



Fall 2016



Connections

NEWS TO KEEP YOU ENGAGED IN THE PROFESSION YOU LOVE

WEA-Retired Annual Meeting

By Sandy Kokko

WEA-Retired held its annual meeting in Federal Way, June 1-2. Fifty-six delegates from across the state attended, making it one of the Association's largest meetings. New board directors were elected or re-elected from Kent, Puget Sound, Rainier, Spokane, Vancouver, WEA-Cascade, WEA MidState, and WEA Olympic. Summit and North Central are now the only councils without board directors. Sharon N. White (WEA Chinook) was re-elected secretary. The 2016-17 at-large members to the executive committee will be Sam Hayes (WEA Chinook), Shirley Hickey (Kent) and Karle Warren (WEA-Southeast).

WEA President Kim Mead shared

with the delegates some of her experiences while working out of the new Seattle satellite office. She also shared information about WEA's involvement with ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act). Julie Salvi, WEA lobbyist, updated delegates on this year's legislative session. Aimee Iverson, WEA General Counsel, talked about the charter school issue and the current situation with the McCleary decision.

Two candidates supported by WEA also spoke to the delegates. Senator Cyrus Habib, candidate for lieutenant governor, shared his background and positive experiences in our

state school system after he lost his sight at age eight. Chris Reykdahl, candidate for Superintendent of Public Instruction, shared his vision for the state schools. Both candidates were well received by the delegates.

Several board directors reported on chapter activities this past year. The focus for WEA-Retired for the last three years has been on organizing. Prior to this time there were five chapters across the state that held regular meetings for members.

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The President's Corner



**By Kit Raney,
WEA-Retired
President**

I am honored to serve as president of WEA-

Retired and

I really enjoy it. I enjoy talking with members and answering questions. I enjoy working to make things better for members. The one thing that I do not enjoy is pensions. Now don't get me wrong, I certainly like getting my pension each month. What I don't like is how much negativity surrounds the subject of pensions.

TRS Plan 1 members want the COLA and gainsharing back and, if they worked more than 30 years, they want the total number of years worked to be used when determining their pension. Plan 2 and 3 members want to be able to retire at a younger age without being penalized. Some Plan 2 and 3 members who retired using the Early Retirement Factors wanted to be able to substitute. Members who worked out-of-state want to be able to buy service credits at a reasonable cost. And almost all members of the three different plans want WEA and WEA-Retired to stop spending so much

time trying to improve the other two plans.

I want to assure all members that we continue to work on improvements to all plans and stop takeaways on any plan. These are detailed in our legislative goals which are reviewed and revised by our legislative work team each year. These goals are then discussed and approved by the WEA-Retired Board every year.

We know what changes would improve our pensions and, if I was the boss of the world (or the Legislature), we would experience major successes on pension improvements every legislative session. But I am not. The reality is that even the smallest improvement to a pension plan usually has a large cost to the state. We also spend a lot of time stopping bad legislation, which would harm our pensions.

In no way am I suggesting that you should not want and advocate for improvements to your pension plan. I am suggesting that, as we are stronger together, you support and advocate for improvements to all three pension plans. A sample of what was contained in our 2016 legislative goals:

Specific Goals for TRS and PERS Plan I

- Eliminate the unfunded liability
- Establish an annual COLA

Specific Goals for TRS and SERS Plan II

- Support efforts to reduce pension penalties for those who take early retirement
- Allow PEBB access when leaving service without drawing retirement
- Allow members sick leave cash-out at the time of separation from service without penalty

Specific Goals for TRS, PERS and SERS Plan III

- Allow five-year vesting without age restrictions
- Allow members sick leave cash-out at the time of separation from service without penalty
- Support efforts to reduce pension penalties for those who take early retirement.

If you would like to see the 2016 legislative goals, email me at raneyk@aol.com and I will send them to you. And you can help greatly by telling your pension stories to your Legislators, being a member of WEA-PAC, responding to email alerts when action is needed during the legislative session and subscribing to WEA's OurVoice www.OurVoiceWashington.org.

2016 WEA-Retired Scholarship Recipients

By Bev Wentz

At the WEA-Retired annual meeting held in June, the five recipients of the scholarships offered by WEA-Retired were announced. We had more applications this year than in previous years making the decisions very difficult. What we know is that there are dedicated, qualified and active members of WEA.

One such educator was Laura McVicker. She was among the original organizers and presenters for the pre-retirement seminars. In Laura's will she left a bequest to the scholarship fund. Then we were notified of a second bequest from her estate. These bequests will result in our increasing the number of scholarships we will offer for 2017. The scholarship committee will be meeting in September to set the number of scholarships available for the upcoming year. Awarding more scholarships will allow us to assist more active WEA members in enhancing skills in specific education areas and/or attaining or

maintaining a teaching certificate.

More information regarding the scholarships will be coming via council emails, local announcements, posts on the WEA website and from WEA-Retired members.

For 2016 five WEA members will continue their educational growth with scholarships from WEA-Retired. All have been very active in WEA, either through their locals, councils and/or state committees /training.

- Adam Aguilera, high school English teacher in Vancouver, is in his final two years of the National Board process.
- Heidi Wilson, kindergarten teacher in Vancouver, is completing her certification through Pro-teach.
- Marcie Rader, high school math teacher in Richland, is working on her masters in math for grades 5-9.
- Carmina Harrington, a brailist for the Vancouver School District, is a special education para-professional pursuing a teaching degree.
- Emil Marks Olson, a para-educator in the Spokane Schools, is pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in general and special education.

Bits and Pieces



mySocialSecurity

Do you have an online "mySocialSecurity" account? The Social

Security Administration was going to require cellphones to receive security-code texts to log into the accounts. After two weeks of outcry, Social Security has backed off of that requirement.

Speeches from the NEA Representative Assembly

There were also some very good speeches at the 2016 NEA RA. Visit <http://ra.nea.org/> to read the highlights of NEA President Lily Eskelsen Garcia's speech and the speech given by Hillary Clinton.

Have you been getting e-Connections?

This emailed newsletter is sent out every month when we do not have a printed and mailed newsletter. If you are not receiving e-Connections, let us know your email address and that you wish to start receiving it at WEARetired@washingtonea.org.

GPO/WEP

The following is an excerpt from a memorandum written by Mary Kusler, director of NEA Government Relations.

Under current law, the Social Security benefits of certain federal, state and local government employees are computed using a modified formula called WEP, enacted in 1983, that reduces the Social Security benefits of people whose work histories include jobs covered by Social Security as well as jobs NOT covered by Social Security. To be impacted by the WEP, an individual must have worked in covered employment long enough to qualify for Social Security benefits; worked in non-covered employment where Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) Social Security payroll taxes were not paid; and earned a pension in that non-covered job.

The WEP reduces the share of pre-retirement earnings that Social Security benefits replace. For roughly the first \$10,000 in average annual earnings, the WEP reduces the replacement rate from 90 percent to as low as 40 percent, depending on years of coverage under Social Security. However, the reduction cannot exceed 50 percent

of the amount of the pension received from non-covered employment.

A related provision, the GPO, reduces Social Security benefits paid to spouses or survivors when the spouse or survivor earned a pension from a government job that was not covered by Social Security. The GPO reduction is equal to two-thirds of the amount of the pension payment from non-covered government work.

Legislation to address some of the inequities created by the GPO and WEP, which unfairly penalize and reduce Social Security benefits earned by educators and other public employees, is being considered by the House Committee on Ways and Means. The bill that is receiving the most scrutiny, the Equal Treatment of Public Servants Act of 2015 (H.R. 711), creates new winners and losers while falling short of NEA's ultimate goal: full repeal of both the GPO and WEP. Meanwhile, NEA continues to strongly support the Social Security Fairness Act (S. 1651/H.R. 973), which would fully repeal both the GPO and WEP.

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The Committee had planned to “mark up” H.R. 711 in mid-July, but delayed any action on the bill amid numerous questions, including those raised by NEA. In partnership with other leading unions — the AFT, AFSCME, IAFF, SEIU, and the AFL-CIO — NEA continues to work with Committee members to find a way forward and mitigate the bill's adverse impact on certain current and future retirees. The GPO and WEP affect only about 3.5 percent of U.S. households, but can have a substantial impact on benefits in those households. According to the Social Security Administration (SSA), they reduce the present value of lifetime Social Security benefits for affected households by roughly one-fifth — approximately 5-6 percent of total wealth. For that reason, and because they are inequitable in other ways, considerable political pressure has been brought to reduce the impact of the GPO and WEP. Some members of Congress are pressing for modifying or eliminating them entirely, the position that NEA supports.

Go to <http://www.nea.org/home/16494.htm> for more information including FAQs.

WEA-Retired Member of the Year

Annette Barca: Jan Curtis

At our annual WEA-Retired Banquet on June 1, it was announced that Annette Barca had received the WEA-Retired Member of the Year Award. Annette has been, and continues to be, more than an advocate for our profession. She has dedicated her life to helping people access the best life available.

As a teacher, she was a leader in the Everett Education Association and the state level. Annette's knowledge of member benefits such as insurance and the pension system was revered by all who came into contact with her. Additionally, she spent many years chairing the Documents and Resolutions Committee for WEA and NEA.

As a WEA-Retired member, Annette has continued to advocate for members with a dedication of time and energy equal to when she was an active teacher. She is part of Pilchuck's Preretirement Seminar Team giving information and wisdom to teachers on our state retiree insurance, Medicare and Social Security. This last year she assisted with WEA-Cascade UniServ Council's seminars, too. She has served as secretary and vice president of Pilchuck WEA-Retired and usually provides our lunches for those meetings.

Annette's commitment to people doesn't stop with just educators. She is the coordinator of SHIBA's (Statewide Health Insurance Benefit Advisors with the State Insurance Commissioner's office) program on Whidbey Island. She is available to help anyone needing assistance with Medicare problems and planning.

Before and after retirement she volunteered with the Red Cross teaching first aid, CPR and emergency planning. Annette is a skilled quilter and has had some of her work published in quilting magazines. Since her husband Bob passed away, she has worked diligently to make sure his prize southern hemisphere garden continues to be a show place for master gardeners and other interested people. Pilchuck WEA-Retired usually takes a field trip to the garden each year.

Annette is the ultimate example of "retire from your position, but not your profession." She is a model for how to live retirement to its fullest by continuing to help others. And she was a very deserving recipient of the WEA-Retired Member of the year for 2015-16.



Newsletter Editor

WEA-Retired is searching for a new editor for our printed and mailed newsletter, *Connections*, produced four times a year. The responsibilities would include working with the president and staff person to determine the content and timeline for each issue, and procuring and editing content. Willingness to contribute content would also be appreciated. Experience with an Association newsletter would be helpful but is not necessary. This is a volunteer position. If you are interested or want additional information, please contact Kit Raney at raneyk@aol.com.

Arts, Education and Culture in Cuba 2016

by **Betsy Guerra**

During my political awakening as an adolescent of the 70s I read Che Guevara. (Yes, I was that hippie kid.) Consequently, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to visit Cuba with Witness for Peace last January and see for myself what the Cuban revolution had or had not accomplished in 50 years. The following themes emerge repeatedly in Guevara's early writings: the creation of an egalitarian society, education, the arts and healthcare. These are the areas of life that I would try to observe in my visit to Cuba. Because I was traveling with Witness for Peace I would have the opportunity to see more and speak with more Cubans from all walks of life than I would have been able to as a tourist.

The Literacy Campaign

One of the Cuban revolution's early successes was the literacy campaign. In 1959 the literacy rate in Cuba was estimated to be between 60% and 76%, with the highest rates of illiteracy being in the rural areas. In 1961 Cuba initiated the Literacy Campaign.

In one year 707,212 adults were taught to read, bringing the literacy rate up to 96%. About one million Cubans were involved as students or teachers. The teachers included professional teachers, young students, mostly between the ages of 10 and 16, and factory workers who would teach their peers in the evenings. The youngest teacher was 8 years old. The eldest student was 109. At the Literacy Museum in Havana we saw photos and letters of students from this era and met elders who had been young literacy teachers in 1961. Want to learn more? Cathrine Murphy produced *Maestra*, a 34 minute documentary about the literacy campaign. You can see it online at <http://www.maestrathefilm.org/#>.

Today education is free in Cuba from preschool through university, and the arts are incorporated throughout. Free education at the university level includes room and board as well as books and tuition. We met the director of the medical school and students at the art institute. Ninety



thousand art students graduate each year. In addition, Cuba trains 10,000 doctors a year, from 110 countries. About 5,000 are students unable to afford education in their own countries who train in Cuba and then go back to practice in their own countries. Most foreign students come from Latin America, Africa and Asia, but US students are included as well. Cuba also sends doctors to many developing countries to care for patients and to set up medical schools and train doctors.

Healthcare

Cuba provides free comprehensive healthcare to all of its citizens. Their healthcare outcomes (child mortality, life expectancy etc.) are similar to those in the US and Europe.

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However whereas the US spends \$4,550 per capita on healthcare per year, Cuba spends just \$193. In Cuba the emphasis is on preventative care. Each neighborhood has a doctor and nurse assigned to it. They live in apartments above their clinic and care for approximately 500 families. They are primarily responsible for preventative care: seeing to it that all families have access to potable water, immunizations, birth control and regular check ups. They also treat minor illnesses and refer patients to polyclinics and hospitals for more specialized care as needed. On our trip we visited the medical school and a local clinic.

Equality

We also spoke with journalists

and economists. The creation of a society built on the principal of equity was a major goal of the revolution and continues to be a concern. Most people get a salary from the government for the work that they do. There is wide spread frustration with low wages, but they fall within a narrow range and so are equally low for everyone. In addition, some private enterprise is allowed, typically small family business such as small restaurants or fruit stands. The burgeoning tourist business is causing some disruptions in Cuban society. On one hand, Cuba is in need of the inflow of foreign dollars. On the other hand, workers with access to tips can earn significantly more than those living on a government salary. For instance, a taxi driver can earn much more than a doctor. Cuba is wrestling with the balancing act of promoting much

needed foreign investment without abandoning the goal of creating an equitable society.

Your trip

I would strongly recommend an educational trip to Cuba so that you can form your own opinion. If you travel with a group like Witness for Peace you won't have as much time to sip mojitos on the beach, but you will have the opportunity to know Cubans from all walks of life, to visit with elders that remember the days of the revolution, and to see for yourself what does and does not work in modern Cuba. My trip focused on arts, education and culture in Cuba, but Witness for Peace sponsors trips throughout Latin America that explore a variety of issues. If you want to learn more go to www.witnessforpeace.org.

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WEA-Retired President Kit Raney had set a goal to have the rest of the councils provide at least one opportunity for members to meet by the end of this year.

She indicated that goal had been achieved except for Summit Retired, which has a lunch meeting scheduled for September 21, and Vancouver Retired, which is also putting something together for this fall.

Two major changes to the constitution and by-laws were approved. Language was added to the constitution defining the difference between a council chapter and an affiliated chapter. By-law language that details what a chapter must do to become and maintain affiliated status was also added. The second major change added a third choice for becoming a member of WEA-Retired. This new option is a monthly dues option whereby a specific amount is deducted each month from the member's state defined benefit check.



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NEA MEMBER BENEFITS PERKS

Many of you probably use NEA Member Benefits for getting a good price on a rental car or maybe for financing or refinancing your home. Did you know that NEAMB has a whole Retirement Center with help for both those trying to save and get ready for retirement and those already retired?

Retirees can find information about a host of topics, including:

- 7 critical pension questions to ask before changing jobs.
- Does it really pay to pay off your mortgage?
- How are your colleagues planning for retirement? Find out in the 3rd annual NEA member survey!

Visit www.neamb.com/retirement-center.htm and take advantage of this member benefit!

Connections

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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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