

SCRTA NEWS

Summit County Retired Teachers Association

"A Teacher's Heart Never Retires"

May - June 2026

President's Message



SCRTA to Participate in Stakeholder Forum

Back in November, 2025, STRS Executive Director Steven Toole hosted the first "STRS Ohio Stakeholder Forum." Toole had been appointed Director the previous July. The purpose of the Forum was to provide members and organizations representing members with an opportunity to hear from STRS leadership and ask questions about STRS's operations. Our Association was invited to attend; member **John Robshaw** and Administrative Assistant **Becky Moore** joined me for the two hour trip to Columbus. The drive was well worth it. The crowd of about 30 people heard brief but to the point presentations from leaders in key STRS departments...Investments, Finance and Actuarial, Legislative and Member Benefits. Afterwards, the floor was opened for questions. All issues were fair game; all topics were considered legitimate for discussion, criticism and debate. The session was highly informative. In no way was there a "lack of transparency" in presentations or in responses to questions as some social media critics have alleged in the past.

A second Stakeholder Forum has been scheduled for May 14th in Columbus. John, Becky and I will again attend as your representatives. The topic for the meeting will center on STRS's Sustainable Benefit

Plan and a recently Board adopted set of additional safeguards to ensure that benefit enhancements are actuarially affordable. In plain English, the goal is to make sure that any benefit enhancements...COLA's, retirement eligibility years, medical benefits, one time payments, etc., are affordable and do not imperil the fiscal integrity of the System. We'll summarize what we learn in a future publication.

We're Headed to STRS in May; STRS is Headed Here in June!

Two STRS Directors will join us for our June 2nd General Membership Luncheon at Guy's Party Center. **Christina Elliott**, Member Benefits Director, will be with us for the third year in a row. Joining Christina this year will be **Greg McLaughlin**, STRS Health Care Services Director. After a brief presentation, members will be invited to ask questions. Reservations for the luncheon can be made using the form found elsewhere in this publication.

Hearing Set on Voucher Issue

As of the date of this publication, a hearing on the constitutionality of Ohio's voucher system is scheduled for May 12 in the 10th District Court of Appeals in Franklin County. In June of 2024, a Franklin County Common Pleas Court judge ruled vouchers unconstitutional. The judge allowed the program to continue in anticipation of appeals up the judiciary ladder all the way to the Supreme Court. The 2024 ruling favorable to public schools was appealed by the State of Ohio and a couple pro-voucher groups. We'll update members on the outcome of the hearing via email and at our luncheon on June 2.

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STRS Board selects Replacement for Fichtenbaum

The STRS Board has selected **Joan Bellner** to fill the retired member seat created by the removal of Rudy **Fichtenbaum** Franklin County Common Pleas Judge **Karen Held Phipps**. The Judge cited Mr. Fichtenbaum's role in the QED Technologies investment scheme as the basis for her decision. Fichtenbaum at the time was Chairman of the STRS Board. Board member **Michael Harkness**, current vice president of the Akron Education Association, was selected by his peers to take over as Chairman. Bellner begins serving in May and her term runs through August of 2027. She served as a psychologist in the Reynoldsburg City School District. Fichtenbaum is appealing his removal.

Ohio House Bill 179 Remains in Committee

The bi-partisan Ohio House bill which in part voids the Ohio legislature's budget bill language eliminating the STRS member majority on the Board remains before the House Public Insurance and Pensions Committee. In the meantime, there has been no further action in the lawsuit filed against the state for the late-night budget language changing the Board makeup. An injunction was issued blocking the change and maintaining the status quo until a hearing is conducted and a ruling issued.

Benefit Changes Approved in March

The STRS Board approved the following benefit enhancements at its March meeting: Retirees and benefit recipients (prior to and including June 1, 2022) will receive a 1.6% COLA effective July 1. The COLA will be paid on the retiree's anniversary date and will be based on the initial retirement benefit amount.

The Board extended the current required years of service for retirement eligibility by five years. Until May 1, 2035, members are eligible for an unreduced benefit with 32 years of

service at any age, or at age 65 with five years of service. Members with 27 years of service at any age, or at age 60 with 5 years of service, are entitled to a reduced benefit.

These changes were deemed to not impair or negatively impact the fiscal integrity of the Retirement System moving forward. *Bill Siegfert*



"All dues shall be payable, beginning in September, for the following year with December 31 being the deadline each year." We gained **33** new members in **2025!!!** Thank you to our members who recruited new members. Total membership is **345** with **193 Life-Time members, 142 paying members, 93 members that have paid for 2026 and 49 members that need to pay dues.** You can now pay dues on our Website through **Zeffy** summitcountyretiredteachers.org.

We are grateful for our Life Time 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. Please join our Facebook page Summit County Retired Teachers Association and invite friends! If there is a * by your name on this newsletter, your dues are due! If you have any questions about your membership status, contact me.

Jackie Hovey, Membership Chair.
jhoveysue@gmail.com

SILENT AUCTION

Add one of your creations

SCRTA will hold its first *annual* silent auction at our November luncheon. AND we need your help.

Do you do arts or crafts? Do you love to paint, draw, make pottery, candles, or do wood working? Perhaps you enjoy baking, or canning home-made pickles or jelly? Maybe someone in your family makes beautiful things. How about donating one of your creations (or other items of interest) for this event?

Classic silent auction items might include any craft creation-- water colors, ceramics, cutting boards or knitted scarfs. A cake, jar of sweet pickles, home made jelly, or candy are just a few examples of objects that might draw a bid.

All you have to do is bring your item to the November luncheon. We'll do the rest. Retired teachers have skills. Let's showcase them, and raise some funds too.

All proceeds benefit SCRTA activities, including our classroom grants and scholarships. If you have questions, please email Mike at summitretiredteachers@gmail.com.

VISIT OUR SCRTA WEBSITE

Please note that the SCRTA website address is now summitcountyretiredteachers.org, a change that switched over from the former address last summer.

You can find past and current newsletters, legislative updates, president messages, membership and event information, classroom grant and scholarship news, a photo gallery, important links, and much more.

Also, this is your website too. Members are invited to submit their photos from any of our events to add to the gallery. Please visit it often.

Michael Rusnak - SCRTA Webmaster



2026 SCRTA MANAGEMENT BOARD

President - Bill Siegfert (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 Siegfert (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)

SCRTA Scholarship Update 2026

The Scholarship Committee is pleased to announce the following 5 students as scholarship recipients for 2026.

THANKS TO YOUR GENEROSITY EACH STUDENT WILL RECEIVE A \$1500 AWARD.

*Submitted by SCRTA Scholarship Committee:
Chair, Vicky Shaw & Members Judi Hill & Kim Joseph*

Thomas Gaffney

Thomas Gaffney grew up with educators-his dad, an aunt, an uncle, and a cousin. He rarely thought about teaching and failed to realize the impact his father had on his students and society. Thomas now believes teaching to be one of the most honorable jobs. When he thinks of his future, he is energized thinking about the impact he will have on the lives of his students.



*Thomas Gaffney
High School: Archbishop Hoban High
College: Bowling Green State University*

Annabel Green

Annabel Green intends to pursue a degree in Secondary Education with a concentration in Social Studies. She is dedicated to cultivating inclusive classroom environments where diverse perspectives are respected and all voices are acknowledged. Annabel's foremost objective is to promote lifelong learning by encouraging students to engage in critical and creative thinking as they form their own well-informed viewpoints and ideas.



*Annabel Green
High School: Hudson High School
College: Otterbein University*

Thank you!

SCRTA Members supporting cup donations, raffles, individual giving, and popcorn fundraisers allowed the committee to present the most scholarships EVER.

"Few things have a greater impact on student success than a teacher who believes in them."

Dr. Brad Johnson



Grace Lance
High School: Springfield High School
College: Bowling Green State University

Grace Lance

Grace Lance chose a career in teaching to make a difference in the lives of students the way her teachers made a difference in her life. Her teachers helped build her confidence and shaped her life with patience and compassion. The academic and social resilience she gained from her teachers during her academic career impacted her decision to teach.

Sydney Peterson

Sydney Peterson, is currently finishing sophomore year at Catawba College, majoring in elementary education. She is a member of S.N.C.A.E. - Students of North Carolina Association of Educators. From day one, she was creating hands-on mini-lessons and observing new and veteran teachers.



Sydney Peterson
Previous SCRTA winner
High School: Green High School
College: Catawba College



Jahzara Semper-Mitchell
High School: Buchtel Community Learning Center
College: Tiffin University

Jahzara Semper-Mitchell

Jahzara Semper-Mitchell realized she wanted to be a teacher when she was eleven years old. Transferring to a new middle school, she encountered educators who made her feel welcomed and valued. Although her family encouraged her to pursue a profession in law or medicine, believing these fields would allow her to help others, Jahzara felt a different calling. She was drawn to teaching, motivated by the belief that she could influence and shape the lives of future doctors, lawyers, and politicians.



Grant recipient SCOT ATEN, of Green Middle School, is the first 2026 Teacher Grant Recipient to turn in an evaluation of his grant proposal. The success of last year's grant-funded Bot's performance, at the National Competition, generated interest among more students to join the bot design program. Because of this increase of students involved, we funded this project for a second time.

Let me know if you have any questions. Thanks again for SCRТА supporting our students this year.

Project Summary: Ant-weight Combat Robotics Financial Stewardship & Impact

The grant funding was instrumental in bringing this project to life. Every dollar was strategically allocated toward the specialized components required for a competitive antweight (1-lb) combat robot, including high-torque micro-motors, electronic speed controllers, and durable chassis materials. Because these precision parts can be costly, the grant ensured our students didn't have to compromise on the structural integrity or safety of their design. The funds covered our necessary expenses fully, allowing the team to focus entirely on engineering and testing rather than hardware limitations.

Student Engagement & Achievement The student reaction was one of pure electric focus. There is a unique brand of "productive stress" found in combat robotics—students had to troubleshoot mechanical failures under tight timelines and adapt their driving strategies in real-time. While we did not secure a top-three finish, the team's performance at the National Robotics Challenge (NRC) was a resounding success. Out of a crowded field of competitors, our bot survived the preliminary rounds on Friday to secure a spot in the Final Eight. Being invited back for the Saturday finals was a massive point of pride for the students; it validated their hard

work and proved that their design could stand up to the best in the area.

Reflection & Recommendation

Without hesitation, I would repeat this project and highly recommend it to other educators. Combat robotics is a "hook" like no other—it integrates physics, electrical engineering, and rapid prototyping into a high-stakes, engaging format. The resilience our students showed after each match was more valuable than a trophy. For any program looking to bridge the gap between theoretical STEM and hands-on application, this project is an ideal vehicle for student growth.

Chris Haas - Teacher Grant Committee Chair



About Shelter Care

Six programs: Shelter House, a group home for boys; **Safe Landing** youth shelter for boys and girls; **Outpatient** counseling for families and couples; **Street Outreach Services**, which provides case management support for teen moms ages 16 to 24; and **Highlands Teen Pregnancy Center**, a shelter for teen moms and their babies.

Phone number: 330-630-5600 **Website:** <https://www.sc72.org>.

How to help: The website includes links to an Amazon wish list and by donating items for monetary donations.

Note: You can also contact *Chris Bean, Rozanne Emich (Co-Chairpersons) or Elaine Jarvis*. Please continue to support both Shelter Care and RMHC with your donations.

Photo Gallery



April 7 Program—Steve Elliott



Johnnette Curry & Bill Sieferth



April 7, 2026 Luncheon Meeting



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June 2, 2026 STRS Luncheon Speakers

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

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ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED

MAY - JUNE



2026

SCRTA Website
www.summitcountyretiredteachers.org

Michael Rusnak - Webmaster
summitcountyretiredteachers.org



Thank You Message from Karen at Ronald McDonald House: "What a wonderful surprise to come into Ronald McDonald House and see a kind and generous donation delivered by Roseanne Emich. I love how Summit County retired teachers continue to give to the community in so many thoughtful ways." Karen

Note: Roseanne also delivered 5 lbs. of tabs from cans. We are so fortunate to have a group of very generous members. Chris Bean – Community Service



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

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

September 1, 2026 (Tuesday) ... SCRTA General Luncheon Meeting ... 12 noon Guy's Party Center. Doors open at 11:30 am.

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