

SCRTA NEWS

Summit County Retired Teachers Association

THE SUMMIT COUNTY AFFILIATE OF Ohio Retired Teachers Association October-November 2021

President's Corner



Dear Colleagues,

It is my pleasure to tell you that our September 14th luncheon meeting was a success because we saw familiar faces who we have not seen in 22 months! If you attend the November 16, 2021 meeting and you missed our first in-person meeting, it will be two years since we saw you last...and that is only if you have been attending SCRTA meetings.

Our members enjoyed a delicious lunch, heard from Summit County Sheriff Michael Walsh on how we can live safer (he was awesome), listened to short reports from Board Members and finally had our FREE raffle drawing. Yes...just for attending you receive a ticket!

We had two extra awards that were given out to members who brought guests. Rose Herdon invited three guests and won a beautiful big Fall Basket donated by Ruby Winter. I also was a winner with three guests attending and won the yummy Italian basket made by our Past President's wife, Sandy DiMascio! Thanks so much to our donors and congratulations to those who won door prizes too!

Guy's Party Center made a safe environment for us by having only 6 people at a table and the tables were 6 feet apart. It was requested that all attending wear their masks whenever walking around in the room.

As your President, I am so happy to tell you that

more retirees are joining us. So inviting retired educators to come and enjoy a meal with us does pay off. No one has to join on their first visit with us...let them see and hear what SCRTA is all about first. Would you like to be the member who brings the most guests on Tuesday, November 16, 2021? I have a secret donor who really has a humdinger of a gift to award. Remember, your guests don't have to be retired educators...they can be family or friends. Even our guest speaker, Sgt. Michael Walsh has his sister, a retired Akron teacher, planning to join us!

Know that our November program will be preparing us for the upcoming holidays by listening to the voices of young people sharing their talents with us.

I am looking forward to seeing more familiar faces this November 16, 2021 right before Thanksgiving.

Happy Holidays to you all.

Mary Lou



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U.S. District Court Terminates COLA Suit

Nearly two and a half years after two retired Cincinnati teachers sued STRS in federal court (May 23, 2019) for allegedly violating state law, the Ohio Constitution and the U.S. Constitution by eliminating the cost of living adjustment paid to retirees, the matter has officially been “terminated from the docket” of the Court.

On July 28, 2020, a United States District Court Southern District of Ohio judge magistrate recommended that all motions filed by STRS and individual STRS board members to dismiss the lawsuit be granted in full, and that all claims be dismissed. Then, a year later (August 17, 2021), Judge Timothy S. Black adopted those recommendations. The decision comes as a sharp rebuke of the legal arguments advanced by the plaintiffs to prove STRS’s misdeeds in that no oral arguments were entertained, much less a jury trial as demanded by the plaintiffs.

What I found particularly irritating over the last two years were the constant claims (and often time “whines”) that the COLA “was promised to me.” While I have no law degree or license to offer legal advice, I do have a modest amount of experience dealing with school and retirement law and, more importantly, I can read. **Section 3307.67, Cost of living increase**, of the Ohio Revised Code states, in part:

(A) Except as provided in divisions (D) and (E) of this section, the state teachers retirement system board shall annually increase each allowance or benefit payable under the STRS defined benefit plan. Through July 31, 2013, the increase shall be three percent. On and after August 1, 2013, the increase shall be two percent...

Sounds great, of course, until you read (E): I./

(E) The board may adjust the increase payable under this section if the board's actuary, in its annual actuarial valuation required by section **3307.51** of the Revised Code or in other evaluations conducted under that section, determines that an adjustment does not materially impair the fiscal integrity of the retirement system or is necessary **to preserve the fiscal integrity of the system.**

Obviously, Ohio law gives the board the authority to adjust the COLA up or down (and to 0, if necessary) as long as any upward adjustment “does not materially impair the fiscal integrity of the retirement system” or any downward adjustment is necessary “to preserve the fiscal integrity of the system.” Try as I might, I could find nothing in the Revised Code that remotely sounded like a promise of a COLA for life, nor, apparently, could the U.S. District Court magistrate and judge.

So What Now?

Back in May of 2017, then STRS Executive Director Michael Nehf wrote a letter to all STRS members announcing that the board had “made the difficult but necessary decision to reduce cost of living increases granted on or after July 1, 2017, to 0% **to preserve the fiscal integrity of the retirement system.**” It’s not surprising that Nehf cited the exact language in the Ohio Revised Code (see paragraph (E) above) to explain why the board decided to reduce the COLA.

In the same letter, Nehf said that the board “agreed to evaluate—not later than the next five-year actuarial experience review—whether an upward adjustment of the cost of living increase is payable without materially impairing the fiscal integrity of the retirement system.” [Note the use again of paragraph (E) language.] Well, here we are, four and a half years later, and as you are reading this article, the STRS Board already has begun or will soon begin to evaluate the possibility of a COLA

Legislative Continued from page 2

adjustment upward from 0%. They will do so using information from primarily two sources...the Actuarial Experience Review and the Pension and Health Care Valuation Report. Those interested in learning more about the information these reports generate can refer to the June, 2021 edition of *STRS Ohio News* on the STRS website. It will take several monthly Board meetings to evaluate the findings in the reports before Board members decide to adjust the COLA. According to STRS, the decision will come sometime in February or March, 2022, the March timeline being more likely.

If the Board votes to grant a cost of living increase, it will be applied during STRS's 2023 fiscal year which runs from July, 2022 through June 2023. Members will see the adjustment beginning with the benefit paid on their retirement anniversary. For example, a member who retired effective July 1 in a given year would first see the COLA in their July, 2022 benefit. A member who retired effective the first of May would first see the adjustment in their May, 2023 benefit. And finally, any additional cost of living adjustments in subsequent years would as well have to be approved by the STRS Board.

We will be monitoring the board's deliberations in the coming months. We will post updates to the SCRTA website at <http://www.summitcountyrta.org/>.

About that Forensic Audit...

Earlier this year, ORTA sponsored a crowd funding campaign to pay Ted Siedel \$75,000 to conduct a "forensic audit" of STRS. The audit was completed and a report issued in June.

Siedel did not have very kind words for anyone who has anything to do with the Ohio teachers' pension plan. Not STRS Board members. Not STRS staff. Not the firms selected by STRS to manage the System's investments. Not the state pensions legislative oversight committee. In my opinion, he painted them, to put it mildly, as a bunch of bumbling incompetents. The result, in Mr. Siedel's words, is

that "billions that could have been used to pay retirement benefits **promised** to teachers have been squandered." (*Emphasis added.*) There's that darn word "promised" again (*see previous article*).

Now that all of the bluster and fanfare has passed, Siedel has taken his \$75,000 and left town, armed with sufficient information allowing him to file an SEC Whistleblower complaint. He's also somehow involved the FBI. Although ORTA paid for the audit, the Association is not a party to either of those actions, nor has either been undertaken by Mr. Siedel on behalf of ORTA.

ORTA is left with a litany of audit criticisms aimed at STRS. The extent to which the criticisms can be used to prove Mr. Siedel's characterizations of STRS and company are limited, as the report states several caveats about its conclusions: "many subjects addressed in the report are inherently judgmental and not susceptible to absolute or definitive conclusions; we were not hired to detect or investigate fraud, concealment or misrepresentations and did not attempt to do so; our analysis, findings and recommendations are not intended to provide legal interpretations, legal conclusions or legal advice; action upon such matters should not be taken without obtaining legal advice addressing the appropriate statutory or regulatory interpretation and legal findings regarding such matters." If I'm reading all of this legalese correctly, I think it says don't take our opinions as gospel truth, and get an attorney before you accuse anybody of anything.

What use, if any, ORTA intends to make of the audit report moving forward isn't clear. As for the Whistleblower complaint, Mr. Siedel has cautioned ORTA leadership that "cases like this are difficult to prove." That appears to be true based on our research and discussion with the Securities and Exchange Commission ... a very small percentage (10%) of complaints is upheld. The average amount of time it takes to complete an investigation is two to four years. It is not clear whether Mr. Siedel's

Please see Forensic, page 4

Forensic continued from page 3

complaint targets STRS or one or more investment companies mentioned in his report, but if his charges are deemed valid, Mr. Siedel would be the recipient of an award. Because STRS is not a private entity, but a public body governed by a legislative oversight committee, it is not clear to us what punitive action, if any, the SEC could take against the System.

*Bill Siegferth,
Legislative Chair*



SUMMIT COUNTY

City and Local School Districts:

If you know retired educators from any of the Summit County City and Local School Districts listed below, please consider inviting them to visit/join our Summit County Retired Teachers Association.

Akron City	Mogadore Local
Barberton City	Nordonia Hills
Copley-Fairlawn	City
City	Norton City
Coventry Local	Revere Local
Cuyahoga Falls	Springfield Local
City	Stow-Munroe
Field Local	Falls City
Green Local	Tallmadge City
Hudson City	Twinsburg City
Manchester Local	Woodridge Local



Virginia Calich

Gertrude Dann

Dorothy Walsh

Virginia Matyja

Albert Ploenes

Richard Smith

Kay Lewis

Roberta Marks

Marcia Crane

Jean Braun

Mary Ann Kimmel

Barbara Norton

Anton Prasher

Juanita White

Richard Pasher

Stanley Wolczyk

Dorothy Salter

Alexander More

Suzanne Frutchey

Juleen Columbo

Scholarship News

Thank you SCRTA membership for your continued support of the students in Summit County by donating funds to the scholarship account. It is very heartening to know that your care for students did not expire when you retired.

The Scholarship Committee intends to award a scholarship in Spring 2022. Applications are always available in the first newsletter of the year, as well as on the website, in February. If you know of a qualified senior graduating from a Summit County school, with at least a 3.0 grade point average and intended major of Education; or a college student already in the College of Education, please have them apply **before** the **April 1, 2022**, deadline!

MESSAGES FROM OUR SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS, PRESENT AND PAST...

Thank you note from Abigail May, 2021 High School recipient:

Dear SCRTA,

Thank you so much for the \$500 scholarship! I will definitely be putting it towards my college tuition. After I graduate, my goal is to come back to Summit County to teach. Thank you again.

Abby May

Update – 2018 College Recipients

Dear Ms. Shaw and Summit County Retired Teachers Association,

I wanted to thank you again for the scholarship and update you on my teaching career. I was fortunate to student teach in Celebration, Florida before graduating from Ashland University in 2019 with an Early Childhood Education, Special Intervention with a fourth and fifth endorsement. I am in my third year as a Title 1 reading tutor, working with students K - 4 at Fort Island Primary School

in the Copley-Fairlawn School District. I am employed by both Copley and ESC. These past couple years working with students has been an amazing experience. COVID has put an interesting twist on helping students. We were fortunate in Copley to be in person all but the first few weeks of school last year. I look forward to my own classroom one day. I am glad I went into teaching because I love working with students and helping them progress in their learning.

Thank you again for helping me further my passion for teaching the younger ones!

Sincerely,

Hannah Houdeshell

Dear Summit County Retired Teachers Association:

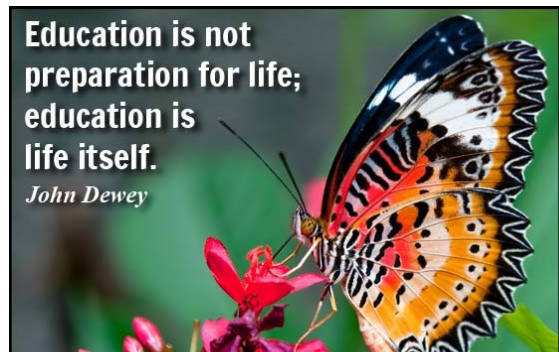
I am pleased to give you my second update since graduation. I am in my third-year teaching Kindergarten at McEbright CLC. This is my fourth year with Akron Public Schools, as I was previously a Title I Tutor for second and third grade. My Kindergartners are currently focusing on how to be safe, responsible, curious, and courteous leaders. During this first month of school, we've also focused on building a safe community in our classroom to continue our journey as lifelong learners. I look forward to updating you again on our learning process this school year.

Thank you again for your generosity!

Courtney A. Jones

Vicki Shaw & Judi Hill

Scholarship Co Chairpersons



**SCRTA LUNCHEON MEETING
September 14, 2021**



**SENIOR SAFETY Program
Sheriff Ryan Gleespen, Ruby Winter, and
Sheriff Michael Walsh.**



Jackie Hovey and Bill Sieferth



Bill Sieferth and Pat Marmaduke



Retired Teachers from Barberton City Schools





Welcome to our new members Nancy Rossi, Judith Dimengo and Mary Ann Donatelli. We are happy to have all of you in our organization and hope to see you at our next luncheon. There was a huge turn-out for our fall luncheon. The food was great and the door prizes spectacular.

I am looking forward to the next general meeting on Nov.16, 2021. Bring a friend or two.

We are updating our email list. Please email me if you have a new email address.

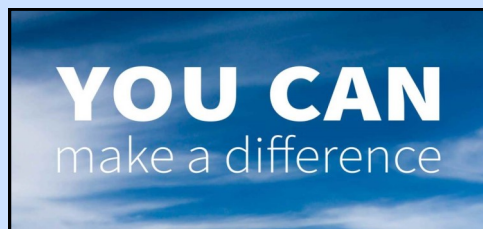
If you are a new member or paying dues, please fill out the membership form in this newsletter and return it to me with a check made out to SCRTA for \$40 (SCRTA keeps \$10 and \$30 is sent to ORTA).

If you are not sure if you have paid, give me a call or email.

I am working on a Facebook page: SCRTA ... a work in progress - but try to check it out!

Jackie Hovey
Membership & Assistant Treasurer
330-940-9147

jhoveysue@gmail.com



SCRTA MANAGEMENT BOARD

President - Mary Lou Swartz (234-678-0747)

1st VP/ Prog. - Johnnette Curry (330-699-4123)

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

Past President - Paul Dimascio (330-882-4738)

Administrative Assistant - Judy Mervine
(330-745-7587)

Treasurer - Paul Green (330-733-7311)

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

Public Relations - Ruby Winter (330-644-6886)

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

Travel - Carolyn Vogenitz (330-645-9928)

Web Master - Leroy Martin (330-666-3984)

Nominating Committee: 3 elected members

Carol Caughron (330-745-1776), Micki Lavis (330-854-3054) and Phyllis Lewis (330-342-3550); **2**

Members at Large Informative and Protective Services—**OPEN; Community Service** - Christine Bean (330-784-4575)

Scholarship Committee - Vicky Shaw (330-773-5862) and Judi Hill (330-688-2512) Co-Chair

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

Chaplain - Rebecca Moore (330-497-9326)



Summit County Retired Teachers Association
452 Herbert Rd.
Akron, Ohio 44312

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

ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED

October-November



2021

SCRTA Website
www.summitcountyrta.org

Leroy Martin - Webmaster
lmartin561@gmail.com

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Thank you for your donations to the organizations we support. Eighty-five items were given to Safe Landing. A special thank you to Mr. and Mrs. Benedetto Donatelli for their monetary gift to Safe Landing. Continue sharing your generosity with supplies or monetary donations for children in need.

Christine Bean, Community Service Chairman



NOVEMBER 16, 2021 ... SCRTA /ORTA General Luncheon Meeting ... 12 noon at Guy's Party Center

FEBRUARY 15, 2022 ... SCRTA Management Board Meeting ... 9:30 am at AEA Bldg.

FEBRUARY 22, 2022 ... Snowdate - Management Board Meeting at AEA building...if needed ... at 9:30 am.

SCRTA / ORTA GENERAL LUNCHEON MEETING

Tuesday, November 16, 2021

Guy's Party Center

500 East Waterloo Road, Akron, OH 44319

12 Noon

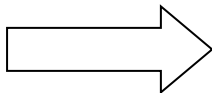
Price: \$20.00

DOOR PRIZES AND 2 SPECIAL PRIZES

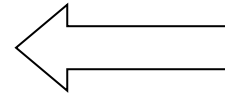
Bring 5 or more items for the Community Service Project and receive an extra door prize ticket. There will be special prizes for the two people who bring the most guests to this meeting.

The meal entrées are Beef Tips, Chicken Paradise, and Rigatoni with Meat Balls. Along with the entrées, they will be serving potatoes, green beans, salad, rolls/butter, and desert. Coffee, tea or lemonade are included with your meal. Tax & tip are included.

Clip this reservation form and send to: Ruby Winter 3873 Roller Ave., Akron, OH 44319 (330-644-6886)



LUNCHEON RESERVATION



NAME _____ PHONE # _____

Please make checks payable to SCRTA and send to Ruby Winter. She must receive this reservation form and your check by **Friday, November 12**.



Our luncheon meetings are on Tuesdays!!



DUAL-MEMBERSHIP FORM FOR SCRTA & ORTA DUES

NAME _____ PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____ / _____ / _____
Street City Zip

SCRTA / ORTA DUAL-MEMBERSHIP DUES \$40____ (SCRTA \$10 / ORTA \$30)
(Dual-membership required) YEAR YOU RETIRED _____

I am a SCRTA LIFE member _____
I pay ORTA directly _____

I am an ORTA LIFE member _____
School District _____

BRING THIS FORM WHEN PAYING DUES. MAKE ALL CHECKS PAYABLE TO SCRTA.
Check # _____ Email: _____

BY MAIL SEND TO: JACKIE HOVEY 1085 COOKHILL CIRCLE, AKRON, OH 44312