

The Journal

WASHINGTON STATE SCHOOL RETIREES' ASSOCIATION

Affiliated with the National Retired Teachers' Association (NRTA)—AARP's Educator Community



JANUARY, FEBRUARY 2021

VOLUME 74, ISSUE NO. 3



Unit 25 Spokane Area collects warm coats, hats, and gloves as an annual project coordinated by member Jeff Hunter (*right*). This year, they were donated to the Chaplin's Outreach Unit of the Spokane Police Department.

WSSRA At Work For You



A message from the president

Rising to the Occasion



by Bob Duke, president

This is our time to shine and we have risen to the occasion! WSSRA local units continue to creatively engage with and support local schools, charities, scholarships, and their own members.

During the last three months we have endeavored to gather information about local unit activities during this time of social distancing. By attending coordinating council Zoom meetings and conducting a well attended unit president training, we have compiled a lengthy list of the activities being conducted at the local level. Units are reaching deeply into their communities to provide support and encouragement that capitalize on the need for distancing and the isolation some folks are experiencing.

What follows is a sampling of activities being conducted by local WSSRA units.

- Revised mini-grants by lowering amount and increasing number of grants.
- Conducted drive thru sock-a-thon collecting socks, toiletries and food bank donations.
- Contributed \$6,000 to two school districts to provide help with student Internet access.
- Donated \$2,000 to Men's Choral Club to fund scholarship for aspiring music educator.
- Funded grants to middle school teacher to purchase materials for print making at home. Over 300 students have received materials.
- Raised \$3,000 for PAC.
- Gave money monthly to local food bank.
- Awarded grant to library system.
- Wrote thank you notes to all active members.
- Helped hungry people in our county with donations to the food bank.

- Donation to domestic violence shelter.
- Continued to work on current projects, i.e., women's shelter, newsletter, Zoom meetings.
- Reinstated our grants and sent notice encouraging application to all of our schools.
- Began mailing newsletter to all members because many do not have access to email.
- Scheduled interesting speakers at each Zoom unit meeting.
- Had volunteers write letters of support for active teacher members working in a COVID-19 environment.
- Increased newsletters to once a month.
- Secured meeting presenters who were comfortable with Zoom programs including State Librarian with a quick summary of 20 books of interest.
- Recruited presenters with stories of high interest (e.g., Camp Harmony story-the Puyallup area internment camp during WW II; fraud alert presentation from AARP).
- Issued \$25 checks delivered to school staff with a specific need described in a short application.
- Provided a \$1,000 grant to repair area farm fences destroyed in late summer fire.
- Hosted virtual pre-retirement seminar attended by 26 active employees.

President, continued on page 7...



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JOURNAL INFORMATION

Published five times per year
by the Washington State School
Retirees' Association, a non-profit
since 1947.

The WSSRA Journal Policy
Board, WSSRA President and
WSSRA Executive Board assume
no responsibility for items ap-
pearing over the signature of
any source. While every effort is
made to check the accuracy of
items accepted, articles cannot be
reviewed for technical accuracy.

Material appearing in The
Journal, in addition to records of
action by the board, councils, com-
mittees and units, is presented to
promote the general welfare of
WSSRA members and otherwise
to fulfill the purposes of this as-
sociation, as defined in Article II
of the bylaws.

JOURNAL articles to:

Kristin Murphy, editor
editor@wssra.org

**Upcoming JOURNAL
article deadlines**

February 5, 2021

for Mar./Apr. 2021 issue

April 5, 2021

for May/Jun. 2021 issue

WSSRA At Work For You



A message from the executive director

Looking Forward to 2021



by Alan Burke, Ed.D., executive director

Whew! We made it . . . it's now 2021 and we can put that nasty 2020 in the closet! With the legislature starting afresh, with COVID-19 vaccines on the way, and with the prospects for a live convention improved, 2021 looks to be a lot better than 2020.

As for the convention, we have a plan. If the vaccines come too late to get members properly treated this spring, we can switch from June 6–9 to October 3–6 and hold the event at the same place – the Pasco Red Lion Hotel. The WSSRA executive board has the final say on dates, and hopefully will be able to make a firm decision at their April 14 meeting. In the meantime, we will work with the Red Lion on a procedure for room reservations. Tara Teitzel will coordinate all of this from our office and will be in touch with unit presidents once the vaccine timeline becomes clear.

As for the legislative session, we also have a plan. When COVID-19 wreaked havoc last spring we knew that the 2021 session was going to be a tough one. With a multi-billion dollar hole to fill, unemployment very high, and the economy propped up by government stimulus plans that inevitably will end, legislators will be burning the midnight oil to come up with a biennial budget that works for Washingtonians.

Legislative Director Peter Diedrick has specifics on WSSRA advocacy priorities in his article on page 4, but, suffice it to say, we will be hunkering down to protect hard-earned medical benefits and maintain the “pension payment glide path” that eliminates Plan 1 TERS and PERS unfunded liability by 2027–28. Remember that it is very challenging to get a COLA bill passed when the state has not funded future pension liability. Indeed, it took most of a decade to get legislative acknowledgement that a one-time Plan 1 COLA should

be funded after the UCOLA went away in 2011. (Note: The Plan 2 and Plan 3 systems essentially are fully funded and currently are not subject to COLA freezing conversations.)

In spite of the COVID-19 virus, the board and the staff have worked diligently the past several months to maintain services. For instance, we know that on-site pre-retirement seminars will not happen until vaccines are widely available, but we have secured presenters from the Department of Retirement Systems, the Health Care Authority/PEBB, VEBA, Social Security, and Medicare for a virtual seminar via Zoom on February 18 from 5:00 pm to 7:30 pm. Information about this event is on our website, included in this *Journal* (see page 8), and electronic flyers have been distributed to every school district. Please encourage active teachers and school personnel who are one to five years from retirement to register.

Finally, please help us out with membership. Without retirement seminars and on-site faculty meeting presentations, our membership has dropped this year—almost entirely due to older members passing away. You can help by spreading the word about WSSRA and the top-notch advocacy we do in Olympia for fair pensions, and the philanthropy that we provide in each of our 30 statewide units. Sign-ups are easily completed through our website, or by filing out the membership form published in each *Journal*. If every current member could find one new member to join our organization, our power in Olympia would greatly increase and retiree pensions definitely would be more secure. Again, your help with membership is appreciated.

Again, welcome to 2021. This will be a better year!

Legislative News



Preview of 2021 Legislative Session



by Peter Diedrick, legislative director

2021 Legislative Session Preview

In a normal year, the legislative interim between legislative sessions can be pleasantly slow paced. This, however, was not a normal year – it was one of crisis management. The pandemic struck at the completion of the 2020 legislative session. Legislators did what they could; they set aside \$3.5 billion in cash reserves and appropriated an extra \$100 million to the state health department for pandemic response measures. Then they left town in hopes of escaping before the virus spread around the capitol campus. On January 11, legislators begin a new legislative session and they will be faced with a mountain of problems to remedy.

WSSRA's Legislative Agenda

Our WSSRA board has voted and our legislative agenda is set. The lobbying and advocacy team will focus on protecting retirees' current benefits from cuts, ensuring appropriators make the actuarially recommended pension payment, and sponsoring legislation to help our members during the coronavirus pandemic.

- **Protecting Retiree Medical Benefits.** Sixty percent of WSSRA retirees purchase Medicare supplemental insurance through PEBB and the Washington State Healthcare Authority. Those insurance premiums are marked down 50%, up to \$183 per month, per person. Eliminating that benefit would save the state approximately \$175 million per year. It would also drive Uniform / Regence retiree coverage up to \$515 per month, per person.

- **Making the Employer's Pension Contribution.** In the 1990's and early 2000's the legislature only made partial pension contributions, leading to today's underfunding in TRS & PERS 1. Any year there is a budget crisis, the WSSRA political team worries that appropriators will toy with pension contributions again. There are many freshmen legislators who need to be educated on the importance of pension contributions.
- **COVID-19 & Early Retirement.** WSSRA is developing emergency legislation to reduce the retirement age for school employees during the pandemic. The proposed legislation would reduce the full retirement age to 60 for employees with 30 years of service credit. For employees over age 60 with 20 to 30 years of service credit, it would reduce the early retirement penalty to 3% of the pension per year – the current penalty is over 8% per year. The legislation would only be in effect while the Governor's emergency COVID-19 proclamations are active.
- **Allowing Retirees Back Into PEBB.** Many retirees are locked out of PEBB insurance. WSSRA is sponsoring a bill to create a one-time enrollment period for retirees who are locked out of PEBB. Additionally, the Washington State Healthcare Authority has developed two new statewide retiree health plans. The WSSRA legislative team feels this would be an appropriate time to allow retirees to re-enter PEBB.

Pandemic Budgeting

The Washington state budget outlook is still showing deficits, but the situation has improved dramatically. In June, economists expected a \$9 billion drop in tax revenue. Appropriators successfully held \$3.5 billion in reserve – a tidy sum – but it did not come close to meeting anticipated shortfalls. In the latest tax revenue and budget forecast, economists are expecting a \$900 million surplus in the short term, and a \$1 billion shortfall over the next four years. Not ideal, but substantially better than in June.

Hidden in the numbers are some bigger challenges. The state incurred some savings this year from reduced school enrollment. For the state's accountants, that is a win. For school budgets and the well-being of our kids, it is a very bad situation. Therefore, the budget challenge continues to be larger than is shown on paper.

Visit WSSRA.ORG
click on "Legislative"

**Information about
legislative priorities,
contacting your legislator,
session bill reports, and the
WSSRA Legislative Podcast**

Assume the state has about a \$1 billion dollar problem on its hands. There is a \$100 million shortfall in the long-term forecast, more than \$500 million in emergency needs for schools, approximately \$150 million in business aid that been promised by the state, and a depleted unemployment insurance account to manage. The state's reserve account should cover those needs, but appropriators will be looking to trim the budget where they can. School retirees have benefits that can be cut, and WSSRA's members should continue to be mindful of the circumstances.

The First Digital Session

The State House of Representatives and State Senate are going digital. Legislative rules do not allow for remote voting, so a rule change will be the first order of business. For one time only, legislators will meet in-person for legislative opening ceremonies. The legislature has rented the Saint Martin's University gymnasium – next to your very own WSSRA office – to allow for a socially distanced vote on the rule changes.

Legislators will have to love their constituents from a distance this year; the public will not be allowed in buildings on the capitol campus. In fact, many staff members will have to receive special waivers to work on campus. Most legislative aides are being forced to work remotely. Legislative leaders will be on site. Senators and representatives will be allowed to work from their offices but are being encouraged to work from home. All committee hearings and testimony will be online. The new process will reduce the number of bills that can be processed, and legislators are being encouraged to limit the number of bills they sponsor – get those bill requests in early is the message to everybody.

Stay Tuned and Stay Vigilant

In the last recession, retirees lost the Plan 1 COLA and part of their medical benefit. Legislators are being reassuring and the situation appears to be less dire. However, tax revenue forecasts have bounced around by \$10 billion in the last six months; it is not a stretch to assume more big shifts are in order mid-session. Please sign up for those email alerts on our webpage. Email is the best way to get you urgent legislative information, and elected leaders will need to hear from you.

Remembering



Gene Forrester

WSSRA President, 2007-2009

Gene Forrester, longtime WSSRA supporter, officer and activist, passed away December 18, 2020. Gene joined WSSRA in 1994 after a long career in education that included 21 years teaching vocational agriculture in Ellensburg followed by a lengthy stay at OSPI as Washington's VO-AG/FFA director. Gene was well known across the state for his tireless, career-long efforts to promote the benefits of teaching kids to become farmers. As agriculture changed so did VO-AG, and Gene was on top of the move to train students for increasingly more sophisticated tech-based businesses. Gene's support of Vo-Ag teaching is memorialized through the annual awarding of two, \$2,000 Forrester scholarships for high school seniors who enroll in the Vo-Ag teaching program at WSU.

At WSSRA, Gene assumed the presidency upon the passing of John Lothspeich early in 2007-08 and continued in that role through 2008-09. At roughly the same time Gene served at the statewide level as a member of the important Select Committee on Pension Policy, the legislative and stakeholder group that vets pension legislation and makes recommendation on which pension bills should be considered for adoption. He also was very active locally in the Olympia Kiwanis and the Thurston County SRA—serving in a number of leadership roles with Unit 28. In addition, he was a member of the national AARP Legislative and Policy Committee. More recently, he was a member of the Washington State Senior Lobby and for the past several years has been the WSSRA Parliamentarian.

Gene is survived by his wife Vivian, four daughters and five grandchildren. Gene, through his yeoman work over many years with the organization, contributed greatly to the rise of WSSRA as a political force. His positive attitude, work ethic, and leadership will be missed by all.

Supporting Future Educators



WSSR Foundation: We Appreciate Your Support



by Paula Buck Nichols, WSSR Foundation chair

A big thank you to everyone who has donated to the Foundation this year. We really appreciate your generosity. In September, we received \$12,400; October, \$3,830; and November, \$3,330. Sixteen high school seniors and college students will be very grateful in June when we award scholarships.

We still encourage you to donate to provide these scholarships to deserving students.

The WSSR Foundation was incorporated in January 1986. Dennis Roley, of Olympia, was the first chairperson. Also on the first Foundation board were Harold Anderson, Olympia; Irene Gleason, Walla Walla; J. Wesley Crum, Ellensburg; and Ernest Newland, Olympia.

The purpose of the non-profit corporation shall be to raise funds and accept donations for the Foundation and to manage the Foundation's investments for providing annual scholarships for high school seniors planning to major in education or school-related fields or college students selected for student teaching or internships leading to professional certification in the field of education.

As a reminder, please continue to gather silent auction items and create raffle baskets for the annual WSSRA convention in 2021. We will take as many baskets and items as you want to donate. Again, thank you for the support you have given us during this difficult time.

DONATION FORM

WASHINGTON STATE SCHOOL RETIREES' FOUNDATION

PO Box 5127, Lacey, WA 98509

Please Print

Donor Name _____ Phone _____

Mailing Address _____ City _____ St _____ Zip _____

Donation \$ _____ In Honor \$ _____ In Memory \$ _____

NOTE: If you would like the person notified of this gift, you must include their full name and address below.

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> In Honor | <input type="checkbox"/> Memorial | \$ _____ |
| Name _____ | | |
| Person to be Notified _____ | | |
| Address _____ | | |
| City _____ | State _____ | Zip _____ |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> In Honor | <input type="checkbox"/> Memorial | \$ _____ |
| Name _____ | | |
| Person to be Notified _____ | | |
| Address _____ | | |
| City _____ | State _____ | Zip _____ |

☐ Please check box if you would like to receive a receipt for your records. The WSSR-Foundation is a 501(c)(3) and donations are tax deductible within the limits of the law.

Check \$ _____ # _____
Cash \$ _____

ONLINE FOUNDATION DONATION

wssra.org Foundation link > Donation Form

Foundation Contributors

| | |
|---|--|
| Joanne Beck - donation | Benton/Franklin SRA - in honor of Marlys Mayer |
| Kay Bishop - in memory of Crystal Johanson | Chelan/Douglas SRA - in memory of Anna Domanska, Elizabeth Judkins, Mary Gibson, Michael Detering, Virginia Penfold |
| Ann Chenhall - donation | Grays Harbor/Pacific SRA - in memory of Larry Woodwick |
| Martin Chorba - in memory of Larry Norwood | Renton/South King RSEA - in memory of Allison Duncan, Bill Raschkow, Delores McKagan, Joe Venera, Ken Forbes, Margaret Mitchell, Margaret Sagmo, Velma Evans |
| Pamela & Larry Conover - in memory of Lewis Lehmann | Seattle SRA - in memory of Sharon Green |
| Sharon Dennis - donation | Skagit-Island-San Juan REA - in memory of Alfred Bonnelle, Annabelle Birkestol, Arnold Torseth, Carol Kirkby, Dave Quall, Joyce Eckerich, Patricia Cruse, Patricia Kelly, Talton Johnson |
| Rita Figlenski - in memory of Ken Cline | Sno-Isle SRA - donation, in memory of William Deller |
| Gene & Vivian Forrester - scholarship | Southwest King SRA - in memory of Jacqueline Call, Michael Winston, Robert Lyle, Stephen Talbot |
| Linda Gaines - donation, in memory of Carol Reeve and Twila Johnson | Spokane Area Foundation - in memory of 2019-2020 deceased members |
| William Gentz - donation | Spokane Area REA - donation |
| Jane Gruver - donation | SW Washington SRA - in honor of Donald Rifenbery |
| Malver Haynes - in memory of Sharon Green | Whitman Co. SRA - in honor of Unit 33 past leaders |
| Karen Keller - in memory of Bob Marshall, Helena Wilson, and Rich Riggs | Yakima Co. SRA - donation |
| Patricia McLachlan - donation | WSSRA - donation |
| George Moergeli - donation | |
| Julee Neuhart - in memory of Sharon Green | |
| Laurel Powell - in memory of Barbara May Reinhard | |
| Victoria Russell - in honor of Marlys Mayer, in memory of Christina Dimmick | |
| Dale Schultz - donation | |
| Zoa Shumway - in memory of Alex Wasisco | |
| Patricia Slosson - donations | |

President, continued from page 2...

- Sent letters to local district superintendents encouraging them to become members.
- Held a "drive by" celebration for a unit member's 90th birthday.
- Issued seven grants of \$200 each to purchase Scholastic books to be sent home with kids.
- Gave \$100 to local schools in unit area to purchase PPE supplies.
- Donated toys to Salvation Army.
- Increased mini-grant total and amount that could be requested.
- Allotted money to establish Wi-Fi hotspots for kids.
- Honored teachers request to purchase art supplies to send home with students.

- Awarded childcare grants to assist families in need.
- Issued grant to a local teacher to purchase rewards for students and encourage teacher/student connections.

Taken as a whole this list of activities, support, and commitment demonstrates the fabric of WSSRA members. Our association is much more than legislation. We are a group of like spirited people, engaged in our communities and committed to being involved in supporting community efforts.

I will continue to work on an easy, interactive way for unit presidents to post activities as they occur.

Thanks to each of you for your commitment to WSSRA, each other and your communities. I am proud to be a member of an organization with a heart.

Plan 2/Plan 3 Corner



Actives: Getting to Know VEBA



by Alan Burke, Ed.D., executive director

The Voluntary Employees Beneficiary Association plan (VEBA) is a type of tax-exempt trust used by its members and eligible dependents to pay for eligible medical expenses. For K-12 employees, VEBA is mostly used to build a health care fund that can be used after retirement to offset medical expenses.

Depending on the individual district plan, some active employees can begin building a VEBA account while employed; others must wait until retirement to start a VEBA. In most cases, VEBA is funded from sick leave balances at a 1 to 4 reimbursement rate, meaning one day's salary is moved to VEBA for every four days of sick leave accumulated.

The major advantage of VEBA is its tax-free nature. In a normal one-to-four sick leave cash-out situation—whether done annually with leave balances over 60 days, or done with the full balance at retirement—the cash is considered by the IRS to be regular income that is subject to federal income tax. With VEBA, the entire amount is tax-free. Thus, depending on a person's income tax bracket, VEBA will generate savings of 20% or more over a simple cash out.

Most common medical expenses are covered by VEBA. Retiree medical premiums, co-pays, deductibles, prescription drugs, dental, vision and even long-term care insurance premiums are VEBA-covered. Spouses and dependents also are covered. After enrolling and becoming claims-eligible, retirees can submit claims and supporting documentation (proof of expense) online or through mailing completed hard-copy forms. In addition, automatic reimbursement of retiree insurance premiums is available.

Most, but not all school districts in Washington allow VEBA. Generally, after the district adopts a plan, employee groups (union and/or non-union) vote to decide whether to participate. Again, by far the majority of school districts in the state allow VEBA. In addition, some plans allow VEBA accumulations prior to retirement and others do not. Some allow other leave accumulations (e.g., personal, vacation) to be cashed out to VEBA, while others do not.

To understand the situation in a particular district, a call to the payroll/benefits office is a good place to start. If the district does not allow VEBA before retirement, then contacting the

union representative to learn about the history of VEBA voting might be in order. The bottom line is that, once 180 days of sick leave is accumulated, the best financial bet in most cases is to begin a VEBA account with the annual sick leave (one to four) distribution. Once started, the account can be built over the years and then supplemented with the remainder of the sick leave balance (again, at a one to four ratio) upon retirement. The 180-day limit is important because state law for certificated employees prohibits a retirement cash out for any accumulation over 180 days.

The VEBA account has the additional benefit of growing as a normal investment. VEBA accounts are managed by third party brokers and treated like any other investment. For those who begin building VEBA while employed, the earnings on the VEBA account (short of an administrative fee) accumulate and are not subject to tax. Even at retirement, the VEBA account will continue to grow subject to it diminishing as claims are made.

If the VEBA holder passes away, the surviving spouse or estate may be able to spend down (use up) the remaining funds by submitting claims. Medical, dental, and vision expenses and premiums incurred by the VEBA holder, spouse, or any dependents will remain eligible for tax-free reimbursement. If funds remain after all claims have been reimbursed, the account will be transferred to the surviving spouse.

All in all, as a tax-free program VEBA is a really good deal for retirees. All who have not started a VEBA account are encouraged to contact the local payroll/benefits office for more information and enrollment procedures.

Note: This is the fifth of a five-part series highlighting the "Big Five" of retirement planning—the Department of Retirement Systems (DRS), the Health Care Authority/Public Employee Benefits Board (PEBB), Social Security, Medicare and Voluntary Employee Beneficiary Association (VEBA). This month's topic is VEBA. Because of space limitations, this summary is necessarily broad.

WSSR-PAC News



WSSR PAC: 2020 Wall of Support



by Lora Brabant, WSSR-PAC treasurer

Let's give a round of applause to our generous supporters for 2020! Listed below are the contributors who gave to the WSSR-PAC so that our voice is heard in Olympia, letting our legislators know that we do care about the promises made while we were serving our community and our children.

In Memory of

Carolyn Horne
Rick Nebeker

Generous Contributors

Unit/Council/Low-Cost Fund Raisers
SW-3 Coordinating Council
Unit 1 Clarkston-Astin-Pomeroy
Unit 3 Clallam County
Unit 16 East King Co.
Unit 29 Benton-Franklin
#2 LCFR

\$0 to \$49 Level

Buckner, Marie
Sweeney, Larry

Sweeney, Robin
Hoffman, Judith
Morganroth III, Chris
Morganroth III, Arlene
Frazer, Linda E
Moilanen-Moilanen, Martin Emil
Beck, Al

Beck, Joanna
Hammer, Debra
Morris, Allison
MacGowan, Craig
Westerlund, Janet
Stella, Carolyn
Stella, David
Endicott, Cynthia J
Endicott, Walter J
Blair, Diane
Kinnaman, Jean
Smith, Marlet
Smith, Anita

Milligan, Mina
Anderson, Richard
Storeur, Catherine
Diedrick, Peter M
Helm, Joan
Sumner, Dale
Sumner, Linda L

\$50 to \$99 Level

Bridge, Mary
Bucher, Doris
Cygan, Patricia J
Cygan, Ronald A
Harvey, James
Harvey, Marianne
Perkins, Denise
Osmonovich, Louie
Osmonovich, Sherry
Fletcher, Robert A
Fletcher, Shirlee M
Fennell, Gary

Finney, Derryl
Romita, Richard
Widman, Donald
Widman, Elaine
Siscel, James
Siscel, Andrea
Williams, Marsha
Scholl, Larry G
Scholl, Rebecca E

\$100 to \$199 Level

Gleason, Gary
Datisman, Eve
Hall, James T
Hall, Shirlee M
Ruby, Edith
Knopf, Timothy
Knopf, Jackie
Requa, Rita C
Burke, Alan M
Burke, Pamela

Kane, Susan
Perkins, Mary
Schultz, Clifford (Nick)
Farrell, Eve
Brabant, Bernie
Brabant, Lora
Bryson, Keitha
MacGowan, Patricia
Schutz, Dale
Larson, Merrillyn
Fletcher, Kathleen
Fletcher, Robert

\$200 + Level

Peterson, Dennis
Wallon, Mary T
Thorp III, John

Want your name on the 2021 Wall of Support?

That is easy; contribute to WSSR-PAC and let us know that your name can be published! You can either contribute by credit card on WSSR-PAC.org and hit the "Donate Now" button (the on-line form will ask you if we can publish your name) or you can hit the "Contribute" button right under the "Donate Now" scroll down and print out an "Individual Donation Form" send the completed form and a check to: WSSR-PAC Treasurer, Lora Brabant, 125 West 11th Street, Port Angeles, WA 98362.

We gave a record amount of \$26,500 to prospective candidates this past election season! However, let's keep the momentum in building up our WSSR-PAC so we can really make an impact. If every member of WSSRA gave at least \$25 in 2021, we would have over \$445,000...that would definitely make an impact to make sure your voice is heard!



Please support
WSSR-PAC
by making a
contribution today!

Online: wssr-pac.org

Check Payable to: WSSR-PAC

Mail to: WSSR-PAC Treasurer

c/o Lora Brabant
125 West 11th Street
Port Angeles, WA 98362-7709

Membership: Strength In Numbers

Local Units Step Up With Innovative Membership Building Ideas



by Don Parks, state membership committee chair

First, here are the numbers. As of December 1, 2020, WSSRA membership was at 17,724. This number includes 4,189 actives (not retired yet), 12,382 automatic dues deposit members (ADD), and 1,109 cash members. By comparison, on November 1, membership was at 17,680; and, one year ago, we had 17,568 members. I would urge us to keep in mind that our potential membership is about 56,113.

Realistically, we are doing well in terms of our membership totals in these tough times. Many across the state are doing what needs to be done to keep our membership levels strong, and they are much appreciated by everyone. We need to thank AMBA for their consistent efforts in helping out. We have 130 pending retiree members and six pending active members. AMBA is a

large part of this. Membership building efforts at many local units are keeping the Association membership strong. Here are some examples:

Unit 21, Skagit/Island/San Juan, sends letters to actives asking them to find other actives to join us, offering the recruiter a \$10 incentive as well as \$10 to the new sign-up. Included in the letter are an ADD membership form and a brochure.

Our newest local unit, Unit 10 Columbia Gorge, is sending letters to non-member superintendents inviting them to join us.

Unit 22, Sno-Isle, sent letters to their active members thanking them for their hard work with students in these tough times.

WSSRA MEMBERSHIP ENROLLMENT FORM

Do you know a school retiree who should be a member? Clip this form and ask them to complete and return the form today!

DUES DEDUCTION AUTHORIZATION FORM WASHINGTON STATE RETIREES' ASSOCIATION PO BOX 5127, LACEY, WA 98509

Please Print

Name _____ Phone _____

Mailing Address _____ City _____ St _____ Zip _____

SS Number _____ - _____ - _____ Home/Personal Email Address _____

Retirement Plan (CIRCLE) TRS1 TRS2 TRS3 PERS1 PERS2 PERS3 SERS2 SERS3

Name of WSSRA Unit (or school district last employed) _____

I authorize the Washington State Department of Retirement Systems to deduct the following dues and any future increases as voted by the membership, from my monthly retirement allowance and to pay such deduction to the Washington State School Retirees' Association.

Should I wish to cancel ensuing deductions I will send a written notification of cancellation to Washington State Department of Retirement Systems and WSSRA.

DUES DEDUCTION: \$7 per month or CASH DUES: \$84 per year

Date _____ Signature _____

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 01-Clarkston/Asotin/ Pomeroy | Pacific | 11-Lewis County | 19-Renton-South King | 25-Spokane | 31-Walla Walla- Columbia |
| 02-Chelan/Douglas | 06-Southwest King | 12-Lower Columbia | 20-Seattle | 27-Pierce County | 32-Whatcom County |
| 03-Clallam County | 07-Jefferson County | 14-Mason County | 21-Skagit/Island/San Juan | 28-Thurston County | 33-Whitman County |
| 04-Columbia Basin | 08-Kitsap County | 15-Okanogan County | 22-Sno-Isle | 29-Benton-Franklin | 34-Yakima County |
| 05-Grays Harbor/ | 09-Kittitas County | 16-East King | 23-Sno-King | 30-Southwest Wash- ington | |
| | 10-Columbia Gorge | 18-Pend Oreille | | | |

Contact WSSRA for membership information: Michele Hunter, michele@wssra.org or 360-413-5496, ext 116

Among many others, Unit 28 Thurston County is sending monthly newsletters to members along with gentle dues reminders to cash members, and mini-grant applications.

Unit 23, Sno/King, participates in Zoom building staff meetings when possible to announce mini-grant awards as well as information on joining WSSRA.

Unit 19, Renton/South King, utilizes Membership Coordinator Michele Hunter's monthly report to identify those who need a follow-up contact. They use "A Little Bird Told Me" letters recognizing random acts of kindness. Also, Unit 19 offers a \$25 award to any active to assist them in meeting educational goals for their students.

Many other locals are also doing great work to keep membership strong in the face of present obstacles. Hats off to all!

Finally, the WSSRA office has recently sent out the annual "blind mailing" for the purpose of encouraging retirees to join WSSRA. The results: 140 new members!

We encourage everyone to be safe and warm in the coming days and weeks. Any way we can stay connected will be of great help to all in WSSRA. Hopefully everyone had a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

RETIREE RESOURCES

WA Dept. of Retirement Systems (TRS, PRS)
1-800-547-6657 DRS.WA.GOV

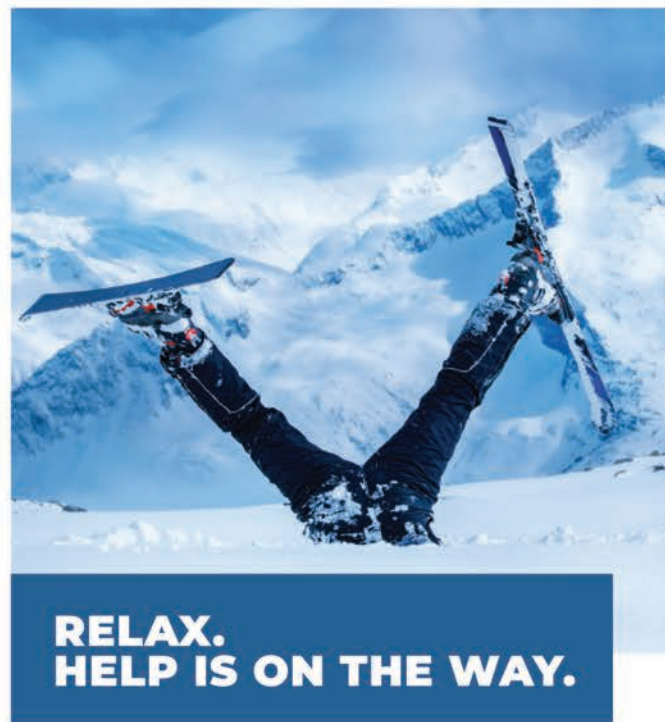
PEBB and Health Care Authority
(health insurance)
1-800-200-1004 PEBB.HCA.WA.GOV

SHIBA - Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors 1-800-562-6900
INSURANCE.WA.GOV/SHIBA

Social Security Administration (SSA)
1-800-325-0778 SSA.GOV

AARP Washington Office
1-866-227-7457 AARP.ORG
Jim Ko, state president
Doug Shadel, Washington state director

Senior Citizens' Lobby
360-754-0207 WASENIORLOBBY.ORG



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via Zoom

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- WA State Health Care Authority – PEBB (medical/dental options)
- Social Security and Medicare
- VEBA – sick leave buyout options

To Register for the Webinar, please email:

tara@wssra.org

or, call 360-413-5496, ext 111

An agenda with Zoom instructions will be sent out before the event.

Active Members

Supporting Our Active School Employees



by Alan Burke, Ed.D., executive director

It's been a rough year in the classroom. Speaking with teachers from far and wide, they all mention the difficulty with managing instruction in a remote environment. Even those in a hybrid situation find themselves working long hours preparing lessons both on-site and online. And, even when crackerjack lessons are prepared, they worry about kids who are not engaged, who lack strong support from home, and sometimes don't have the internet connectivity they need.

Of course, those of us who spent a career in the classroom feel their pain. And WSSRA members are helping out. For instance, one unit sent letters to teachers thanking them for their work in these difficult times. Another group devoted mini-grant money to helping the district with internet connections in remote places. A third unit bought personal protective equipment (PPEs) for staff. A fourth group is sending out e-cards to active members this holiday season. All of this is in addition to the numerous student teaching/internship scholarships that are given annually through the WSSR-Foundation and local units.

And at WSSRA, we are redoubling our efforts at two legislative items important to active teachers: promoting more early-out options, and maintaining retiree health care benefits.

When you have a chance, please thank an active educator for the work they do. Teaching kids is always a challenge, but the 2020-21 school year will go down as perhaps the most difficult in modern times.

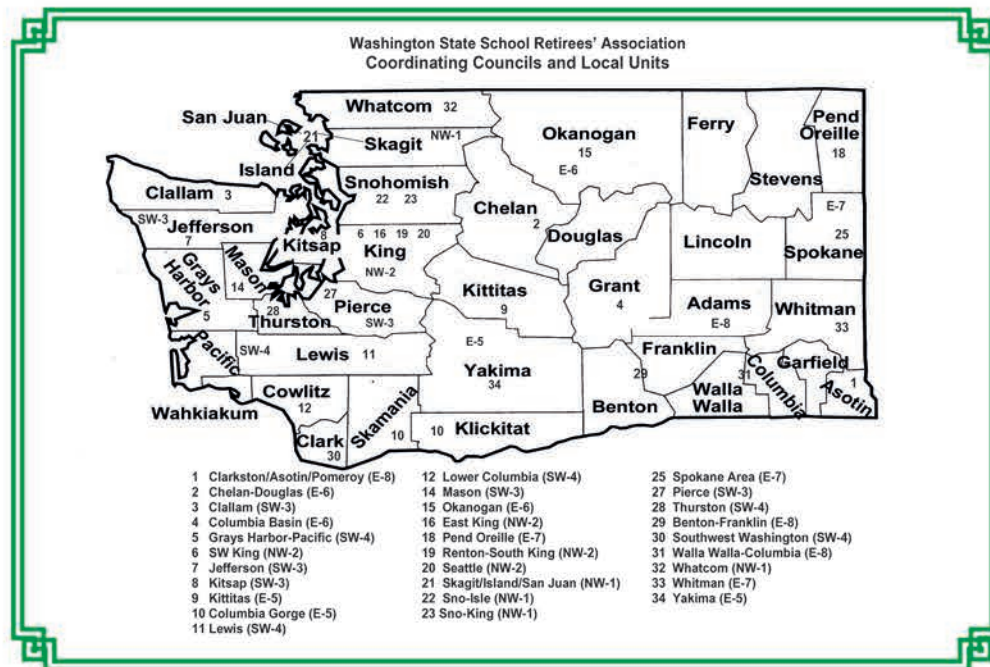


Active members from Unit 21 Skagit/Island/San Juan teaching their students online during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pictured are: **Joel Howard, Anna Wright, and Tanya Smith**. All are teachers at Clear Lake Elementary in the Sedro Woolley School District.

WSSRA Around The State

What's happening in...

From the Coordinating Councils and Local Units



Note: Given the public health concerns caused by the coronavirus pandemic, most WSSRA units have been unable to meet in-person for several months. As we look forward to a time when WSSRA members can safely gather for meetings, luncheons, field-trips, volunteering, etc., please explore ways to stay connected, such as online (such as Zoom), by email, or phone.

NORTHWEST-1

Unit 21 Skagit/Island/San Juan:

This year has been a bit unpredictable. Unit 21 has taken that in stride and has been “working outside of the box.” One of the things, the unit did this fall was to reallocate some of the budget line items. Funds were moved (150% more) into the mini grant allocation in order to be able to fully fund all applications to the amount requested, which often times was more than the usual allotment.

These funds have already been sent out to the applicants and will help ensure that many students who have been marginalized by the COVID-19 virus required virtual schooling taking place would be better supported. Outreach funds were increased and checks have been sent to Community Action Services in the three county area to assist feeding those in need.

And for a little bit of fun, unit members were able to join in a “drive by” birthday celebration to help Gay Barker

celebrate her 90th birthday. It was a bit cool, but it didn’t rain and a good time was had by all. Thank you Gay for providing a reason to be able to be out and about during these times and “seeing” some of unit friends.

Unit 22 Sno-Isle:

Sno-Isle 22 members were unable to gather for their usual holiday luncheon but that didn’t dampen the spirit of giving. Toys and cash donations were collected in a drive

through toy drive - A Parade of Toys. The donations were given to Everett’s Christmas House who is distributing this year through food banks.

A group of retired members took on the task of writing letters of appreciation to actives. Over 400 thank you notes went out letting members know how much their hard work was appreciated.

Unit 22 also made available more learning stipends to help members with the extra challenges of remote teaching.

Unit 23 Sno-King:

The Unit 23 board continued to hold regular monthly meetings via Zoom. Knowing the importance of direct member communication, the board prepared and sent out a November-December Bulletin.

In addition, a letter was sent to all of the local members with the legislative endorsements suggested by the WSSRA executive board. Following the election, **Rita Requa** sent a letter to area legislators listing the WSSRA legislative goals.

November was a busy month. SKSR conducted its regular monthly board meeting. **Virg Rayton** delivered a \$1,000 donation (\$500 from the unit budget and \$500 from individual members) to the local Washington Kids in Transition Organization. This monetary support was in lieu of the

WSSRA Around The State

COVID-19 restriction, which prevented the unit from helping pack snack items for the homeless students that this program serves.

SKSR also completed its first wave of Active Educator Grants awarding \$3,788 to support sixteen educator's remote/virtual learning activities. **Karen McElliott**, unit grants chair, prepared a second round of grants in January. **Jim Siscel** presented some of the first-round grants on school staff Zoom meetings. He mailed a framed certificate for these grant awards to each recipient.

Unit 32 Whatcom County:

Unit 32 Whatcom County board members continue to hold a virtual board meeting once a month. Recently, Jennifer Rick and Thom Barthelmess from the Whatcom County Library System spoke about the ConnectED pro-

gram which WCSRA donated \$2,500 to help students at county school districts and families. It is an amazing program especially for students as their student identification card acts as their library ID. This program makes it amazingly easy for students to obtain and return library materials without parents having to take students to the library. This has become an extraordinarily successful program and Jennifer and Thom stated that the generosity of Unit 32 would help immensely in getting materials in the hands of students.

On January 21, Dr. Mark Lindenbaum, the former Director of Senior Health at PeaceHealth will speak to members on health issues concerning seniors. All units are invited to join this Zoom presentation. Send an email to wcsra32@gmail.com to receive the link to attend. In 2020, the unit wished, "Happy



Unit 21 Skagit/Island/San Juan:
"Drive-by"
Birthday
Party for **Gay Barker** (*seated*)
celebrating her
90th birthday.
Bonnie Killion
(*standing*) helped
organize the
event.

90th Birthday," to the following members: **Dick McClure**, **David Simonson**, and **Dolores Vanstone**, along with **Robert Hall** who celebrated his 95th.

NORTHWEST-2

Unit 6 Southwest King:

Due to COVID-19, Unit 6 will

not be meeting in person this school year. A Zoom account has been purchased for board meetings and the unit hopes to have programs for this school year. Unit newsletters will communicate with members and will include an emphasis on making sure members are aware that the 2021 legislative session in Olympia will be difficult for WSSRA's issues.

SWKSRA has finally perfected its grant outreach to all staff at a school district. For years, handing out fliers at schools didn't generate a great response. The unit has developed a process to connect with district staff electronically. Here is the process for communicating with school districts that participate in Peach Jar, a service that is free for non-profits such as school districts.

Step one is to present materials to the school district's



Unit 22 Sno-Isle: Despite the pandemic, unit members figured out a way to hold their annual toy drive as a drive-through event this year, "Parade of Toys." The toys were given to the Christmas House in Everett.



WSSRA Around The State

community outreach group with a sample PDF of the grant application. Take the Word document to a print shop where they will format the document to make it interactive so school staff can complete the form with their smart phones.

Step two is to contact Peach Jar's chat services after having been approved by the point person at the local district. Give Peach Jar their email address so the grant application can be processed and programmed to reach every teacher and para-professional in the district's system.

Step three is to upload the grant application to Peach Jar who will then forward it to the district contact person. This will allow all district staff to get a version of the grant in their email. This is much better than posting a single flier that few will see. It does get results!

Applications are email only this year under COVID-19 distancing obligations. Checks are mailed to the school principals indicating which staff members are grant winners.

Unit 16 East-King:

East-King 16 successfully held two executive board meetings via Zoom, one in September and the other in November. At the September meeting, Executive Board member **Jeani Goodrich**

came with a special request. She had learned that youngsters at Salt House in the Lake Washington School District were in dire need of school supplies. Salt House supports homeless women and their children. Seeing an immediate need, the board unanimously voted to donate \$600 to help with those supplies. **Jeani** personally delivered the check and reported that it was received with much enthusiasm and relief.

The unit meeting held in November was also a virtual one and featured Christopher Jarmick of BookTree in Kirkland. Christopher's presentations have always been popular with members as he provides insight into new publications as well as old favorites that listeners want for themselves or as gifts. Ordering information was given by Christopher and included in the fall newsletter.

Because of COVID-19's impact on education, **Shirlee** and **Jim Hall** sent out mini-grant applications and cover letters to East-King's six school districts early. Anticipating new needs that require funds as soon as possible, the due date was set for early December.

Jim Hall put together a special newsletter for December. It detailed information about the Salt House donation, mini-grants, and unit plans for the future. It informed members about WSSRA's pre-retirement seminar on February 18,



Congratulations to Karen Jones, member of the Unit 19 Renton South King SRA, who recently received a special Community Service Award from AARP. This award goes to outstanding volunteers from across the United States who provide important services to needy community members.

In Karen's case, she organized the noteworthy Nails Project for the Brookdale Senior Living facility in Renton. Once a month, Karen and a dedicated group of volunteers from Renton South King visit Brookdale and provide manicures for residents at the home. In addition, Karen spends many hours visiting different salons seeking donations of products that are gifted during the sessions. According to facility leadership, the manicure sessions are the best attended of any outside activity, and residents say they are treated as if Karen and her team came from a high-end Hollywood salon!

Again, congratulations to Karen, and kudos to her volunteers and the leadership team at Renton South King who submitted the award application to AARP.

WSSRA Around The State

2021, too. It also sent warm wishes from the executive board for a safe and healthy holiday season.

Unit 19 Renton-South King: Due to the coronavirus, Renton South/King has had one membership meeting since March and it was a Zoom meeting. WSSRA Executive Director **Alan Burke** and WSSRA President-elect **Bruce Boyer** were guest speakers.

Before the coronavirus, Unit 19 gave mini-grants to an elementary school in the Enumclaw School District, scholarships to two female students at Auburn Mountain View, and one scholarship to a male student who attends Green River Community College. In addition, thirty-nine Random

Acts of Kindness have been given to school employees in the Auburn, Kent, Renton, and Tahoma school districts.

Nine delegates from Renton/South King: **Rachel Almeleh, Joan Frank, Karen Jones, Joan Morgenstern, Sue Perez, Eleanor Raschkow, Robin Stroben, Tina Underdahl,** and **Linda Van Nest** participated in the WSSRA Zoom convention in June. Unit 19 received a Unit of Distinction award. Renton/South King member **Eileen Yamada Lamphere** was featured in the Women Who Make a Difference booklet.

Recently, Renton/South King gave mini-grants to an elementary school in Renton and Random Acts of Kindness were given to schools in the Enumclaw school district.

Unit 19 member **Karen Jones** won the AARP Community Service award for her formation of the Nail Team at Brookdale in Renton.

Renton/ South King had a Zoom membership meeting on December 8, 2020. **Eileen Yamada Lamphere** gave a presentation on "The Silent Farm," a Japanese internment camp in Puyallup. Two survivors, Lilly Kato and Elsie Yamaguchi, told about their experiences at this camp.

Unit 20 Seattle:

Despite not having luncheon meetings, which were held at The Canal Restaurant in Ballard, the unit has stayed in touch with members by publishing a November/December edition of the unit newsletter, "The Bulletin," which is also available on-line at www.seattlesra.org.

On November 13, some unit board members joined in a Zoom meeting with others from the Northwest 2 coordinating council to share information.

The unit continues to do committee work including S.E.E.D. Grants (mini-grants to current Seattle School employees), scholarships, the health committee, and the legislative committee. Contributions to local charities from the unit's Community Services committee, headed by **Marilynn Miller**, are continuing.

Recently, the unit announced the six recipients of the Internship Grants chaired by **Patricia MacGowan**. These \$5,000 grants are for graduate students who will be teaching soon.

SOUTHWEST-3

Unit 3 Clallam County:

Clallam County School Retirees' Association has been holding hybrid meetings. Smaller groups of 10 to 12 have been allowed at Joshua's Restaurant in Port Angeles so that proper spacing for COVID-19 guidelines can be maintained. Other members can attend via Zoom, which is set up by President **Lora Brabant** on her laptop. Due to new restaurant restrictions, the December meeting was cancelled. A small group did meet to choose mini-grant recipients. Going forward the meeting format will be decided each month. If restaurant restrictions are still in effect, the meeting can go to all Zoom.

On September 15, the guest speaker was Kim Kummer from the Olympic Medical Center Infection Prevention and Control Department. She attended via Zoom and sent out a slide show in advance so members could follow along or read it later.

The guest speaker for October 20 was Sandy Ulf from Olympic Medical Center Advanced



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WSSRA Around The State

Care Planning. Her handouts were emailed in advance. She presented via Zoom as well.

Eve Datisman, local member, presented in person for the November 17 meeting. Her topic was Women's Suffrage and the history of events leading up to women getting the vote 100 years ago.

Zoom creates some issues. If the presenter is on Zoom, it works better for those on Zoom than for those attending in person. The reverse is true if the presenter is there in person. Efforts to improve presentations so it works for all will continue.

Unit 14 Mason County:

The first hybrid meeting was held November 3, 2020 since COVID-19 restrictions were instated in April. Six members attended in-person in a large room in a restaurant, and six more attended by Zoom. The membership approved a \$100 per school grant to all districts in Mason County. The funds were to purchase personal protective equipment when schools reopen to in-person learning. All school districts received an application for mini-grants through email. The membership agreed to fund up to 10 projects for \$200 each. The 11 grant reports from last year were presented.

The second meeting, on December 1, was Zoom and tele-

phone only. The membership approved donations to county food banks and shelters to be delivered in January 2021, when need might be most urgent.

Monthly meetings will resume by Zoom and telephone until COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. Community guest speakers are invited to each meeting.

Unit 27 Pierce County:

The Unit 27 December online meeting featured Jane Flower from "Guide Dogs for the Blind," along with her guide dog, Pilaf. In her current role as youth outreach specialist, Jane and Pilaf travel throughout the U.S. and Canada sharing the mission and vision of Guide Dogs to prospective guide dog users and their families, as well

as professionals in the field of low-vision. The national headquarters for Guide Dogs for the Blind is in San Rafael, California. Jane lives near the headquarters and was available to Zoom her presentation.

An excellent first response for mini-grant applications will be followed by a second offering after the holidays. Pierce County continues to



Unit 28 Thurston County: On October 31, the unit held a drive-through community service event. Socks were collected to donate to the Little Red Schoolhouse and money/checks for the WSSR Foundation, the Salvation Army or the Thurston County

Food Bank. By the end of the three-hour event, the bag of socks was full and over \$1,400 was donated by generous unit members. Sally Jones, unit community service chair, dressed as the sharpest crayon in the box! Her able assistant was Unit President Pat Slosson (pictured, top right).

WSSRA Around The State

be impressed by the creative and worthwhile applications received.

Ongoing for PCSRA is the collection of socks for the local homeless shelter. Surveys indicate that socks are one of the most requested items by the homeless.

SOUTHWEST-4

Unit 5 Grays Harbor-Pacific: Grays Harbor Pacific Unit 5 has not met since COVID-19 came on the scene. Members have stayed connected by postcards sent out to all the members.

Community service projects include, "Thinking of You" cards being distributed to residents of Channel Point in Hoquiam and Westhaven in Aberdeen, as well as to other facilities. The unit continues to help financially with the Ocosta School's "Weekend Lunch Brunch," as some families have difficulty providing meals on weekends. Donating library books in memory of school employees who have passed away is an important project to unit members. So far, during this school year, ten books have been purchased which will go to school libraries. **Pat Lanning** makes very nice "In Memory" bookplates for each book. Right now, the books are being delivered to the school district offices until the school libraries are open.

Each fall quarter, a Grays Harbor College sophomore majoring in Education, receives a scholarship from Unit 5 for \$1,600.

Unit 5 has notified all the school districts in Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties regarding the February 18 Zoom Retirement Seminar.

Unit 11 Lewis County:

LCSRA Unit 11 had an uneventful autumn, as COVID-19 concerns have limited activity and accomplishment.

The unit did send out one newsletter that contained applications for mini-grants. Response was small but the unit was able to award seven \$200 grants. The unit hopes to sponsor scholarships this spring from WSSRA applicants, as well as contributions to WSSRA Foundation and Centralia College Foundation.

Unit 28 Thurston County:

Sally Jones, community service committee chair, along with some Unit 28 board members hosted a drop-off

donation event at a local mall for unit members. The collection site was outside and safe for all, following COVID-19 guidelines. The donation event was a great success because many Unit 28 members stopped by with contributions of socks, clothing, toiletries, and money. These donations will help needy children in the community and the local food bank.

The executive board is looking into the possibility of having luncheon meetings of members with entertainment via

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WSSRA Around The State

Zoom. There are still many issues to work through; members will be kept up-to-date on the progress of this possibility.

Elementary and secondary mini-grants applications for all school employees in Thurston County are available on the TCSRA website (www.wssra-units/thurstoncounty.org), through January 8, 2021. Unit 28 is looking forward to awarding many grants.

The unit is still collecting email addresses - please go to the WSSRA website (www.wssra.org) to complete the simple form at the bottom of the homepage.

Unit 30 Southwest Washington (Vancouver):

Thanks to Zoom, Unit 30 has started up again with three recent meetings. The unit plans to have a monthly board meeting and a general meeting until gathering in-person is safe once again.

Treasurer **Marty Erickson** budgeted \$8,000 for mini-grants and \$6,000 for three school foundations. A donation of \$2,000 was given to the Washington State School Retirees' Foundation (the amount normally raised during the annual convention) was given in honor of long-time member, **Don Rifenberg**.

Vice-President and Mini-Grant Chair **Waneta Filbin**

reported that \$350 for mini-grants is now being offered to teachers. This will end when the budgeted \$8,000 is used up. Notifications about the mini-grants were sent out to the districts through the ESD directing them to SWWSRA's site where there is a mini-grant application. When this application is completed and submitted, it will go directly to **Waneta**. In order to raise awareness of the importance of becoming a member, a letter was inserted with the mini-grant application. **Despo Varkados** is always looking for ways "to get our name out there."

Margaret Snitzler reported that in October, the unit had 510 members, and in November, there were 507 members.

Darci Schmitt's Battle Ground High School Vocal Jazz Ensemble performed, via Zoom, on December 3 during the unit's general meeting. Everyone enjoyed seeing and listening to this award-winning group. Darci has been entertaining unit members for many years and did not want to stop because of the pandemic. Thanks Darci, for making everyone smile!

EAST-5

Unit 9 Kittitas Co.:

The local board met recently to discuss plans for supporting grants. Grant chairperson **Tim Bow** sent grant applica-



Unit 10 Columbia Gorge: Unit members sponsored a holiday sock drive gathering warm socks to donate to Washington Gorge Action Programs in Bingen. Pictured above is Teresa Obregon, a program volunteer, with a pack of socks donated by the unit.

tions to all active members in early December as well as getting information to all county school administrators. Completed responses are due in January and the grant money will be provided soon after. An important part of the screening process in recent years was Sally Gililand, who passed away this fall. We are saddened by her loss.

The health insurance policies of many retirees and actives in Kittitas County were put in jeopardy in August when major provider KVH announced it was not renewing the existing contract with Kaiser Permanente beyond the end of July 2020. Unlike other counties, only one other plan has been available, so this was

very unsettling. After much back and forth discussion among all parties, this was resolved by the Health Care Authority requesting KVH to honor the contract through the end of 2020. This took care of the situation until renewal time next year when another decision may be made. In this year of other worries, health care is vital.

There are no plans to hold general meetings until the pandemic has been overcome. In the meantime, there will be another newsletter sent to members in January. Hopefully, the new year will bring some better news. Stay well, pursue your at-home hobbies, and look forward to better times ahead.

WSSRA Around The State



Unit 33 Whitman County: Unit President Alice Davis, Unit Treasurer Lu Luhning, and Penny Bettas held a unit board meeting at a local park. The unit made special donations to assist local residents after the area sustained extensive wildfire damage in the fall.

Unit 10 Columbia Gorge: Columbia Gorge School Retirees' Association, Unit 10, sponsored a sock drive in November and December. Members donated warm socks to the Washington Gorge Action Programs in Bingen for distribution to various organizations in the region. Recipients of the donations included the Goldendale Housing Office and the Guided Path in Bingen.

Unit 10 also contacted the region's ten superintendents, inviting them to join their unit as active members and to help disseminate information concerning retirement seminars, scholarships, mini-grants,

and membership recruitment meetings to their district staff.

EAST-6

Unit 2 Chelan-Douglas:

Due to COVID-19, the September board meeting was held in a large, spacious room to allow for social distancing; all wore masks. The unit allocated funds to support various local organizations (district homeless funds, museums, and school clothes for needy children). The membership team shared about the difficulties of gaining new members this year. The unit plans to contact newly retired educa-

tors to share with them the benefits of the organization. The PAC organization endorsements were explained and all three of local legislators were endorsed for their support of the COLA.

The unit is proud to have a longtime resident of the area honored in the booklet, "Women Who Made a Difference." Eva Anderson was an educator, women's advocate and successful legislator from 1948-1960. She was a woman who lived by her convictions.

The October and November unit meetings were held virtually on Zoom. In October, the general membership meeting featured **Dr. Garn Christensen**, superintendent of the Eastmont School District. He spoke about the district's plan to open schools and the need for the upcoming levy. (The levy passed!). The second speaker was Jill Fineis, the newly hired principal for Wenatchee's first charter school, which will open in September 2021. It was an extremely informative presentation; they have much work to do in the upcoming months.

In November, the unit newsletter went out early to explain the new insurance options and help unit members make wise decisions before the end of November. The November meeting speaker was a paramedic from a local ambulance company. His message was extremely pertinent to the group. He explained how

911 calls were answered and why fire trucks also show up. (They are often the closest to the scene and have trained personnel.) He gave a quick update on CPR and some excellent information on "fall prevention."

Unit 4 Columbia Basin:

The October board meeting for Columbia Basin, Unit 4, was held at the home of **Susan Hickok**, with members wearing masks and spaced the appropriate distance apart. Those in attendance, in addition to **Susan**, were Co-Presidents **Helen Preston** and **Lanita Pomeroy**, **Lois Palek**, **Wanda Harrison**, **Pat Simmons** and **Karen Schafer**. Topics of discussion included teacher grants, student teaching scholarships, and Books for Babies. It was reported that six grant applications had been received so far, and that information had been sent out to three individuals, concerning student teacher scholarships. It was also reported that about 500 packets of books, for the CBSRA Books for Babies program had recently been assembled. Several members took materials home to assemble the packets, rather than having the usual work party/potluck lunch, because of COVID-19. Volunteers on this project were **Susan Hickok**, **Pat Simmons**, **Wanda Harrison**, and **Helen Preston**, plus Helen's husband John. Many of the completed packets have already been distributed to

WSSRA Around The State

two Grant County hospitals, in Moses Lake and Othello.

The November board meeting was postponed, due to an elevated number of COVID-19 cases in Grant County.

Unit 15 Okanogan:

Although face-to-face meetings are on hold, OCSRA has been busy giving grants to its Active members. Fall grant winners, schools, and projects are:

April Cole (Tonasket, 6th-8th grade) - 3-D printer for middle school engineering class. **Scott Olson** (Tonasket, 5th grade) - 3 sets of ten bilingual books for students to take home and read with family members, partner-read at school, and read with students in younger grades. **Emily Gurnard**, (Omak, 1st grade) - subscription to Mysteryscience.com with supplements including access to NextGen science lessons, weekly mini lessons, and material/resources for experi-

ments. **Samantha Peterson** (Omak, 1st grade) - flexible seating to help students stay focused and engaged in their learning. **Jenny Rose** (Omak Middle School, Health & Fitness) - replace worn yoga mats used in yoga classes. **Heather Downey** (Okanogan preschool - 5th grade, special education) - art supplies delivered to Life Skills students to aid in online learning. **Jancey Marsh** (Okanogan, 4th grade) - classroom rewards to develop positive connections.

"Women Who Made a Difference" booklets were distributed to each unit board member and each community service committee member has received a copy of July's, "Community Service" booklet.

The unit played host to 26 current teachers at its October Virtual Retirement Seminar. **Dr. Alan Burke, Penny Garrison, and Rita Figlenski** rounded the number of attendees to 29. Financial Alternatives of Wenatchee presented.

November saw board members meet virtually utilizing Zoom. In light of the miles of fencing yet to be replaced on the Reservation because of the Labor Day fire, it was voted to donate \$1,000 from the OCSRA Contingency Fund to the Cold Springs Fire Relief Fund via the Omak-Okanogan Long-Term Recovery Organization.

EAST-7

Unit 18 Pend Oreille:

Unit 18 has been happy to contribute monetarily to the community and to the WSSR Foundation. The four local food banks also received donations to purchase food and necessary items for the holiday season. These food banks are located in Newport, Cusick, Ione, and Priest River.

Pend Oreille River School, an alternative school, connected with the Newport School District, received a donation to buy supplies for their students. Mini-grants will be available to teachers in the school districts in Pend Oreille County in February.

With sadness, the unit made donations to the WSSR Foundation in memory of local retired teachers who passed away this year. Memorial donations were made in memory of teachers Edith Jones, Mick Schultz, Nick Nicholson, Mary Hays, Robert Sparks, Jim Mathis, Cindy Hoisington, and Fred Vogel.

Unit members look forward to Zoom meetings and to eventually meeting in person.

Unit 25 Spokane Area:

Unit 25 held virtual board meetings, via Zoom, on August 25, September 18, and October 28. The pandemic curtailed the general meetings this fall. A virtual general



Unit 29 Benton-Franklin: The unit's annual toy drive for the Tri-Cities Salvation Army was a drive-through event this year. Unit President

Victoria Russell (top, left) and Captain Jesus Quintanilla (top, right), of the Tri-Cities Salvation Army, with some of the toys donated by unit members. Members also gave \$500 in cash donations. Also pictured, a unit member and her dog deliver toys to the drive-through.



WSSRA Around The State

meeting is planned for late February. The meeting topic and Zoom instructions will be announced in the unit's January newsletter.

Health Care Choices - Since a large number of unit members do not have an email contact with WSSRA/SAREA, as well as many rural members have limited internet access, SAREA mailed a postcard informing members of a Zoom webinar, held on November 9, explaining details of the United Healthcare Medicare Advantage plus Prescription Drug program that PEBB is providing as another choice.

Outreach - The unit's annual coats, hats, gloves drive is coordinated by **Jeff Hunter**. The items are typically brought to unit meetings, as well as the September and December luncheons. Due to COVID-19 restrictions this year, the unit offered two alternate ways to donate this fall. Members could choose to send a check, made out to SAREA, and mail

to the unit treasurer. Or, members could purchase items and deliver them to **Jeff Hunter**. This year the items will be donated to the Chaplin's Outreach Unit, Spokane Police Department. They often come upon situations where there is an immediate need for children to be properly clothed for the weather.

Non-profit status and USPS status -The unit would like to recognize **Carol McGurk** for her diligence in pursuing the reinstatement of the unit's non-profit status. In addition, the unit recognizes **Kathy Beal** for applying and receiving a separate non-profit status for mailing. The discount is approximately 50% on the unit's mailing costs. The United States Postal Service sanctioned the non-profit status because of the 501(C)(3) rating, as well as the philanthropy record in the community. This allows the unit to budget more money for scholarships or mini-grants.

Unit 33 Whitman County: In September, Unit 33 Whitman County donated \$1,000 to WSSR Foundation, to help with student scholarships. After fires in northern Whitman County destroyed homes and small towns, the unit donated to United Way of Whitman County to help purchase food and gas cards for those in need. Part of the Unit 33 board met at a park to affirm the donations.

EAST-8

Unit 1 Clarkston/Asotin/Pomeroy: Unit 1, which is nestled in the Lewis-Clark valley, has been active using new and old ideas along with social media. The unit used the old trick of paper information sheets about WSSRA and was even successful at recruiting a new member! Welcome **Melanie Martinez** who teaches elementary school at Asotin. Unit members look forward to meeting her in per-

son when the pandemic allows such face-to-face meetings.

Teacher mini-grant recipients were selected. The unit is funding items that will positively affect 860 students in K-12 in local schools. Some examples are books, art and craft supplies, headphones, flex seating, and robot supplies, among others. The unit hopes to offer some grants this spring, which would be a first for the unit to offer grants twice in a school year. With the strange year, we are experiencing, unit members feel it would help boost the morale of working members.

The unit newsletter is now going to all active and retired members via postal mail in an effort to keep the WSSRA name visible. Some members have requested it via email as well, so the internet is kept hopping down in the little valley.

The next unit project is to begin having some contests on the unit's Facebook page to entertain and engage members. The contests will be simple. Examples are guessing how many candies are in a jar and trivia-based questions on schools in the unit. Prizes will be mailed to winners. Members will be asked to invite school staff, that aren't members, to take part in the contests in an effort to engage possible future members.

The unit social committee has been busy sending birthday



Unit 25 Spokane Area: Pam and Les Francis model the face mask created especially for the Spokane Area Retired Educators Association.

WSSRA Around The State



Unit 1 Clarkston/Asotin/Pomeroy:
Tools for a successful outdoor, socially distanced, unit meeting - hand sanitizer, bottled water, agendas reminding members to social distance and wear their masks, sanitized pens and a door-prize drawing basket.

cards, sympathy cards, and “thinking of you” cards as to try to encourage members throughout this challenging time.

The unit is looking forward to normalcy soon in our nation, schools, and homes!

Unit 29 Benton-Franklin:

The First United Methodist Church, Kennewick, was the site for the Annual Toy Drive for the Tri-Cities Salvation Army. It was a chilly and rainy day. Unit members delivered toys, games, and monetary donations to a drive-through at the church lobby entryway. Volunteer members **Ardith Eakin, AJ and Jim Foster, Helen Bruggeman, Dottie Stevens, and Victoria Russell**

were on hand to help unload and ready the collections for Captain Jesus Quintanilla of the Tri-Cities Salvation Army. Collected was a cash donation of \$500 and 10 huge garbage bags filled, to distribute during the holidays. In a separate collection were donations of school supplies for the S.H.A.K.E. (Seniors Helping All Kids' Education) program. School items will be given to schools as requested during these times of hybrid learning.

Zoom board meetings, led by President **Victoria Russell**, continue as necessary business is conducted. A mail-out newsletter for Christmas was sent out in addition to the nine email newsletters and a previous fall newsletter. Members

are encouraged to give their email addresses to Newsletter Editor **Helen Bruggeman**. Members only receive the mailed out version one time a year, if their email address is not available.

Arrangements are being made for a very important event – a Zoom general membership meeting in late January to feature the school superintendents of Richland, Pasco, and Kennewick. Facebook, the phone tree, and the December mailed newsletter will inform the members.

Current/future program information and news can be found on the blogspot <http://bfsraunit29.blogspot.com/> and in the monthly newsletter.

Unit 31 Walla Walla/Columbia:

Unit 31 is staying active with Zoom board meetings and Zoom membership meetings. Due to small participation on membership meetings, they will be held

every other month. In October, 16 names were drawn for mini-grant awards. The lucky teachers were very appreciative.

At the Christmas meeting, the membership donates canned food and makes cash donations for local food banks. Because there was no in-person meeting, WWCRA donated \$250 to Blue Mountain Community Foundation in Walla Walla and Waitsburg Food Bank. Unit members also gave \$250 to Helpline in Walla Walla and \$250 to Project Timothy in Dayton. These programs help with rent and utility bills. Board members delivered 16 beautiful poinsettias to shut-in members.

The annual Teddy Bear Tea has been cancelled because of the COVID-19 virus pandemic. Instead, a raffle drawing was held for two hand-made Teddy Bears. The drawing for winners was on December 15, just in time for Christmas.

ADDRESS CHANGES

Please Notify:

Membership Coordinator:
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michele@wssra.org

Phone: 360-413-5496, ext 116

WSSRA, PO Box 5127
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Ask a friend to join us



Vision

WSSRA will provide leadership
and promote action relevant
to all retired and active school personnel.

Washington State School Retirees' Association
*Dedicated to preserving, protecting and improving
the benefits of educational retirees.*

The mission of WSSRA is to...

- develop, propose and implement action that will benefit all school retirees.
- propose legislation and legislative action that will enhance school retirees' lives.
- provide the support necessary to strengthen local units of WSSRA.
- foster involvement by school retirees in educational and community activities and organizations.
- communicate to local units the activities and priorities of NRTA, AARP and other entities that affect retired school personnel.
- represent all present and future Washington state school retirees, both classified and certificated.

Don't delay – ask today

You'll find inside...

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