

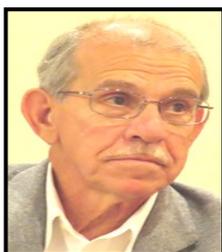
SCRТА NEWS

Summit County Retired Teachers Association

"A Teacher's Heart Never Retires"

March - April 2026

President's Message



For the last ten to fifteen years of my 39 year tenure with the Akron Education Association—which included 27 years as its president---the SCRТА Management Board would hold its four or so meetings each year at the AEA office. If I happened to be in when they met, I would usually walk back to the conference room to say hello to them, as a majority were retired Akron teachers whom I knew well. Most of my visits were very cordial and included some reminiscing about the good old days. Once in a rare while, though, I would disagree with one or two members, especially during the state pension reform years, when benefit cuts were necessary and supported by virtually every organization with a vested interest in the financial well-being of STRS.

As soon as word got out that I would be leaving at the end of June, 2018, **Mary Lou Swartz**, SCRТА's President at the time, approached me and asked (I'm being diplomatic) if I would be willing to fill the vacant Legislative Chair/2nd Vice President position. I won't waste time and space here talking about the "or else" side of her offer. As it turned out, I took the job as well as that of treasurer a couple years later.

A few months ago, I mentioned to a friend that I had agreed to be nominated as a candidate for president. The response was, "I knew you'd eventually end up leading that group."

I was willing to accept the position because of the solid core of leaders serving on the Management Board and their goal to see SCRТА grow not just in numbers, but to bring about more community awareness of SCRТА—who we are and what we do. Finally, and most importantly, the Board wants to make sure that retired as well as active teachers in Summit County know about their retirement system, the successes as well as the challenges.

Over the last two or three years, we've made progress toward those goals. Our scholarship program has grown to where we've been able to offer more scholarships and/or larger scholarship amounts. Through our teacher grants we are becoming known to teachers in districts across Summit County who will one day retire and know who we are when they do. Membership is growing thanks to some strategies that have allowed us to reach out to retirees, especially the most recent ones. We've reserved our summer luncheon programming in recent years for presentations by guests from high level leadership positions in STRS, and we plan to continue the tradition because of its popularity among our members.

You're responsible for SCRТА's recent success and growth. Your generosity in support of grants, scholarships, Ronald McDonald House and Shelter Care, your willingness to recruit new members and to attend luncheons to see old friends and enjoy good food will lead to more growth for us and more support for teachers and students in Summit County's public schools.

On behalf of the Management Board, thank you, and we'll see you on April 7th! *Bill Siegfert SCRТА President.*



From the Archives: 25 Years Ago in SCRТА

SCRТА began 2001 with 898 members. Early in the year The Honor Fund presented \$105 to a retiree to help her pay for medications. The program for the April meeting was presented by the Rev. Robert Denton, Executive Director of the Victims Assistance Program. The Miller South Stage Band performed a short jazz program at the same meeting.

SCRТА’s spring trip was a visit to the Mansfield Reformatory for Boys which opened in 1886 and closed in 1990. The trip also included visits to Kingwood Center, the Carousel Pavilion, and Der Dutchman smorgasbord where President Bob Frutcheу conducted a business meeting to help meet the requirement of six General Meetings that year. The cost of the trip was \$38 for members and \$40 for nonmembers.

Article submitted by Rebecca Moore



November
2025
SCRТА
Luncheon

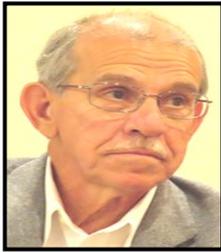
2026 SCRТА MANAGEMENT BOARD



President - Bill Siegerth (330-819-4123)
1st VP/ Program - Elaine Jarvis (330-607-0226)
2nd VP/Luncheon / Bulk Mailing - Rozanne Emich (330-603-7660)
Administrative Asst. - Rebecca Moore (330-497-9362)
Treasurer - Bill Siegerth (330-819-4123)
Asst. Treasurer/Membership - Jackie Hovey (330-940-9147)
Past President - Johnnette Curry (330-289-2354)
Luncheon Res. - 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)
Emeritus President Active - Paul DiMascio (330-603-3374)



Legislative and Legal Updates



State Ethics Commission: STRS Board Members Cannot Accept ORTA “Legal Defense Fund” Payments.

Nearly three years ago, the Ohio Retirement for Teachers Association (ORTA) created the “ORTA Pension Defense Fund.” ORTA created the fund to “help pay legal expenses to defend and protect our pension and retirement benefits from current and future legal attacks,” which Executive Director **Robin Rayfield** defines as “current and future lawsuits.” No doubt the State of Ohio lawsuit against one current (**Rudy Fichtenbaum**) and one former (**Wade Steen**) STRS board member for their alleged involvement in the QED investment scandal is an example, to ORTA’s way of thinking, of an attack against the system eligible for Defense Fund subsidies.

Notwithstanding ORTA’s constant claims that many retirees cannot make ends meet because they are not receiving promised COLA’s from one of the worst pension systems in the country, they continue to solicit contributions from members for the Defense Fund. According to a recent ORTA publication, contributions to the Fund stand at about \$180,000, while paid legal expenses total \$281,000. It appears that contributions have decreased significantly over the last several months.

From the beginning, many have questioned the appropriateness, even the legality, of an STRS Board member accepting legal fee payments from ORTA. In 2024, **Laura Bischoff** of the USA Network reported that the Ohio Ethics Commission’s position is that “public officials can’t accept contributions to pay for their legal fees from any ‘prohibited’ sources—those that have interests before the public agency.” A Case Western Reserve law professor said that the ORTA

contributions raise a “red flag.”

Now, more than a year after this practice gained public attention, the Ethics Commission has issued an advisory opinion which very clearly addresses the situation: “*Divisions (D) and (E) of Section 102.03 of the Revised Code prohibit a public official or employee from soliciting or accepting contributions for his or her legal defense fund in a civil case from parties who are doing or seeking to do business with, regulated by, or interested in matters pending before the public agency.*”

The opinion includes a number of examples of applying the Ethics Law to the Legal Defense Funds situation, one of which speaks very directly about the ORTA initiative: “(6) *A state retirement system board member is a defendant in a civil lawsuit. A collaborative organization of current and future retirees establishes a legal defense fund for the board member. The collaborative organization would be “interested in matters before” the retirement system because the collaborative organization is advocating for current and future retirees regarding their pension and benefits. Therefore, the collaborative organization would be a prohibited source of legal defense funds for the board member.*” An Opinion footnote defines a “collaborative organization” as “a union, chamber of commerce, or other trade or professional association that represents the collective interests of individuals, for-profit organizations, or non-profit organizations.” ORTA, no doubt, is a collaborative organization as far as the Ethics Commission is concerned.

It is interesting ORTA liaisons when the issue began to attract public attention, **Rayfield** said that ORTA did receive a lawyer’s opinion that legal fee payments did comply with the law, but it was an opinion from a lawyer of one of the Board members! As of the date of this newsletter, we are not aware of any public statements made by ORTA, STRS, or the present and former STRS Board members in response to the Ethics Commission’s Opinion.

Please see Legislation, pg 5.

Legislation Continued from page 4

Little has changed from what we reported in the most recent Email Update with the status of the three lawsuits in Columbus directly affecting STRS.

The judge in the Ohio AG's lawsuit against current Board member Rudy Fichtenbaum and former member Wade Steen has yet to hand down a decision in the case which was heard before Christmas. The suit seeks to permanently ban both gentlemen from ever holding an STRS Board position for their alleged involvement with the QED investment plan.

The COLA class action lawsuit against STRS and STRS Board members challenging the 2017 reduction of the 2% COLA to 0% remains undecided in the Franklin County Common Pleas Court where it was filed in 2021 after the 2019 filing in Federal Court was dismissed.

The backhanded attempt by the Ohio legislature to take away the active and retired member majority on the STRS Board has yet to be ruled upon. The measure was blocked from going into effect pending a full litigation of the issue. We are not aware of any dates that have been set for a hearing. In the meantime, the STRS Board continues to operate as it had before the budget provision was approved by the legislature.

The EdChoice private school voucher plan was ruled unconstitutional by a Franklin County judge. The judge allowed the practice to continue, however, in anticipation of appeals all the way up to the Ohio Supreme Court. The case is currently scheduled to be heard this year before the 10th District Court of Appeals (Franklin County). Regardless of whether the lower court ruling is upheld or reversed, the losing party is expected to appeal the decision to the Supreme Court.

Senate Bill 69, known as a placeholder bill, is intended to be the Ohio Retirement Study Council's legislation to update revised code language governing retirement systems. Each retirement system was offered an opportunity to submit suggestions to the council of provisions each wished

to see in the bill. STRS, for example, submitted requests/suggestions among which was included an increase in the employer contribution rate. Unfortunately, the bill appears to be going nowhere fast. Our perspective is that issues such as legal proceedings involving STRS, the voucher battle now before the courts, and uncertainty over the direction the property tax debate will take have moved pension system legislation to the back burner.

Bill Siegfert, SCRTA Legislative Chair



COMMUNITY SERVICE

Many, many thanks to all of you who bring donations for Ronald McDonald House and for Safe Landing (Shelter Care). Both organizations have expressed appreciation for all your support. Please continue that support by bringing items to the next luncheon on April 7th. Anyone who brings five (5) items will be given an extra ticket for the door prize drawing.

Current needs include toiletries, individual snack packages (crackers, pretzels, trail mix, nuts), individually wrapped snacks such as granola bars/ Little Debbie treats, juice boxes, disposable silverware, paper plates, Ziplock bags, plastic wrap, cleaning supplies, band-aids and full-size hair and body care items.

Please also remember to bring the pull tabs you have been saving for Ronald McDonald House. It seems like a small thing, but it can help in many ways! Thank you!

Rozanne Emich, Community Service Co-chair



2025 Retiring President, Johnnette Curry and Leroy Martin, retired webmaster.

Remembering Marjorie Martin



We recently learned of the passing of Leroy Martin's wife, Marjorie. Some of you met Marjorie when she accompanied Leroy to the November 2025 general meeting where he was honored for his service to SCRТА. One piece of advice offered to new retirees is that one should not only retire *from something* but to retire *to something*. During her retirement years and in spite of her quiet character, Marjorie became an active member of Kiwanis Club and a public children's advocate through club projects. She traveled and spoke throughout the state with Leroy when he served as the Ohio District Governor. It was fitting that Leroy, a retired educator, and Marjorie served together in an organization that is dedicated to "improving the world one child and one community at a time". We extend our sympathy to Leroy and his family for their loss.

If you would like to send your condolences to Leroy, his address is 4290 Ridgewood Road, Copley, Ohio 44321.



The Scholarship Committee is excited to inform you that our Double Good Popcorn sale this past November raised \$4,396.00. Our 50% payment was \$2,198.00. Thank you to all who sold and/or purchased popcorn. Thanks also to those of you who gave a donation towards this endeavor.

Our next good news is about the Acme Community Cash Back Program which ended on February 15th. As of February 11th, as I type this report, we have received \$2,339.92 in receipts from you, friends and family members. The next newsletter will update you on our final total and how much we received from the 5% cash back program.

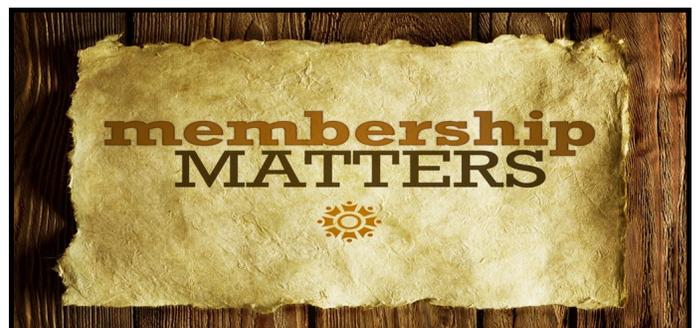
Students have started turning in their scholarship applications early this year utilizing the application form on our new website. School Counselors across the Summit County area have also received the forms to distribute to students. Please be aware that your grandchildren, nieces, and nephews may also apply. Please keep the date of April 6, 2026 in your memory since it is the absolute final date that we will accept applications.

Thank you SCRТА members for all you do to support the Scholarship Committee and the children of Summit County by your generous donations and willingness to go the second and third miles helping with the fundraisers. See you in April! *Vicky Shaw and Judi Hill, Scholarship Co-Chairpersons*



**2026 Teacher Grant Awardee
Hannah Handley
Paragraph by Chris Haas**

Dear Summit County Retired Teacher Association, The grant money more than adequately covered all of the necessary expenses for my project and had a very positive impact on my classroom. Thanks to this funding, my students and I are incredibly thankful to now have a full class set of 18 phonics blending boards along with extra magnetic letters. This allowed every student to have their own board to use during phonics instruction, which has made a noticeable difference in student engagement and participation. Students are excited to build, blend, and manipulate words independently, and having their own materials has helped them feel more confident and successful during lessons. The quality of the blending boards has also exceeded expectations. They are sturdy, durable, and well-made, which means they will hold up to daily use and last for many years in my kindergarten classroom. The hands-on nature of these boards has greatly supported my students' learning, especially as they practice forming new words and strengthening foundational phonics skills. Students have responded with enthusiasm and excitement, and they often ask to use the boards during literacy activities. This project has been extremely successful, and I would absolutely repeat it in the future. I would also highly recommend these blending boards to other teachers in kindergarten through second grade. Any educator using hands-on phonics instruction would see clear benefits from these materials, as they support student learning, engagement, and long-term instructional success. Thank you so much for granting my project. *Hannah Handley Kindergarten Teacher Coventry Elementary School*



Summit County Retired Teachers Association
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Cuyahoga Falls, OH 44223

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ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED

March - April



2026

SCRTA Website
www.summitcountyretiredteachers.org

Michael Rusnak - Webmaster
summitcountyretiredteachers.org



It's been a long, cold winter. Thank goodness, Spring will soon be here. You've had a lot of time to stock up on donations for Ronald McDonald House, pull tabs, cleaning products, and health and beauty products., also for Shelter Care, Safe Landing for boys and girls. All donations are very much appreciated. Thank you.

Christine Bean,
Community Service Chairman



April 7, 2026 (Tuesday) ... SCRTA General Luncheon Meeting ... 12 noon Guy's Party Center. Doors open at 11:30 am.

April 21, 2026 (Tuesday) Management Board Meeting ... 10 am at the AEA Building

June 2, 2026 (Tuesday) ... SCRTA General Luncheon Meeting ... 12 noon Guy's Party Center. Doors open at 11:30 am.

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