



Alaska Retired Educators Association

Spring/Summer 2014

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open
Secretary
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Treasurer
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Bill O'Dell, Fairbanks
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AKREA.ORG
Anchorage and Mat-Su Areas: CARTA: Shannon Jones, President
CARTA meets 1st Saturday at 12:30 at the AnchorageSenior Center (Sept.-May)

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Fairbanks (FRTA) Steve Heckma
FRTA meets the 2nd Wednesday at the at 11:30

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JRTA meets on the 3rd Monday every month

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GALENA PROJECTAutomotive teacher Josh Pittsenbarger (left) guides students Zelek McNeilley (in vehicle) and Lynn-Victor Lonewolf working on the flood-damaged truck
Hawk Highlights, February 24, 2014

In January, AKREA awarded six Opportunity classroom grants to working teachers. A committee from Juneau Retired Teachers Association selected the winners from 35 applications from all over the state. The winners, in no particular order, were

1. Scott Darter, Ladd Elementary , Fairbanks, with a project for students to interact with a working scientist while engaging in real - life hands – on science.
2. Lyndsay Hamachek, Whaley Special School, Anchorage, whose project developed a curriculum and creative approach to empower the girls to work together and foster respect
3. Pamela Lambert, University Park Elementary School, Fairbanks used Versa Tile sets to practice and reinforce literacy and math skills during the After School Program.

4. Kipp Norris, George H. Gelson Middle School, Valdez requested lathe tools to provide more opportunities for middle school students in the Woodshop Program
5. Joshua J. Pittsenbarger, Galena Interior Learning Academy, Galena, requested parts for reclaiming and modifying a vehicle from a recent flood . (see picture)
6. Alisa Thompson, Point Higgins Elementary School, Ketchikan used special paper that can be transformed into a plastic plate to learn about the orca, the school mascot ,

Congratulations to these innovative educators.

Watch the website (akrea.org) for more pictures as the projects are completed and teachers send their evaluations.

Next call for applications will be during Fall semester, 2014-15 for award at the beginning of the second semester.

These grants were made possible by a grant from NRTA. In the futures AKREA will fund them with proceeds from Teacher Tales and other books, and from donations.



PACKING WITH PAT.....

Alaska Retired Educators Association (AKREA) has finalized our 2015 travel plans with Collette Vacations.....**WE ARE OFF TO WASHINGTON, D.C. , April 1 – April 7, 2015.** The time chosen was a deliberate one. Pat Spence, our new travel liaison, wanted us to be there during the Cherry Blossom Festival! She has worked diligently to put together a fun – filled, exciting package .

Now, all we need is **YOU** to join us! Our website, akrea.org, is the gathering place for all the latest news, updates, regarding the trip. Watch for trip brochures in the mail and also on line.

Collette is offering a **Special Travel Presentation online, Wednesday, May14, 2014, 5 pm, Alaska Standard Time.** Questions will be answered.

Register: www.collettevacations.com/meet/o/1613914

RSVP 907.789.0051

WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN IN THE FUN! CONTACT US. Written by: Liz Lucas, Executive Director

Pat Spence, Travel

IN THE UNITS

FRTA

FRTA had to cancel our November meeting due to icy roads. Our December meeting, “A Jazzy Christmas with ‘Cocktail Sauce’”, was very enjoyable listening to high school students bring Christmas music to our luncheon and later we sang along to wonderful songs that certainly put us in the Christmas spirit.

For our January meeting we had Jinx Whitaker, a very knowledgeable person in Alaskan art, come to give us some information about what should we consider and know about our art. Jinx let us know that she had been working on an appraisal and showed us a document and explained all that was involved and the amount of time it had taken.

We had several different types art that she went over various questions we should ask ourselves and points that we should consider.

At our January meeting we were beginning to learn what other retirees were facing with our new Proposed Health Care Plan. I call the Division of Benefits and Retirement asking that FRTA have a meeting with them about our proposed new health plan.

Mike Barnhill contacted me and we set up a video conference in February for FRTA members and a face to face meeting with Mike for any state retiree in March at Raven Landing. The attendance at both of these meetings was very good. We had over 150 people at the “Town Hall Meeting” in March with many people voicing the problems that they had faced since the January 1 start of our new Health Plan and the disappointment that they had with the state.

At our February meeting we had Lanien Livingston from Tanana Chiefs speaking to us about her involvement from the beginning with the new Chief Andrew Isaac Health Center. She let us know that if FRTA would like a tour of the new Chief Andrew Isaac Health Center that she would be happy to be our guide around the facility. We plan to approach her for a May tour.

At our March meeting members voted to establish a webpage that can be found at akfrta.weebly.com. We had Karen Kriezer present a program of Fairbanks Resource Agency’s senior service agencies in the Fairbanks area. She spoke to us on the senior services that FRA offers and how we can let FRA know of a senior that may need assistance.

CARTA

Town Hall Meeting

The Division of Retirement and Benefits held a town hall meeting in the Wilda Thurston Theater at the Lousaac Library on April 20. Health Commissioner Curtis Thayer, representatives from Aetna Medical, Aetna Pharmaceutical, Moda Dental, and other members of the Dept. of Administration were present to answer questions about the transfer of the retiree health plan to Aetna and Moda/Delta Dental of Alaska. A near capacity crowd, composed largely of retirees, immediately began to vent their frustrations. Problems from contradictory and mis-information from both the state and Aetna seem to be

at the root of the problems. Until a new handbook is published, the 2003 edition is still in effect with some amendments added in January 2004. Copies of these amendments were available at the meeting--about 40 pages, which takes some time and concentration to read. Most of the changes are clarification, and rewording of some procedures. These are the requirements Aetna and Moda Dental must meet to fulfill their contracts with Alaska Care.

Malfunctioning mikes added to the confusion and since not much was accomplished to resolve the problems, Commissioner Thayer is planning for another meeting within 30 days to confront these issues.

CARTA News

During their last meeting of the year on May 3rd at the Anchorage Senior and Activity Center, officers for 2014-2014 will be installed. Kathryn Berkowitz will become the president. Proceeds from the April Scholarship Auction totaled \$1950 plus an additional \$225 in donations. The scholarship recipients will be guest of CARTA at the luncheon. Call 907-349-1714 for more information or to make reservations for the luncheon.

Spring Activities For JREA

We have certainly enjoyed a very pleasant winter, unlike a good part of the United States. My relatives, back east, are still complaining about snow.

JREA had luncheons in both January and February. The first month we enjoyed an update on the SLAM Project. This is certainly a wonderful project.

In February we met our new Doctor from our radiation center. We are very fortunate to now be able to have radiation right in Juneau.

Our March speaker had to cancel due to a fall. In April, she has promised to tell us about her memories of time spent in an internment camp during World War 2. Juneau will dedicate the Empty Chair Memorial in July. This will honor all the Japanese forced out of Juneau in 1943.

May, will be our annual picnic at Auke Rec.

In between our meetings, several of us have spent a great deal of time working on the reprinting of our book, Alaska Experiences by Juneau Teachers. We have added pictures of early schools in Juneau. When possible, we have also added pictures to accompany the teacher's stories. This project has taken many hours of our time. Things are coming together. We are almost finished.

I hope members from around the State will support our efforts by purchasing a copy of our book. It should be ready sometime in June. We'll be sure and let you know.

The money, from the sale of this book, will go towards mini grants for teachers that are still teaching. This past year was the first time these were available. Last year, AKREA gave out five mini grants, thanks to a grant from NRTA. Now, AKREA has to raise money to continue these grants. Juneau took on the task this year. We hope you will support us.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BARB'S BY-LINE

Good news first. We are getting an infusion into our TRS Retirement Fund. The legislators voted to add two Billion to the TRS fund and one billion to the PERS fund. It is not going to be put in all at once but it is a start. We need to thank the Governor who proposed this and all legislators who voted for this bill. We ask legislators to do as we wish but we also must thank them. Please, send a note to each one and let them know you are a member of AKREA and appreciate the effort to help make the fund sound.



Many of our members especially those who are not on Medicare have had a very difficult experience with the changeover to Aetna and the new regulations which were imposed on health care. The Dental and visual changes have affected all of us. I received a number of phone calls from some of you who have been impacted negatively. You are not alone. There are many of you out there with problems that the Aetna and state Department are trying to resolve. As an example one person had to pay his Doctor as Aetna would not pay for any of his visits he has been retired a few years and never had trouble before. The Prescription Drug reimbursement has been a nightmare. Things are beginning to get straightened. If you have any issues you cannot solve, please call the Department of Retirement right away as they are trying to resolve these issues (all numbers are on our web site www.akrea.org . They (the state department) reverted back to the old way of doing things for the rest of the year but will change back in 2015 so let them know the problems you have faced and what is not working so they can resolve it. I know they want to save money as they feel they are spending too much on health care but they made a promise and we need to help save money but not when it concerns a serious medical issue. Be sure and call with your issues. The members of the Retirement office in Juneau at the area meetings on these issues encouraged us to call them with any problems. Please do this calling ASAP as they are trying to resolve the issues before enforcing the new standards in 2015 they want all calls by the end of April.

With the changes to the dental and visual comes the issue of “no taxation without representation”. Right now the department or their designees such as Mod can change our dental and visual and Long Term Care without any say from us or our designees. We need to have a supervising board as we used to have in the PERS and TRS boards. This should be one of our priorities. We now have so much evidence to prove that we are unhappy with the way they handle things. The money for dental, visual, and Long Term Care does not come out of the states pocket it comes out of ours and we should have a definite voice in the use of it as we used to have. We need to have a say! Please talk to all you legislators and candidates for office in the next election on their stand in this issue. If we make enough noise maybe they will listen. **WE WANT A TRS AND PERS BOARD** to make the decisions on these issues.

The hearings around the state on the problems of the changeover have been well attended. People have been very vocal. The next one is in Juneau and will have a phone line for all who cannot make the meeting the phone number can be obtained from the state web site www.ak.gov/drb

I would like to thank Liz Lucas, Virginia Walters, Kathy Wischler and all of the board as they stepped up and did all of my work for a few months as my husband and I were in the lower 48 for medical reasons. I am trying to get caught up with all that is happening. The legislation, the new travel plans, the new Teacher Tales book. They all did a great job. Thank you very much.



AKREA NEWS FROM THE NORTH

AKREA is on the move! There have been several accomplishments since we had a chat. We are happy to welcome Barb Potter as the Community Service Coordinator and Pat Spence as the Travel Liaison. They are both enthusiastically involved in projects which will be mentioned later .

Pat Spence has done a wonderful job in coordinating and planning a 2015 Washington D. C. trip, April 1 – 7, with Collette Vacations, complete with cherry blossoms in bloom! ;-) Put it on your calendar. Check the website, akrea.org, for details. There will be an online presentation, May 14, 2014, 5:00 pm, Alaska time. To register go to: ww.collettevacations.com/meet/o/1613914. Please RSVP (907)789-0051.

Juneau Retired Educators Association (JREA) and the Alaska State Retired Educators Association (AKREA) are collaborating on the updating and re – publishing of the 1993 JREA book, *Alaska Experiences by Juneau Teachers*. Barb Potter and Marie Darlin, with the aid of the book committee, are nearing the end of the project. There have been many hours of planning meetings, trips to the state museum, gathering pictures, etc. The new book will be published in May! Watch for the actual date. Check the AKREA web! The profits will be used toward funding the Opportunity Award.

We just completed the first year of our mini – grant project. AKREA offered the Opportunity Award to all active, classroom public teachers in Alaska. The task was to create a project that would benefit the classroom, school or community. The timeline was September 1 to December 15, 2013....up to \$ 200 could be used. There were 34 applications received. 6 winners were chosen. Total of \$1000 was distributed!

State – wide discontent over the transition of the retiree health plan administration to Aetna and Moda/Delta Dental of Alaska has occupied a disproportionate amount of our time. Concern is high over protection of benefits and the awkward Aetna change - over. We worked with other like groups to delay the transition until further public testimony has been taken. The draft retiree health plan document will not be implemented in 2014. We will continue to operate under the 2003 booklet as amended January 1, 2014. Any further proposal to adopt a re – written plan booklet will be preceded with notice and an opportunity for comment.

2014 Legislative News.....

The unfunded liability , one of AKREA’s major focus points, has been front and center this legislative season. The governor’s plan is to transfer \$3 billion from a budget savings account into the state’s retirement trust fund. Thus, paying down the unfunded debt and creating a lower fixed annual payment from the state operating budget.

AKREA has been monitoring and speaking out in favor of the governor’s bill. We wrote an article for the Juneau Empire entitled, *Now Rather Than Later*, in defense of the ARM Board’s position re unfunded liability.

We also sent several e-mails to all members of the House and Senate Finance Committees, requesting that they back the governor's bill.

Thanks to Ken Helander, AARP State Office, Director of Advocacy, for a well-written article on Alaska's unfunded liability. Great support letter!

Late News Update, April 20, 2014: The House passed the TRS/PERS HB 385 bill with a unanimous vote to approve the measure. This amended measure puts \$2 billion into the ailing teacher's retirement system and \$1 billion into the public employee's retirement system.

In talking to Sam Trivette, ARM BOARD member, soon after passage, he stated "I am so pleased that legislators and the Governor have stepped up to the plate to address PERS/TRS funding and all 60 legislators supported the compromise bill that will transfer \$2 billion to TRS and \$1 billion to PERS. This will increase the funding ratio of both trust funds significantly while still giving the legislature and Governor sufficient money in reserves to annually fund other vital public services such as education, public safety, roads and infrastructure, and health and welfare for years to come. It is a milestone for all Alaskans."

***Compromise on Governor Sean Parnell's education bill, HB 278, has finally arrived after a long battle. It will provide \$100 million in education funding for each of the next 3 years. The money will be split evenly between one-time funding and increases to the Base Student Allocation, the amount the state pays school districts per student.

The Defined Pension bill did not make it this year. Senator Egan and his staff did a heroic job! AKREA supported them all the way. We will try again!

As we said at the beginning of the article, AKREA is on the move!

Thank you to all AKREA members for the support you are sending our way. We appreciate it! Join us in continuing to monitor and protect the benefits of Alaska retired educators! Drop us a note on line...help us celebrate together and plan for the next legislative session!

Liz Lucas, Executive Director, lizlucas@hotmail.com, akrea.org

KENAI

Kenai retired teachers are still looking to restart the Unit there. Many have expressed an interest in a unit that convenes to help the community and/or schools complete special projects such as back to school days, Read-Across -America, library book sales and other community service type activities.

If you are interested in exploring this possibility, contact Virginia at 283-7305 or vewalters@gci.net

ALASKA EDUCATORS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

AEHS is still calling for submissions for the next TEACHER TALES. Lots of memories and good stories are still out there waiting to be told. The E-Book issue of Volume IV is selling well and has received some great reviews from those who have read it, one of them being that they 'hope we add more stories'.

The revised and enlarged Juneau Teacher Tales is nearly ready for publication. Barbara Potter tells us it should be to the printer in May, ready for summer sales to visitors to Juneau and to the membership. Watch the web site (AKREA.ORG) for the announcement.

And, we hear the rumor that 'maybe' Fairbanks unit is thinking about gathering some stories from their membership and others and doing a Fairbanks Teacher tales. Hope so!

Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip** _____

Phone: _____ **E-Mail** _____

I prefer to receive the newsletter via e-mail USPS

Dues: \$15 per year 4 years/\$50

Make Check Payable to ALASKA RETIRED EDUCATORS ASSOCIATION

mail to: Virginia Walters

214 Birch Street

Kenai, Ak 99611

The Ak-REA dues year is January –December. Any dues received after September 15 each year will cover the next year