

SCRTA NEWS

Summit County Retired Teachers Association

THE SUMMIT COUNTY AFFILIATE OF Ohio Retired Teachers Association August - September 2025



WE AWARDED 20 SUMMIT COUNTY PUBLIC TEACHER GRANTS IN 2024

LET'S SHOOT FOR 25 IN 2025 !!!



Hello, SCRTA Members,

Last year, our members donated a little more than \$6,000.00 to the SCRTA teacher-grant fund. As a result, we awarded \$300.00 to each of Summit County public school teachers, whose applications displayed the most creative, clear and well-thought-out lessons to enhance student learning in a broad range academic concepts. We thought you might be interested in seeing examples of how our donations were used.

Our hope is that you will realize what a wonderful "pick-me-up" these grants represented to our twenty recipients and be encouraged to become part of this extremely feel-good endeavor, by making a donation to our teacher grant fund! Our goal is to be able to award 25 teacher grants this 25-26 school year!

Here are a few examples of how our grant money was used:

Rodney Rowell of Norton Middle School submitted a project called **Showering With Knowledge**. His response:

*I write this project summary with much gratitude. I am grateful for the support of fellow educators who have walked this path before me. I am in the twilight of my career, completing my 29th year. I'm confident that we all share the same characteristic, "Once a teacher, always a teacher!" **Your dedication to support current teachers is a testament to your educator-heart.** Even though I am at the end of my career, I transitioned to teaching middle school after 26 years of teaching high school. Even though kids are kids, no matter what age they are, middle schoolers present many special issues. The biggest adjustment I have had to make is to understand middle schoolers need to move and be active. I realized I needed to add a physical, kinesthetic, tactile element to each educational experience. The decor of my classroom is very bland. White walls and fluorescent lights do not make a very inviting environment for learning. My idea for "Showering with Knowledge" was to engage my students in decorating my classroom. In my personal life, I always wanted a Periodic Table shower curtain in my bathroom. Using this desire, it was a natural leap to use shower curtains as classroom decorations. Above all, preprinted shower curtains are quite affordable and durable. White vinyl shower curtain liners are also a cheap pallet for students to decorate. The shower curtains were a major hit! We created shower curtains that summarized the following: Steps To Solve a Rubik's Cube; Hydrocarbons and Polymers; Design and Build Fingerboard Skate Park .*

Again, thank you for your support for those still in the trenches. I hope to join your ranks in a couple of years!

See Teacher Grants page 7

President's Message



Congratulations to the 2025 SCRTA Scholarship recipients who were introduced at the June general meeting: Emilia Gifford, LeKai Baity, Rachel Robinette and Samara Hampton. We wish them well attending their schools in the fall.

Christina Elliot, Deputy Executive Director of Member Benefits for STRS, gave a very informative presentation on STRS updates for members. She appreciated the several questions asked and the participation from the audience. Thanks to the nearly 100 members and guests who attended.

Mark your calendar to attend the next meeting on September 16, 2025. Doors open at Guy's Party Center at 11:30 am. Please remember to fill out the reservation form included in this newsletter.

Christina Haas, the SCRTA Teacher Grant Committee Chairperson, will be the guest presenter at the luncheon. This committee worked very hard in selecting the current teacher grant recipients. Come and hear about the projects that the teachers created for their students. We would like to add at least 10 more grants this year and you can help us reach this goal. Thank you to all members who donated to this project.

I truly believe in the saying, "Together we can make a difference" and that's what SCRTA represents. Earlier this year, the marketing committee began working on a new Recruitment Strategic Plan. "Stay Strong" became the adopted theme. All retired educators should be informed about policies and legislation that impact our schools and communities. As a member of SCRTA you can find out how to be involved and support teachers

and students. Let's continue to work together and **Stay Strong!**

I look forward to seeing you in September.

Johnnette Curry, SCRTA President

Membership

"All dues shall be payable, beginning in September, for the following year with December 31 being the deadline each year." *

Attending our luncheons is not the only way to become involved with our association. There is always room for members to help with awarding scholarship and grants to current teachers. SCRTA supports two community organizations ... Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC) and Shelter Care ... primarily by giving them toiletries, cleaning and paper products that are donated by our members at our General Luncheon meetings. We welcome help, a little or a lot!

Total membership is 332 with 208 Lifetime members. Resources are limited! We are grateful for our Lifetime members that have made contributions towards our Teacher Grants and Scholarships.

Your dues and contributions will help us achieve our goals, benefit current and future educators and ensure that you will continue getting our newsletter.

If there is a * by your name on this newsletter, your dues are due!

If you have any questions about your membership status, please contact me.

Jackie Hovey jhoveysue@gmail.com

*** SUMMIT COUNTY RETIRED TEACHERS
ASSOCIATION STANDING RULES**



From the Archives: 50 Years Ago in SCRTA

The Woodridge Senior Choir presented a program of selections from "Fiddler on the Roof" at the April 8, 1975, meeting. In place of her husband who was scheduled, Virginia Ocasek discussed five pending bills in Ohio including one to approve calculating retirements on the basis of the best three years instead of the best five years. Secretary Dorothy Darden gave a summary of all programs of 1974. President Horton recognized Guy Swartzel, Past President of SCRTA for sixteen years.

September 9, 1975, 380 retired teachers, guests and friends met at the Cathedral Buffet for lunch at noon. New retirees were honored. Mr. James Sublet of the STRS explained the insurance program and answered written questions. President Horton explained a change in the cost of the meal - \$3.00 if paid in advance by mail and \$3.25 if paid at the door. (Members mailed a check with a self-addressed envelope to Pres. Horton five days before the meeting and received a ticket(s) in return.) A bus with SCRTA members left for New York City September 30 on their first adventure trip and returned October 3.

Attendance was 300 at the November meeting. Dr. George Knepper, history professor at the University of Akron, gave the most interesting talk about the seven Ohio Presidents of the United States. The slate of officers was presented, duly elected, and installed with Virginia Ocasek as President of SCRTA. President Ocasek adjourned the meeting.

The board met at the Cathedral Buffet in December and made plans to have future board meetings at the Summit Federal Credit Union with packed lunches at noon and the meeting at 1:00 PM. A new directory was planned to be run off from IBM cards. The board received correspondence stating the Institute for Lifetime Learning will offer fifteen courses for the winter in January.

Article submitted by Rebecca Moore

2025 SCRTA MANAGEMENT BOARD



President - Johnnette Curry (330-289-2354)

1st VP/ Program - Elaine Jarvis (330-607-0226)

2nd VP/Legislative - Bill Siegferth (330-819-4123)

Administrative Asst. - Rebecca Moore (330-497-9362)

Treasurer - Bill Siegferth (330-819-4123)

Asst. Treasurer/Membership - Jackie Hovey (330-940-9147)

Past President - Mary Lou Swartz (234-755-1490)

Membership Luncheons - Micki Lavis (330-854-3054)

Sunshine Committee - Christine Bean (330-703-2196); Rozanne Emich (330-603-7660) Co-chair

Newsletter Editor - Elaine Jarvis (330-607-0226)

Web Master - Michael Rusnak (330-472-3593)

Nominating Committee: 3 elected members
Carol Caughron (330-606-6900); Micki Lavis (330-854-3054); One **OPEN** position

2 At-Large Members: Community Service - Christine Bean (330-703-2196) and **OPEN** (At-large Member)

Scholarship Committee - Vicky Shaw (330-957-5216); Judi Hill - (330-805-5550) Co-Chair

Bulk Mailing - Rozanne Emich (330-603-7660)

Travel/Excursions - **OPEN**

Teacher Grants - Christina Haas (330-752-3943)

Past President - Paul DiMascio (330-603-3374)



Legislative and Legal Updates



Bill Siegfert

My Opinion

ORTA OPENED THE DOORS WIDE; THE POLITICIANS STEPPED IN

The Ohio legislature completely trashed the existing makeup of the STRS Board in its new budget bill, eliminating the seven-member majority held by elected active and retired teachers. When fully phased in (2028), the number of elected teacher members will have shrunk to three, two active and one retired. Media coverage has suggested that legal action may follow, although who might bring that action and the legal basis for it has not been reported.

The outrageous overhaul was proposed by Rep. Adam Bird (R-New Richmond), chairman of the Ohio Retirement Study Council. Ironically, the Council, which oversees the state's public pension systems, took no vote for or against changing Board membership. Bird and other legislators attributed their support for the change to the "chaos and corruption" that has prevailed at STRS over the last several years.

There's no denying the chaos. Over the past five years, in this publication and in guest editorials, I've reported on the relentless attacks and baseless accusations leveled against STRS staff, consultants and "non-reform" or "status quo" Board members. The lion's share of the complaints and allegations have come from the Ohio Retirement for Teachers Association (ORTA) and its partner social media outlets, the STRS Ohio Watchdogs (founded by Dean Dennis, the ORTA Executive Council Chair) and the Ohio STRS Member Only Forum on Facebook. ORTA Executive Director Robin Rayfield has falsely declared that Ohio teachers have the worst pension system in

the country and that retirees don't get out of their pension what they put into it. Contrary to past and current Ohio law, he claims that when he retired he was promised a 3% COLA for life (not even Dean Dennis' COLA lawsuit claims that). In 2021, Rayfield reported to a county chapter that "forensic auditor" Ted Siedle filed an SEC whistleblower complaint against STRS and reported his findings to the FBI. The untrue claim remains on ORTA's YouTube page in spite of my having asked ORTA to remove it because it's a false statement. In a 2023 Liaison Update, ORTA went so far as to claim a "trail of corruption connects Householder (of First Energy fame), DeWine and STRS." The list of "grievances" goes on; to continue listing them here would needlessly belabor the point. And the point is that the non-stop attacks have contributed to top leadership leaving the system and two consulting firms voluntarily terminating their service agreements with STRS.

Beyond the circumstances above, handing Rep. Bird a convenient excuse to spearhead and justify the change in STRS Board membership is the allegation that two STRS Board members, one of whom currently serves as Chair (Fichtenbaum) and one whose term has expired (Steen), acted illegally in trying to steer business to a company called QED. A lawsuit filed by Attorney General Dave Yost alleges that both men violated their fiduciary duty to the pension system by working to get STRS to invest with the company after efforts by QED in 2020 to sell itself to STRS were rejected, reportedly because they had no clients, no track record and the company was not registered as a broker-dealer. In a 2023 email to Robin Rayfield, I asked if ORTA supported the QED investment strategy. Rayfield responded that ORTA, "...does not support ANY specific strategy suggested by ANY company." There seems to be some evidence to the contrary. John Damschroder, at the time an editorial writer with the Fremont News-Press and one who had been supportive of ORTA initiatives, wrote in a piece titled *Time for the full truth from ORTA*, "Fichtenbaum, ORTA and the Ohio teachers who

Please see Legislation, page 5

Legislation Continued from page 4

support them can't claim the high ground when they have materially misrepresented this proposal from day one." He added, "Fichtenbaum and ORTA support a plan that attacks safety checks in both the U.S. and global financial system. Ohio teachers would be delivering financial fentanyl, profiting from deceit, either uncaring or unaware." In yet another situation suggesting ORTA's possible involvement with QED, the "Engagement Timeline" in the State Auditor's investigation of STRS included "Meeting with Seth Metcalf and ORTA representative." Seth Metcalf is a QED principal; the Auditor's office identified the "ORTA representative" as Michael Dittoe of High Bridge Consulting. When asked the purpose of Metcalf and Dittoe appearing as its representatives, ORTA replied, "Mr. Dittoe serves in no capacity at ORTA. ORTA did work with High Bridge Consulting for a few months during 2022. There were no fees charged to ORTA and the work on behalf of ORTA by High Bridge was at no cost."

Perhaps the most contradictory evidence to ORTA's claim that they do not support QED happened this past April. In an email to the STRS Board, then Interim Executive Director Aaron Hood wrote, *"Yesterday afternoon I received a telephone call from Robin Rayfield at ORTA. Robin offered to set up a meeting for me with representatives of QED (including Seth Metcalf) since there is so much 'controversy'. I was so taken aback that I stepped out of my office and asked him to acknowledge his request again on speaker phone so that other staff could hear his confirmation of the request. I informed him that I will not meet with anyone related to QED and encouraged him to read the AG's filings (including exhibits) involving communications from QED to a former board member. To be clear, no STRS staff will be meeting with representatives of QED and I would advise you all as board members to avoid any such meetings as well, especially in light of the pending outside litigation."*

A recent column by Laura Bischoff of the Columbus Dispatch stated that, "QED aligned with the Ohio Retirement for Teachers Association to help elect new board members who might be more open to the new strategy."

As the Attorney General's lawsuit proceeds, what role ORTA played in the QED scheme, if any, may come to light. ORTA and Rayfield may find themselves in another bind over a separate issue... that of paying the legal fees of Fichtenbaum and Steen to fight the AG's lawsuit. The Ohio Ethics Commission is supposedly looking into the practice but will not comment on an ongoing investigation according to a representative with whom I spoke. Along the same lines, one of the greatest ironies in my mind in the ongoing battle between ORTA and STRS is that no one has raised any ethical or legal concerns over ORTA's payment of legal fees to a Board member while at the same time one of its (ORTA's) highest ranking officers (Dean Dennis) is suing the Board (including the member for whom it is paying legal fees) as a plaintiff in the COLA lawsuit. As a child, my Mom would often remind me that, "Billy, you can't have it both ways." I'm not so sure that's the case anymore.

Bill Siegferth - Legislative Chair

NEW SCRTA WEBSITE UNDER CONSTRUCTION!

Mike Rusnak has graciously agreed to take over as SCRTA's webmaster. Mike is an Akron retiree who served for many years as AEA Vice President during which time he managed the AEA website. Mike serves in a similar capacity with the Akron-Canton Bonsai Society. A small group of SCRTA leaders is working with Mike to design the new website. Much has been done to date, but more remains to be done. The new website address is <https://summitcountyretiredteachers.org/>. Please keep in mind when you visit the site that design work and content is a work in progress. When the design work is complete, we will announce the fact to the membership. Stay Tuned!!

Scholarship News

We love hearing how our scholarship recipients are doing in school. Below is an email we received by one of last year's recipients, Sydney Peterson. Keep up the good work Sydney!

I hope all is well with you and all the members of the Summit County Retired Teachers Association. I am Sydney Peterson and I was last year's recipient of the SCRTA Scholarship. I wanted to follow up on my scholarship and let you know how my first year in college as an Education Major went. I attended Catawba College in Salisbury North Carolina, and I had an amazing first year. I was a member of the Catawba Swim Team and got to be a part of the NCAA team who traveled to Indianapolis this past March and was a member of the 400 Medley Relay that finished 6th in the Country. Right after Nationals I attended the Innovative School Summit in Orlando, Florida with the education department and had an amazing time listening to some very inspiring stories. I am still pursuing Education and have had many classroom opportunities even just being a freshman! I look forward to some of my classes next year that are more specific and detailed into classroom behavior and teaching. I ended my freshman year as the Catawba Athletics Female Freshman of the Year which was a huge shock to me and everyone around me! Thank you so much for your help towards my freshman year and I will keep you posted on my future journey and plans as an educator! Best regards, Sydney Peterson

SCRTA members you make all this possible with your donations, participation in the 50/50 raffles, Acme Community Cash Back

Program (August 1, 2025 – February 15, 2026)
and our **November Double Good Popcorn Sale**.
Thank you so *much!*

Vicky Shaw & Judi Hill - Scholarship Chairpersons



The Ronald McDonald House of NE Ohio, Safe Landing and the community service committee of SCRTA would like to thank you for your generosity at the last luncheon. The many items that were donated will be put to good use. Thank You!

Ronald McDonald House current needs include:

Toiletries, individually packaged snacks, juice boxes, toys, disinfecting wipes, hand sanitizer and paper towels. Gift cards to Giant Eagle, ACME, Aldi, Costco, gas cards, Home Depot, Lowe's, Walmart, Target, Sam's Club, Amazon and local restaurants around Akron are also gratefully accepted.

Currently, Safe Landing needs include:
Bottled water, Gatorade/Powerade, individually wrapped snacks (granola bars, snack crackers, pretzels, individual bags of nuts, trail mix), Ranch dressing, disposable silverware, paper plates. Ziploc bags, plastic wrap, Lysol wipes, paper towels, dish and hand soap, laundry detergent, dryer sheets, band-aids, canvas and paints, full size hygiene items (shampoo and conditioner, body wash, deodorant, lotion. hair gel)



Laurie Thompson, of Ritzmen CLC involved the entire school population, as her fifty-eight 5th graders held a living biographical museum in the gymnasium. Jackie Hovey and I visited this event, and it was awesome. She purchased grade-level biography books for her students, who portrayed, in costume, their chosen famous person. With the touch of a star, on the table next to the student, which held a tri-fold poster with pictures and illustrations, Frederick Douglass, Amelia Earhart, Abraham Lincoln, Albert Einstein, and many more, came alive.

Kristina Schroeder of Ledgeview, Rushwood & Northfield Elementaries purchased Iditarod Insider School Ultimate Online Subscription and four books about sled dogs, the Iditarod and an Iditarod Workbook for her thirty-five 4th grade students, who then participated in a cross-curriculum activity involving math, reading, letter-writing and geography. The students selected a 2025 Musher and tracked him or her during the Iditarod race in March. They wrote letters to their chosen Musher and received letters back.

Melissa Clapper of Green Primary School's forty-six 1st graders each built small, closed- ecosystem terrariums to illustrate the water cycle.

With a totally different idea, **Scott Aten of Green Middle School** sponsors a Robotics Club. He purchased the supplies for his 26 club members to use to build a small bot. What is a bot? We learned and saw video of his students, in The National Robotics Challenge, remotely controlling the small vehicle that they built, which attempted to overcome other student-built and controlled vehicles. The Green students' bot won second place in the Combat Bot Plastic Division Event in April in Marion, Ohio!

At **Richardson Elementary in Cuyahoga Falls**, many students were engaged in refurbishing a teaching garden. Guided by **Stephanie Petit**, 5th grade teacher, who used the grant money to purchase soil, tomato cages, plants and seeds. She

wrote: Thank you!!! This is fantastic! *Just today I looked out our teacher's lounge window, where the garden is located and saw what's left of my broken tomato cages. The students will be so excited to hear. Look for some fan-mail in late May. I do a GRATITUDE IN THE GARDEN DAY, where the students give thanks to those who supported us "throughout the years."* True to her words, we received about 100 short Thank You notes from the participating students! We also have pictures of the students working to revive the garden.

We hope to see many of you at the **September 16th** meeting, where we will show a short power-point of pictures featuring these and more of the grant-sponsored activities that **YOU** made possible with your donations. Please plan to participate. Our grants meant so much and touched not only teachers but thousands of students! Please plan to donate to this meaningful cause. Think about how **you** would have appreciated the opportunity to see a vision come to life, with financial help from fellow, albeit retired, educators.

Rodney Rowell was right: "Once a teacher, always a teacher?" Let's give the new generation of educators a helping hand! When these teachers retire, they will remember SCRTA and be motivated to join our ranks!

Please send your tax-deductible donations to Bill Siegfirth, our treasurer, 82 Cedar Woods Dr. Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio 44223. Be sure to write TEACHER GRANTS on your check memo. Thank You!!! Christina Haas, Teacher Grant Committee Chairperson

Living Biography Museum



Summit County Retired Teachers Association
82 Cedar Woods Dr.
Cuyahoga Falls, OH 44223

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
U. S. POSTAGE PAID
AKRON, OHIO 44309
Permit No. 418

ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED

August-September



2025

SCRTA Website
www.summitcountyretiredteachers.org

Michael Rusnak - Webmaster
michael.rusnak@gmail.com



Thank you for being so generous with your donations for Ronald McDonald House and Safe Landing for Boys and Girls. Continue to bring pull tabs and other donations. Bring in 5 or more items and receive an extra prize ticket. A special thank you to Rozanne Emich for delivering all of your donations.



September 16, 2025 (Tuesday) ... SCRТА General Luncheon Meeting ... 12 noon Guy's Party Center. Doors open at 11:30 am.

October 7, 2025 (Tuesday) ... SCRТА Management Board Meeting ... 10 am at the AEA Building.

November 11, 2025 (Tuesday) ... SCRТА General Luncheon Meeting ... 12 noon Guy's Party Center. Doors open at 11:30 am.

"A Teacher's Heart Never Retires"