



Fall 2017



Connections

NEWS TO KEEP YOU ENGAGED IN THE PROFESSION YOU LOVE

Resist hate

By Maureen Ramos

I proudly display the bumper sticker “Resist hate” which is so important to me and to the ones I love. However, the violent, hateful events of Charlottesville are a harsh reminder of a time many of us lived through as children and early in our careers as educators. Torches carried not by hooded Klansmen, but by a new, young generation of bare-faced, Neo-Nazis/KKK, who marched spewing vile, anti-Semitic, and racist chants. I am saddened, horrified, and angry that, as a nation, we are experiencing an uptick in the horrors of blatant, hateful discrimination.

I must ask, do you remember what we lived through in the ‘60s and ‘70s? What we fought for in support of our students?

I was a new teacher in 1964 in an inner-city school where the student body ranged from children who had cardboard in their shoes to cover the holes to students who lived in gated homes. Welcome to the most diverse group of students I would ever teach. I was teaching there when there was violence and protests. I was invited to homes of black families who were gracious and loving to me, educating me gently as I was a young woman from Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, who had experienced too little. Thank goodness they saw my heart was good, for they helped me understand what was happening through their eyes. (Blessings, Wells family!) Even in my second year of teaching, on a field trip on public transit, a bus driver tried to block the class and me from riding the bus, shutting the door on one of my female students. Blocking the door open with my body, I urged my students to board and several other bus riders helped us. Needless to say, after a call from me to the transit authorities, a special bus was sent to take us back to the neighborhood. We all have so many memories of those difficult, heart wrenching times. Meanwhile powerful, meaningful responses and legislation at all levels — national, state and local — made a difference in our country. We lived it. We taught through those times, loving every one of our students.

See resist, continued on page 7.



The President's Corner

By Neva Luke

WEA-Retired President

As your new president, I am experiencing many firsts and this is one of them — the first mailed newsletter, *Connections* — under my watch. I am very grateful for all the support I have received: the collective trust by your representatives that elected me in June at the annual meeting, the work of so many of our leaders over the summer, and the staff — ever ready to get the job done for WEA-Retired. I must highlight the gratitude I have for our outgoing president, Kit Raney, and the job she has done over the past seven years in moving our organization forward. She truly earned the “Member of the Year” award she received at our WEA-Retired Annual meeting. In addition, at the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting, Washington received the award for the state with the highest percentage increase of membership over the last year.

During the summer, many of your WEA-Retired leaders and officers began preparing for the 2017-18 year. The Executive Committee met in August to review last year's work and to be sure everything was in place for this year. The Seminar Committee spent countless hours planning its training for the seminar presenters. The Legislative Committee scheduled several key legislators to meet with the committee. WEA-Retired members also attended the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting, the NEA-Representative Assembly, WEA-PAC, Senior Lobby, and the Washington State Senior Alliance meetings.

Mary Lindsey, your new vice president, and I have met regularly this summer with each other, with staff, and leaders. One of our goals is to visit a meeting in every chapter in the state. We urge all members to attend the retiree gatherings in your area so you can stay connected and enjoy the camaraderie of your colleagues.

In the past year, it seems like the national news has usually been somewhere between worrisome and horrifying. Recently it was Hurricane Harvey, Hurricane Irma, the end of DACA, Charlottesville, and closer to home, a confusing legislative budget with no retiree improvements, no capital budget, and the list goes on.

Even though we are retired educators, most of us still feel that September is the time to pause for reflection and goal setting as a new school year starts. This is a good season to focus our energy and thoughtfully choose how to spend our time and utilize our strengths and talents. I believe if each of us chooses to do even one or two things in concert with our organization, WEA/NEA and WEA/NEA-Retired, our ability to make a difference increases exponentially. Let's continue to push forward!

(Pictured: WEA-Retired Vice President Mary Lindsey, WEA President Kim Mead and WEA-Retired President Neva Luke at a Leadership Training in July.)



NEA-Retired Delegate Nomination Form for the 2018 and 2019 NEA-Retired Annual Meeting/NEA-RA

NEA-Retired Annual Meeting/NEA-Representative Assembly will be held in Minneapolis in 2018 and Houston in 2019.

- Nominees must be retired and not hold a contract with a public school district.
- Nomination forms must be postmarked by Oct. 15, 2017.
- 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 with the mailed ballot.
- Email the statement and picture to *WEARetired@washingtonea.org* by Nov. 1, 2017. 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 2018 and 2019 NEA-Retired Annual Meetings/NEA Representative Assemblies.

Name _____ Address _____

City/State/Zip _____ Phone (_____) _____

E-Mail address that nominee checks regularly (required by NEA) _____

UniServ Council _____

DELEGATE FUNDING

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

Return this Nomination Form postmarked no later than Oct. 15, 2017 to:

Jan Curtis

718 Russell Road

Snohomish, WA 98290-5617

Greetings from your new WEA-Retired Vice President, Mary Lindsey

Welcome to the 2017-18 school year as a retiree or future retiree! I am very happy to serve you as your vice president for the next two years. Thank you so much for your support at the WEA-Retired Annual Meeting last June! I am eager to work with you in our commitment to moving WEA-Retired forward!

Quick facts ... I was born in Bellingham and went to Bellingham, Chewelah, Everett, and Shoreline Public Schools. I attended Shoreline Community College, and earned my BA and MA in Special Education at Western Washington University. I retired in 2007 after teaching for 32 years in the Bellingham School District as a middle school special education teacher and one year in fourth grade. I love to travel and have been to all 50 states, and 19 countries. I find that people throughout the world are more alike than they are different. I especially enjoy hearing stories from locals and visitors. I believe we learn a lot from listening!

Like many of you, I have enjoyed being involved in WEA activities throughout my years in education and now in retirement. I found that being on the local bargaining team was the best of times and the worst of times. Very similar to working with the Legislature! I have been on the WEA-Retired Legislative Work Team for a few years now. This team works to promote state issues important to our members and public schools in general. I am also a member of the Washington Alliance for Retired Americans Executive Board as a liaison for WEA-Retired. This organization has a focus on retirement security for all seniors mainly at the federal level. WEA and WEA-Retired are working with many other organizations to provide a larger voice for the common good.

The other day, I helped my sister set up her kindergarten classroom for the new school year. Another teacher came in while we were chatting and, she mentioned an article from the last WEA-Retired newsletter. I responded that she must be a pre-retired, WEA-Retired member. She stated that she was, and had joined because she heard that WEA-Retired stuck up for people. She thought that was what she needed.

We all need to feel that someone has our back. This is what WEA-Retired is all about. All of us collectively sticking up for each other, and supporting our public schools. As retirees, we have a history of the ups and downs, the progress made over the years. We know how important it is to be persistent because we have seen what has been gained can also be taken away. Find opportunities to share your stories with politicians and educators new to the profession. Experience matters!

I am looking forward to working with you this year. Neva and I are prioritizing visits to local chapters throughout the state. Hope to see you at your local WEA-Retired gathering sometime soon!

What are GPO & WEP, and why should we care?

By Kit Raney

As public school educators in Washington state, we paid monthly into Social Security. Perhaps, though, you or a spouse also taught in another state that did not pay into Social Security for teachers; there are, in fact, 15 states that choose this option. Further, even in Washington state, some public-sector workers such as firefighters or PUD employees, among others, do not pay into Social Security.

If you have worked in a position where you were exempt from paying into Social Security, and then also worked in a position where you did pay into Social Security, you, spouses, and minor children may be impacted by two federal provisions, the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP). The GPO and WEP penalize educators, police officers, firefighters, and other employees of state and local governments who dedicate their lives to public service.

What is the Government Pension Offset?

The GPO reduces Social Security survivor benefits. Nine out of 10 public employees affected by the GPO lose their entire spousal benefit, even though their spouse paid Social Security taxes for many years. That's because if you receive a pension from a government job in which you did not pay Social Security taxes, some or all of your spouse's, widow's, or widower's benefit may be offset by two-thirds of your public pension, hence the title "Government Pension Offset."

What is the Windfall Elimination Provision?

The WEP reduces the Social Security benefit for retired and disabled workers receiving pensions from non-SS-covered employment, but also worked in jobs that paid into Social Security. This law seeks to prevent some public employees from getting "double" retiree benefits: their state pensions AND Social Security. The WEP causes hard-working people to lose benefits they earned themselves.

It is easy to get more information and to take action. Go to www.edadvocacy.nea.org. This will take you to NEA's Legislative Action Center. Go to "Key Issues" at the top of the page and find "Retirement Security" in the list of issues. This will take you to a page with links to information and an easy way to act in support of repealing GPO/WEP.

More information can be found at these sites:

www.massretirees.com/wepgpo-explained

www.ssa.gov/planners/retire/gpo.html

www.ssa.gov/planners/retire/wep.html

My medical mission to Nicaragua

By Chris Gray

Two years ago, I began sewing with a group of women who were making washable menstrual products for women in Nicaragua through an organization called Corner of Love (COL). When I began, I was not thinking about making a medical mission trip, but as I talked to people who had gone, I began to think about joining their venture. Nelson and Tanya Amador are the Maple Valley founders of COL, which serves people in the most impoverished northeast corner of Nicaragua. Nelson, a native Nicaraguan, met Tanya in 1983 when he came to the U.S. to attend school. In setting up and managing COL, they have spent their lives developing contacts all over the world to provide monetary support. More importantly, the Amadors seek volunteers willing to travel to Nicaragua on mission trips that will provide mobile medical clinics to deliver medical, dental, eye, and foot care in remote village homes, churches, or schools. Especially important are the anti-parasite medications as well as meds for many skin conditions, both resulting from the lack of modern sanitation. Basics such as shoes and clothing are also distributed. The volunteers are professionals from all over the world. When not on mobile duty, they also man a San Ramon clinic built by the Amadors themselves.

I joined a 12-person mission trip in July. We were men, women, and children and among our group were two nurses and a pediatric occupational therapist. I'm an OT too, but volunteers need not have medical training.

Of course, we went there to help others, but upon arriving in Managua, the capital, we were delighted to get a tour of the city's museum and its colorful market place. We visited a nearby active volcano and enjoyed a boat trip on Lake Managua. I loved travelling by bus and horse-drawn carriage, the better to absorb the stunning architecture. I loved meeting the city's beautiful people and learning about their history. Later that evening, Tanya accompanied us to San Ramon, about three hours away. We were housed in a dormitory-type structure they built to house upwards of 120 people, so we rattled around a bit! We would eat most of our meals there, or staff travelled with us to cook, thus decreasing the chance of us getting sick among the unfamiliar germs.

After a day to unpack, lay out, and store or package the medicines and clothing, we headed up to our first mobile clinic duty in a small, mountainous village. It was 90+ degrees, 100% humidity, pouring down rain, and mud was everywhere as our bus passed coffee plantations and several rivers flowing above the cement bridges. We worked in a very small church with a dirt floor, few windows, no electricity and smelling of smoke from the cooking fire out back. I was assigned to the "pharmacy," along with two other people. Boy, did we work hard and fast. Each patient, anyone of any age, visited one of our three teams. Usually a prescription was developed and filled and then patients were given an explanation of its use by native speakers. We spent another few days in similar villages, though some did have electricity, then we went back to the San Ramon clinic.

See mission, continued on page 7.



I felt much more at home with the duties of the pharmacy at the clinic where the supplies were nicely organized, color-coded, and stored in labeled plastic containers on shelves — much better than zip-locked bags in boxes, suitcases and few shelves we worked with out in the field. In all we saw between 80-200 patients per day.

I learned a great deal about myself and the world. First, despite the nice tour of the first day, this was not a vacation and was, in fact, VERY hard work

under difficult geographic and weather conditions, not to mention the poverty. Despite the gratification I felt when I saw the appreciation of our patients, I was concerned that we had so little time with each patient and might have missed something life-threatening. Another concern I have in retrospect is the necessity of good teaching methods to help the patients understand the use of the menstrual kits and the prescriptions. Given the language barrier, we needed more time to demonstrate and check for understanding of the instructions. On a grander scale and in the long term, I wonder how this poverty and its accompanying poor sanitation can be alleviated by more outside help as well as better local government. I am proud that I was part of a team of dedicated volunteers who went outside our comfortable lives to help others in need. The simple gifts of clothing, shoes, toothbrushes, soap, and washable menstrual products are enormously important and helpful to these villagers. After all, women miss five to seven days per month of work/school because they cannot leave their homes. Witnessing this level of poverty makes us appreciate the bounties we may take for granted in the U.S. The best reward was giving immediate comfort to the people we saw followed closely by the reward of working with like-minded volunteers. I encourage you to try the hard work of a medical mission! Despite the hard work and difficult conditions, it will be an experience that you will remember for the rest of your life. For more information on Corner of Love, go to their website at www.corneroflove.org.

Resist, continued from page 1.

Where were you? What were your experiences?

Those mostly young KKK/alt-right/Neo-Nazis/white supremacists (call them what you want, they all hate), believe in white supremacy. Their chants and torch-carrying marches mirror the German Nazis' beliefs that targeted entire groups of people for extermination due to their religion, nationality, or disability, resulting in the deaths of over 6,000,000 people. What can we do? What should we do?

Our experiences and history in making change can support today's activities and events, turning back the hate and discrimination. We have loved and taught ALL students. We worked too hard for too long to allow overt hate back into our society. We all need to take a collective stand, raise our voices and get involved. Elections are more important than ever. Vote. Join WEA-PAC if you haven't already. Be active. Stand up. Speak out. We cannot be silent. We are educators! We RESIST HATE!



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MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Oct. 15: NEA-Retired Delegate Nomination forms must be postmarked by today.

DONATE

The Texas State Teachers Association and NEA are now accepting donations to the Hurricane Harvey Disaster Relief Fund to help NEA members displaced by the storm and to assist the schools where they work. These educators have the double task of rebuilding their own lives as well as helping rebuild the lives of their displaced students.

Tax-deductible donations may be made online at:
www.neafoundation.org/donate.



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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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