. Built atop an abandoned mid-19th century viaduct, the Promenade stretches for three miles through the 12th

Arrondissement. We delighted in the quiet green space accented with riotous splashes of color and unexpected water features and shared this idyll alongside locals who were soaking up autumn's last days of sunshine.

Our next excursion was visiting Luxembourg Gardens where we felt as though we had been transported into a French Impressionist painting. Enchanted, we watched children sailing vintage boats in the Grand Bassin duck pond. The boats are lovingly maintained antiques, but the giggling children racing around the pond transcended time and place. We felt quite Parisienne as we enjoyed the water, the light, and the laughter.

A quiet contrast was our visit to Pere Laschaise Cemetery. We meandered on beautiful green paths that took us through groves of trees, headstones, tombs, and memorials. Many famous people rest in this lovely place, including Jim Morrison, Edith Piaf, and Balzac. Many stones are no longer readable or have toppled completely, yet many grave sites are lovingly maintained by descendants. We were captivated by the memorials to unknown wives, mothers, soldiers, old men, and children. We prayed at memorials to victims of the Holocaust as well as at memorials for victims of airline disasters and wars. We couldn't visit all the nooks and crannies of this reverent place, but in one grove we were completely nonplussed by a colony of lively green parrots building nests in its trees. No one seemed to know how they happen to be there.



Member Spotlight continued.



One Sunday morning we visited the lovely St. Sulpice Church where the organ music so completely fills the chapel that one actually feels the silence when it ends. After the service, “those in the know” remain behind for a short concert. Local parishioners, tourists, and homeless people alike sit in quiet awe as the music weaves its magic around the sanctuary. The organ has 6,600 pipes, and the organist, David Roth, is world-renown. This is an experience we will never forget. Of course, if you’ve read *The Da Vinci Code*, you know about St. Sulpice for another reason. Yep, you can see

the infamous brass line on the floor!

Back to practicalities. Paris boasts an amazing Metro system, but we were surprised to discover an inexpensive way to travel on the Seine, the Batobus! Its passengers may “hop on/hop off” the boat at nine different stops around the city. What a lovely way to spend a day, enjoying many hours and many views of Paris from the water.

And, yes, of course we visited the more famous tourist stops: the Louvre and other art museums, Notre Dame, Sacre Coeur, the Eiffel Tower, and the Arc de Triomphe, which we climbed. Its flame honoring the unknown soldier from WW I is re-lighted daily.

While the well-known art museums, the iconic monuments, and the charming neighborhoods were wonderful, for us, the special memories were the off-the-track excursions and experiences. I encourage you to spend some time in a city exploring the places frequented by the locals; become a traveler instead of a tourist. I am confident you will find spaces that delight you.





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Important dates

March 20: WEA-Retired Executive Committee, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
March 21: WEA-Retired Board Meeting, 9:30 a.m. – 3 p.m.
April 25: WEA-Retired Mock RA (Spokane), 3-6 p.m.
April 25-27: WEA-Representative Assembly (Spokane)
May 8: WEA-Retired Executive Committee, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
June 4: WEA-Retired Executive Committee, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
June 5: WEA-Retired Board Meeting, 10:30 a.m. – 12 p.m.
June 5-6: WEA-Retired Annual Meeting
June 30-July 1: NEA Retired Annual Meeting (Houston)
July 3-7: NEA Representative Assembly (Houston)



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Connections is published by Washington Education Association-Retired four times a year. We invite your comments and contributions.

President

Neva Luke

WEARetired@WashingtonEA.org

Vice President

Mary Lindsey

malscomputer@aol.com

Editor

Barbara Galler

bgaller2@comcast.net

Editorial Board

Lee Ann Prielipp, Sandy Kokko, Kit Raney

P.O. Box 9100

Federal Way, WA 98063-9100

www.WashingtonEA.org/retired/