



Fall 2019



Connections

NEWS TO KEEP YOU ENGAGED IN THE PROFESSION YOU LOVE

Annual Fall Senior Lobby Conference

By Phyllis Farrell, WEA-Retired Representative to the Senior Lobby

The Washington State Senior Citizens' Foundation held their 2019 Fall Conference on Oct. 24 at the Hotel Murano in Tacoma. There were 405 attendees from the 37 coalition members. The five WEA-Retired members who attended were Phyllis Farrell, Eleanor Gilmore, Mary Lindsey, Shirley Hickey and Susan Lindsey. Phyllis Farrell is the representative from WEA-Retired as well as a Senior Lobby Board member.

Gov. Jay Inslee was the keynote speaker. The conference also featured several notable presentations, including state demographics by David Mancuso, DSHS research data director; senior property tax exemption by Steven Drew, Thurston County auditor; state budget and revenues by David Schumacher, director of Office of Financial Management; revenue analysis and needs by Andy Nicholas, a senior fellow at the Washington Budget and Policy Center; health care issues by Mitch Needham from Health Care Authority; and senior services by Bea Rector, Home & Community Services Division.

The reception the night before was lovely. Attendees were able to socialize with policy directors and legislators, including the newly elected Speaker of the House, Laurie Jenkins. The conference was well organized and highly rated on evaluations. For additional information about the Washington State Senior Citizens' Lobby visit www.waseniiorlobby.org.

Please join us in 2020 for the annual fall Senior Lobby Conference on Oct. 22, at the Hotel Murano in Tacoma!

Save the Dates and Join Us

WEA Lobby Day, is Monday, Jan. 20, on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Each UniServ Council will have the opportunity to send a bus to Olympia. Retirees, contact your uniserv council for further information regarding this WEA event. **WEA-Retired & Retired Public Employees Council (RPEC) Joint Lobby Day** is Monday, Feb. 3. This event starts with registration at 10 a.m. at the Hotel RL in Olympia, followed by a training session and lunch, which will be provided. RPEC staff will pre-arrange all meetings with legislators at the Capitol, which will begin at 1:30 p.m. Round-trip bus transportation will be provided. Join us for a legislative reception with light hors d'oeuvres and refreshments at 6 p.m. Learn more at www.washingtonea.org/retired.

The President's Corner

By Mary Lindsey, 2019-20 WEA-Retired President



Happy December! I hope that you all had a very pleasant Thanksgiving — and that, as retirees, your life can slow down a little to enjoy this holiday season.

You may be traveling during the holidays. My good friend, Sue Dunn, and her husband are now traveling to Arizona to see their daughter and her family for the holidays. They chose to go the slow way down the coast to avoid the mountain passes and to enjoy the beautiful ocean view. Along the way, Sue noticed a sign in Seaside, Oregon, with the following question, “When was the last time you did something for the first time?” Sue thought about that question a lot, and so have I. For Sue, her answer was immediate, as she had walked the promenade in Seaside for the first time. For me, as your first-year president, a lot of what I do is for the first time, or at least the first time in a new context. I hope that you too, will think about this question. Every now and then you hear about retirees doing some amazing things for the first time, such as parachuting from airplanes, starting a new business, writing that novel, traveling to new places, learning a new skill, volunteering, or giving your time to someone or something that needs it.

What do you want to do that you have never done before? Bringing the topic back to WEA-Retired, there may be some things that you may want to do for the first time. If you have never been a delegate to WEA Representative Assembly (RA), give it a try by submitting your name on the enclosed application form (there was also a link to the form in November's e-Connections). As a delegate, you will see WEA in action as we celebrate the 100th WEA Representative Assembly in Spokane, April 16-18. It would be wonderful to have representation from each WEA-Retired chapter throughout the state! Talk to a friend; both of you could submit your names. Ask others who have been delegates to fill you in. We need a variety of educator voices and backgrounds at RA. Please consider participating, whether it is your first time, or if you are a seasoned retiree delegate.

There are two member lobby days fast approaching. If you have never been to a lobby day in Olympia, give it a try. I think you will really like it. Don't worry, you do not lobby alone, and you do receive training with talking points on the specific topics needing attention when you lobby.

WEA Lobby Day is on Monday, Jan. 20. Bus transportation is provided through your uniserv council. Please contact them for details.

WEA-Retired Lobby Day with RPEC (Retired Public Employees Council) is on Monday, Feb. 3. This day includes speakers, training, lunch, lobbying, and an early evening legislative reception. Please register by Jan. 15 by emailing wearetired@washingtonea.org, online at www.washingtonea.org/retired or by calling 253-765-7067.

I hope to see you at the WEA Representative Assembly and Lobby Day 2020! Happiest of New Years to you!

WEA-Retired Delegate Nomination Form for the 2020 WEA-RA

The WEA-Representative Assembly will be held in Spokane, Washington, April 16-18, 2020.

- Nominees for WEA-Retired delegate must be retired and not hold a contract with a public school district.
- Nomination forms must be received by Saturday, Jan.18, 2020.
- Nominees must agree to attend all sessions.
- All nominations must have the consent of the nominee. Self-nomination is acceptable.
- Delegates are elected annually to serve one year.

Your name _____ Retirement/separation date _____

Your email _____ Cell phone (____) _____

I nominate the following RETIRED member(s) to be a delegate to the 2020 WEA Representative Assembly.

Nominee	Chapter	Email
1. _____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____
4. _____	_____	_____
5. _____	_____	_____
6. _____	_____	_____
7. _____	_____	_____

DELEGATE FUNDING

- WEA-Retired Board of Directors approved a policy change on June 6, 2018, regarding the funding of WEA-Retired delegates to the WEA Representative Assembly. The result of the change is that a delegate who needs lodging may have to cover a portion of the cost of the room.
- Under this policy, we estimated that delegates needing lodging at the 2019 WEA Representative Assembly would be out-of-pocket \$50. In the end, all hotel costs were covered. **We anticipate that the hotel costs will also be covered this year.**

Please check one of the following statements:

____ I understand I could have some out-of-pocket expenses, and I am willing to cover those expenses.

____ I understand I could have some out-of-pocket expenses, and I would prefer my name be removed if that is the case. Delegates will be given an approximate out-of-pocket amount as soon as hotel costs are known. At that time, delegates will be asked again to confirm if they want to stay on the delegate list.

This nomination must be received by Saturday, Jan.18, 2020, by email to Diane Kanda at mdkanda@yahoo.com or by mail to Diane Kanda, 4595 Wynn Road, Bellingham, WA 98226.

Your Health Care: PEBB, SEBB, Prescription Drugs and More

By Tom MacRoberts, WEA-Retired Representative to PEBB

Recently, Mary Lindsey asked me if I would be willing to write a column for the newsletter about our health care programs. I enthusiastically agreed, for there is much we need to know about the Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB) and the Washington Health Care Authority (HCA). I am currently serving as the WEA-Retired representative to the PEBB. It is composed of seven members: one representing active state employees, one for retired state employees, one for retired school employees, three who provide Cost/Benefit Analysis, and the HCA Director. The PEBB is the decision-making body for the HCA; it approves all decisions regarding state insurance plans. Some of the most important issues that we should consider are:

The SEBB — In 2017, the Washington State Legislature created the School Employees Benefits Board (SEBB) for all active K-12 employees. The SEBB goes live Jan. 1, 2020, so current active school employees are in the process of deciding which of the available plans they will choose for their health care. Should they fail to choose a plan, they will automatically be enrolled in a plan very similar to Uniform Classic. Once you retire, you will join one of two subscriber pools: non-Medicare retirees or Medicare retirees. Regardless of which plan you choose you will become part of the PEBB. This is all very straight forward. However, should you decide to work part-time as a school employee and work more than 630 hours in one school district, you will be eligible to rejoin the SEBB. In terms of cost, it will probably be worth it to do so. All PEBB plans — including Uniform, Kaiser and Premera — will have an equivalent plan in the SEBB. You will not lose your PEBB plan by switching back to the SEBB; you will be able to switch back and forth without being affected by the change.

Plan Costs — The good news is that for the second year in a row, plan costs have changed very little. For Medicare retirees, Kaiser NW Senior Advantage increased by 2.4 percent, Kaiser NW Medicare Advantage 4 percent, UMP Classic 2.4 percent, and Premera Plan F 0.6 percent. Non-Medicare retirees will see their plan reflect similar increases.

Medicare Advantage + Prescription Drug Plans (Part D) — The Health Care Authority understands that any increase in plan costs is potentially harmful to those senior citizens on a fixed income. Medicare Advantage Plans have the potential to offer a lower monthly cost option to those who feel that our current offerings are becoming too expensive. MA-PDs are private insurance plans that cover all Medicare benefits, including Part D drug benefits. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) pays the MA-PD a per enrollee subsidy to provide Original Medicare benefits (Medicare Parts A & B). Also, the MA-PD plans receive subsidies from CMS that cover at least 74.5 percent of the cost of Part D drug benefits. Drug manufacturer discounts are also available to Part D plans under the ACA (Obama Care) to help keep premiums low. Additionally, many Medicare Advantage plans offer benefit enhancements over Original Medicare. Currently, the HCA is examining some of the plans available and hopes to select one or two for our consideration next year. If all goes according to plan, the PEBB would vote approval, and at least one Medicare Advantage Plan would become available Jan. 1, 2021.

Continued on page 7.

NEA-Retired Delegate Nomination Form for the 2020 and 2021 NEA-Retired Annual Meeting/NEA-RA

The NEA-Retired Annual Meeting/NEA-Representative Assembly will be held in Atlanta, Georgia in 2020 and Denver, Colorado in 2021.

- Nominees must be retired and not hold a contract with a public school district.
- Nomination forms must be received by Saturday, Jan.18, 2020.
- Nominees must agree to attend all sessions.
- All nominations must have the consent of the nominee. Self-nomination is acceptable.
- Delegates are elected to serve for two years.
- Delegates may submit a candidate statement/biography of 50 words or less and a picture. The statement and picture will be included in addition to the ballot.
- Email the statement and picture to *WEARetired@washingtonea.org* by Saturday, Jan. 25, 2020. Mailed copies of the statement and picture will not be accepted, and statements containing more than 50 words will only have the first 50 words printed. I nominate the following RETIRED member to be a delegate to the 2020 and 2021 NEA-Retired Annual Meeting/NEA-Representative Assembly.

Name _____ Address _____
City/State/Zip _____ Cell phone _____
Email address that nominee checks regularly _____
(Required by NEA) UniServ Council (WEA-Retired Chapter) _____

DELEGATE FUNDING

WEA-Retired Board of Directors approved a policy June 8, 2011, regarding the funding of delegates to the NEA-Retired Annual Meetings/NEA Representative Assemblies. WEA-Retired is eligible to send 7 delegates and, in accord with that policy, if WEA-Retired leadership determines that WEA-Retired cannot afford to fully fund 7 delegates to the NEA-Retired Annual Meetings/NEA Representative Assemblies, there will be some out-of-pocket expenses.

Please check one of the following statements:

____ I understand I could have some out-of-pocket expenses, and I am willing to cover those expenses.

____ I understand I could have some out-of-pocket expenses, and I would prefer my name be removed if that is the case.

This nomination must be received by Saturday, Jan.18, 2020, by email to Diane Kanda at *mdkanda@yahoo.com* or by mail to Diane Kanda, 4595 Wynn Road, Bellingham, WA 98226.

My Heroes are Rats

By Heather Griffin Phillips, WEA-Retired Member



How many of you have dreamed of visiting Siem Reap, Cambodia so that you could catch the sunrise over the reflecting pool at Angkor Wat? Why else visit Siem Reap, right? I went for the rats. Yes, you read that correctly.

Like most people, I visited Cambodia last year to experience the magic of the temples. During that visit, I noticed that in Cambodia, unlike other Southeast Asian countries, there were quite a few people who were missing limbs. This is due to the number of unexploded ordnance (UXO) left over from conflicts in that country from the tumultuous 1970's until the late 1990's.

Cambodia is the most landmine-affected country in the world. Some UXO are designed to kill; some are designed to maim. Some UXO can be seen above the ground; some are buried up to three meters below the ground. Farmers and children are the two groups that have been affected the most by these destructive weapons. There are over 25,000 amputees in Cambodia. Last year alone, 50 were injured.

Landmines are inexpensive to make and lay (from \$3-\$75) but expensive to remove (from \$300-\$1,000), and this is where the Hero Rats of Apopo come in. These rats are brought in from Tanzania, where they receive nine months of training. They have a highly developed sense of smell (though are mostly blind) and can sniff out bombs buried up to one meter below the ground. If a bomb is more than one meter below the surface, a person can walk over it without it exploding. Each rat can check the area of a tennis field in 30 minutes. It would take a human four days to do the same.

Each rat has two handlers. The field to be checked is divided into zones. The rat handlers stand several meters apart, each holding one end of a guide rope. The rat, tethered to the rope with a harness, follows the rope, sniffing as he goes. If he smells explosives within 50 cm, he scratches the ground. The rats can tell the difference between scrap metal and explosives, unlike human deminers.

At their visitor center, we were able to observe one of the rats in action. He ignored a partially buried metal object, but when he reached a buried explosive, he scratched the ground and partially unearthed it. Watching the rat in action was amazing — that a creature so reviled in so much of the world can do so much good was heartwarming.

After the rat identifies a landmine or UXO, experts are brought in to try to remove it. If it cannot be removed safely, it is detonated. How effective are these rats? One hundred percent effective! There have been no further injuries on any field that the rats have cleared. Nor, for that matter, have any rats been injured. During 2018, 29 rats cleared 12 fields containing over 1 million square meters of land. Ten more rats were delivered from Tanzania at the end of February 2019 and will be sent to the Battambang Province, where 40 percent of the injuries from landmines come from. It takes a year to train the rats; new shipments are delivered as soon as the rats are ready.

Continued on page 7.

My Heroes are Rats. Continued from page 6.

These little heroes work seven days per week, depending on weather conditions. They are fed a diet of 10 peanuts and two bananas per day, but they get treats on the weekend (watermelon, apples, corn, and extra bananas). They have saved countless lives and limbs. They work for approximately seven to eight years before enjoying a well-earned retirement. The Apopo organization has been training rats for 20 years in Tanzania, though they have only been used outside of Africa since 2015.

Apopo is supported exclusively on donations. If you can't visit Siem Reap, you can adopt a Hero Rat or donate funds at www.apopo.org/en. If you do visit Siem Reap, by all means go to Angkor Wat, but spend an hour visiting the Hero Rats — you won't regret it.

Learn more at www.TravelsWithHeather.com.

What are you up to? We want to hear about your adventures and stories! Send them to WEARetired@WashingtonEA.org.

Your health Care. Continued from page 4.

The Value Formulary — The PEBB voted to adopt a Value Formulary for prescription drugs beginning Jan. 1, 2020. Note: This formulary only applies to Uniform. If you receive your health care through Kaiser or Premera, they use their own formulary. What does this mean to you, the consumer? The value formulary would eliminate the Tier 3 drug category. Members would either pay 100 percent for the cost of these drugs, or they would have to go through an exception process and show medical necessity in order to have them covered. This change was necessitated in large part because of the extreme volatility in drug pricing. It was felt that this creates a simpler and clearer method for members to understand drug pricing, as well as an exception process that is more equitable. You should still have access to medicines in every covered therapeutic class, as well as possibly lower out-of-pocket costs at the pharmacy.

It is important to also understand that not all drug categories will be affected by this change. Drug categories that are not affected: antipsychotics, antidepressants, antiepileptics, chemotherapy, antiretrovirals, immunosuppressives, and immunomodulatory/antiviral treatment for Hepatitis C. If you have questions about your prescription drugs, check the Uniform Preferred Drug List (PDL) or call (888) 361-1611. (If you do a search for UMP Preferred Drug List, it will take you directly to the web page you are seeking without having to navigate the HCA's website.)

One more item: All PEBB meetings are governed by the Washington State Open Meetings laws and are open to the public. The PEBB meetings are held at the Health Care Authority Offices, 626 8th Ave. S.E., in Olympia.

The 2020 meeting schedule is March 18, April 15, May 28, June 17, July 15, July 22 and July 29. Meetings typically run from 1-4:30 p.m., and time is always allocated for members of the public to speak about any topic related to their health care and decisions made or under consideration by the PEBB.



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Important dates

Jan. 15: WEA-Retired & Retired Public Employees Council (RPEC) Joint Lobby Day registration due

Jan. 18: WEA-Retired Delegate Nomination Form for the 2020 WEA-RA and NEA-Retired Delegate Nomination Form for the 2020 and 2021 NEA-Retired Annual Meeting/NEA-RA applications due

Jan. 20: WEA Lobby Day

Feb. 3: WEA-Retired & Retired Public Employees Council (RPEC) Joint Lobby Day

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

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