



OKANOGAN COUNTY SCHOOL RETIREES' ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER, January 2025

Website: <http://wssra-units.org/okanogancounty>

OCSRA MEETINGS AND PROGRAMS 2024-25

Tuesday, February 25, 2025, 11 am: \$5 Soup & Sandwich Lunch and General Meeting. Community Presbyterian Church of Omak. 9 Birch St. South. Voting on Grant Winners.

Wednesday, February 26, 2025, 10 am: E-5, E-6 Coordinating Council Zoom Meeting. Contact Tara at www.wssra.org for the link to the meeting.

Tuesday, March 25, 2025, 11 am: \$5 Soup & Sandwich Lunch and General Meeting. Election of officers.

Tuesday, May 27, 2025, 11 am: \$5 Soup & Sandwich Lunch and General Meeting. Budget Proposal for 2025-2026.

June 2-June 4: WSSRA Convention: Yakima Convention Center.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

January Compilation: On January 2, 2025, **OCSRA** had 335 members: 24 Cash Payers, 214 Retirees on pension payment, 2 Honorary Status, and 95 Actives working in school systems. Total **WSSRA** membership: 16,851

OCSRA Welcomes New and Returning Members: Omak School District: **Cynthia Buchert**, **Baelie Meese**, **Misty Taylor**, and **Gavin Voelckers**; Okanogan School District: **Amy Cheeseman**; Tonasket School District: **Sasha Dart**; Returning member: **Rev. Joe LaGrou**, Naukati Bay, Alaska

In Memorial:

Jerald Brightbill, Tonasket, died at age 79 on March 4, 2024. His 33-year teaching career includes teaching many years at Tonasket Elementary School. Note: Jerald's age and date of death were listed incorrectly in **OCSRA**'s Fall Newsletter.

Charles "Chuck" Pecha, Omak, died August 29, 2024, at age 92. Chuck taught Industrial Arts at Omak High School for 51 years. At age 90, he was named an Honorary Member of **WSSRA** for his years of service to **WSSRA/OCSRA**. A dedicated leader in **OCSRA**, Chuck is especially remembered for the beautiful scrapbooks he created as **OCSRA** Historian.

HOW TO RECEIVE THE OCSRA NEWSLETTER BY E-MAIL

If you wish to receive your newsletter by email, please send your current email to Michelle Hunter at michele@wssra.org.

THINKING OF RETIRING?

WSSRA'S free 2-part Pre-Retirement Webinars will be held in mid-March. Complete information will be sent to area schools by early March or contact Tara at **WSSRA**: 360-413-5496. Each webinar will be recorded and available for viewing online at www.wssra.org.

Retirement information is also available at the **Department of Retirement Systems** website, drs.wa.gov. This is a reminder that you can retire at age 62 with full benefits if you have worked for 30 years or more and use the 2008 Early Retirement Factors schedule (2008 ERF), but you must plan out your health care coverage until you reach Medicare age.

Free individual help is also available from Financial Alternatives in East Wenatchee through a partnership with the North Central Washington ESD. Phone: 800-456-1370 or email: askfinancialalt@finaltlc.com.

OMAK ELK SCHOLARSHIP FAIRE

OCSRA has been invited to participate at the Omak Elks Scholarship Faire on Saturday, February 22, from 10 am to 1 pm. Members of **OCSRA** will be promoting the scholarships available for high school seniors through **WSSRA**. These include The WSSR-Foundation, Robert J. Handy, and Gene Forrester Memorial scholarships. Please refer to the January-February issue of the JOURNAL, page 7, for more information and to access the QR Code. Students and parents throughout Okanogan County visited the Elks Faire last year to learn about the numerous scholarships available from local organizations and foundations.

THANK YOU LETTERS

Dear OCSRA Committee,

Rena Shawver, the Executive director of the **Okanogan Community Action Council**, sent two thank-you letters to the **OCSRA** for a \$400 donation to the Food Bank and Weatherization program. The donation will be used to provide food through night food pantries, weatherize family homes to create a safer and more energy-efficient living space, and provide energy assistance to residents struggling to pay rent, mortgages, and utilities. Your generous gift is already making a difference.

Dear OCSRA Committee,

Cancer Care of North Central Washington, Inc. wishes to acknowledge with grateful appreciation your donation of \$100. Your generous contribution helps continue our mission to alleviate the day-to-day inconvenience of cancer by providing a Regional Care Resource Center where patients are assisted with housing and other support services. From all of us at Cancer, thank you for your precious gift. We are very blessed to have your support.

Dear Okanogan County School Retiree Association,

On behalf of the **Okanogan School District**, we wanted to extend our deepest gratitude for your generous donation to the Bulldog Bites Food Pantry. Your support is truly appreciated and will go a long way in helping us provide food and snacks to students in need. Thank you for making a difference in our community and for your continued dedication to supporting our schools. With sincere thanks, Steve Quick, Superintendent.

COMMUNITY SERVICE REPORT

OKANOGAN COUNTY SCHOOLS RETIREES' ASSOCIATION

COMMUNITY SERVICE REPORT

January 2025

At its September 2024 **OCSRA** meeting, the community service committee proposed, and all attending members approved, the following contributions:

Our House Cancer Care in Wenatchee	\$100.00
Community Action Weatherization Program	\$200.00
Community Action Food Bank	\$200.00
Bulldog Bites for Okanogan Outreach School	\$400.00
WVC at Omak for Gas Cards for Students	\$400.00
Okanogan Senior Center Meals on Wheels	\$100.00
Omak Senior Center Meals on Wheels	\$100.00

From a budget of \$2,000, the club approved the distribution of \$1,500 at its September meeting. The remaining \$500 is in reserve for requests which come during the 2024-2025 year. If you have any suggestions for consideration regarding the remaining \$500 in this year's community service budget, please contact committee members (Carol Payne, Sherrie Pitts, and/or Mary Johnson). As of this writing, a suggestion has been proposed to consider making a monetary donation to the Okanogan Support Center.

SCHOLARSHIP TRUSTEE BOARD INFORMATION

ATTENTION:

\$2,000 College Scholarship Available

OCSRA has a **\$2,000 college scholarship** available for an Okanogan County high school graduate. To be eligible, applicants must be at least a college junior working towards initial certification in an education field and must plan to work in public schools. The application deadline is **May 1**. Applications are available at www.sra-units.org/okanogancounty For more information, contact sibylwehmeyer@yahoo.com

Other Scholarship Trustee News: Bob Shacklett was elected to replace Richard Johnson on the Scholarship Trustee Board at **OCSRA**'s September meeting. Dee Blank, Scholarship Trustee Board Chair, announced the Trustees will meet with **OCSRA**'s Edward Jones Advisor Jessica Herriman at 1:30 pm, Wednesday, January 22, for the yearly finance update. Dee will discuss the update at **OCSRA**'s February meeting.

FALL GRANT RECIPIENTS

In October, **OCSRA** awarded four grants of \$300.00 to the following members.



Kathy Bryson, Okanogan Middle School, received a grant to purchase a flash for the school cameras to improve the quality of the photos of school events. She said, “Thank you very much for the \$300 grant! I appreciate all you do for the teachers in our county and state. Our MS yearbook students have already been able to put the flash to good use. They have taken photos at the Halloween dance and during HOPE week; both events affected so many of our OKMS students. 😊 The pictures are turning out great! The students appreciate the extra equipment too. Thank you for your support!” Sincerely, Kathy Bryson.



LeeAnn Schrock, principal at East Omak Elementary School, wrote, “Thank you so much for the generous grant to purchase the Connect Four yard games for our playground at East! Because of Cyber Monday deals, I was also able to purchase two jumbo Tic-Tac-Toe yard games as well! How exciting! We appreciate your support.” LeeAnn Schrock.

Grant Committee Chair, Carol Payne, presented a \$300 grant to Omak Middle School Principal LeeAnn Schrock for the giant playground games.



Gavin Voelchers, Omak High School, wanted a grant for supplies for three different classes he teaches: Ag-Bio, Floral Design, and Ag Systems.

Gavin is pictured with Evon LaGrou, OCSRA representative, at Omak HS.

Julie Conklin, 3rd grade teacher at Tonasket Elementary School, wanted help to purchase 70 books titled I Need My Monster. After reading the book, students will design a monster; and then a high school art student will create it so students can see their monster.

Marcelle LaGrou and Penny Garrsion with grant winner Julie Conkle at Tonasket Elementary library.



It is now time for **OCSRA** to award four more grants, and we hope many will consider doing this. You can use the application in this newsletter or on our website. The applications are due February 15, 2025.

2025 WSSRA LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES



Washington State School Retirees' Association Legislative Priorities – 2025

Restore an ongoing cost-of-living adjustment for TRS 1 & PERS 1 retirees.

- **Lost benefits:** 50,730 retired teachers, school employees, and public employees have been without an ongoing COLA since 2011, when the legislature eliminated their annual benefit increase. Since then, most pensions have lost at least 25% of their purchasing power.
- **Restore fairness:** Only TRS 1 & PERS 1 members don't receive automatic annual COLAs.
- **Seniors in need:** Washington is among the most expensive states for retirees. Without an ongoing COLA, retired public servants are being forced to consider moving out of state to afford housing, food, and health care.

Paths to an ongoing COLA

SB 5085	SB 5113
Restore an ongoing COLA by creating the Legacy Retirement System	Restore an ongoing COLA with long-term investments
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Benefits restored: PERS 1 & TRS 1 members receive an annual inflation-based COLA of up to 3%.- Positive budget impact: Financed by reorganizing TRS 1, PERS 1, and LEOFF 1 into the Legacy Retirement System. PERS 1, TRS 1, and LEOFF 1 benefits will be fully funded without the need for ongoing payments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Benefits restored: PERS 1 & TRS 1 members receive an annual inflation-based COLA of up to 3%.- Funded by employer contributions over a 15-year period.- Approved by the Select Committee on Pension Policy.

Additional Priorities

- Maintain the \$183 monthly Medicare benefit for insurance plans offered through the Public Employees Benefits Board (budget line item).
- Cover mobile dental care through the Public Employees Benefits Board so retirees in long-term care settings can stay healthy (bill number forthcoming).
- Protect surviving family members from clawbacks by ending month-of-death pension prorating (SB 5114).
- Fully fund all pension plans.

Washington State School Retirees' Association
PO Box 5127
Lacey, WA 98509

Legislative Contact: emmett@wssra.org
Emmett Mills (541) 602-4806 – cell
(360) 413-5496 ext. 2 – off.

OKANOGAN COUNTY SCHOOL RETIREES' ASSOCIATION GRANT FORM

GRANTS AVAILABLE FOR OCSRA MEMBERS

ATTENTION: Members of Okanogan County School Retirees' Association (OCSRA) currently employed or volunteering in one of the Association's school districts—

- OCSRA offers members eight \$300 grants this school year. The grant must be used in a single school year to fund projects and materials (excluding field trips) not covered by other financial means. The grants must be used in an OCSRA School District and the application must have the signature of the *building principal*. This year four grants will be awarded in the fall with an October 15 deadline and four grants will be awarded in the spring with a February 15 deadline.

To apply, complete the form below and return it to OCSRA Grants Chair, Carol Payne, 13 Kermel Road, Omak, WA 98841 by October 15, 2024 to apply for the fall grant or by February 15, 2025 to apply for the spring grant.

Applicant's Name: _____

School District's Mailing Address: _____

Applicant's Email Address: _____

Applicant's Home Address: _____

Grade Level/Area of Instruction: _____

Number of Students to Benefit: _____

Estimated Cost: _____

Will the Grant Provide Resources for More Than One School Year? ____ If Yes, How? _____

How Will the Grant Be Used? Attach Any Helpful Pictures/Supporting Documentation for the Grants Committee. Please Use the Back Side for Further Explanation for the need.

Signature of Applicant: _____ Dated: _____

Signature of Building Principal: _____ Dated: _____

Office Telephone Number of Building Principal: _____

LEGISLATIVE NEWS

Dear WSSRA Unit Presidents, Legislative Committee Members, and Unit Legislative Committee Chairs,

Here is a legislative update for use in unit newsletters and journals. Please click these links to access a [Word document version](#) and a [PDF version](#) of the article. The message also appears below:

The 2025 Legislative Session is off with a bang. Legislators are being forced to address a budget shortfall of somewhere between \$12 and \$16 billion dollars over the next four years. Budget cuts and new taxes are both being seriously considered as ways to help close the gap.

The shortfall is bad news for retired school employees, who rely on pensions and health insurance benefits funded by the state. In past budget shortfalls, we've seen legislators make cuts to pensions and benefits to balance the budget. For example, in 2011, the legislature eliminated the annual COLA relied upon by TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees and substantially reduced the benefit provided to keep PEBB health insurance premiums affordable. We are vigilantly watching to make sure this does not happen again. We are also looking for creative ways to advance our priorities in a challenging budget environment.

Here are some of the most important bills we're following:

House Bill 1292/Senate Bill 5113 would provide an ongoing cost-of-living adjustment to TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees. It is the result of many years of hard work and is the ideal solution to restoring benefits. Unfortunately, it also has a price tag.

Like HB 1292/SB 5113, **SB 5085** would provide an ongoing COLA to TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees. However, it would be funded by merging TRS 1, PERS 1, and LEOFF 1, a closed pension plan for retired police officers and firefighters, into a single retirement system. The ongoing COLA for TRS 1 and PERS 1 members would be funded by the \$2.9 billion surplus in LEOFF 1. This would save the state money and is our most realistic path to an ongoing COLA this session.

HB 1312/SB 5114 would stop the state from clawing back deceased retirees' final pension payments. It would end the practice of month-of-death pension prorating and allow survivors to keep their deceased loved one's entire final pension check.

Questions, comments, or concerns? Contact WSSRA Legislative Coordinator Emmett Mills at emmett@wssra.org or (360) 413-5496 ext. 2.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you,
Emmett Mills
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