



Bits & Pieces

www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/

March 2021

Unit 28 of the Washington State School Retirees' Association
Serving retired and active school employees and our community.

WE'VE BEEN BUSY!

It's March! Last March, we had our last in-person board meeting. Last March, we canceled our luncheons until further notice. Last March our active members were moving to distance learning and all that it entails. Last March seems a lifetime ago, and yet it also seems like yesterday. The business of Thurston County School Retirees' Association has continued. We may operate a little differently, but we are staying committed to "Serving retired and active school employees and our community."

What have we been up to?

- Your officers and committee chairs continue to share important information concerning health, education, membership, and legislation through our newsletter, website, Facebook, and email "blasts." Thank you to **Sharon Dennis**, **Karen Keller**, and **ZiNita Carrell** for keeping us in the know!
- **Ann Chenhall**, along with a group of volunteers, has been coordinating Zoom visits with our state senators and representatives, asking them to commit to our issues.
- **Ron Crawford** and WSSRA Executive Director **Alan Burke** hosted a state-wide Retirement Webinar last month.
- **Karen Keller** and **Keitha Bryson** continue to work on membership via USPS mail. We hope next year to be able to go to schools and tell people face-to-face about our organization.
- **Sally Jones** keeps us apprised of community service opportunities while maintaining our ties to our partners, the Little Red Schoolhouse, The Other Bank, the Thurston County Food Bank, and the Salvation Army.

I heard from a friend. She's bored and tired of COVID. Well, I think most of us are tired of being isolated. But bored? If you are bored, give me a call! I am working on committees for next year. I'll put you to work!

Pat Slosson, TCSRA President

IN-PERSON
LUNCHEONS ARE
CANCELED
UNTIL
FURTHER NOTICE!

THE STARS AND STRIPES REVOLUTIONARY ROAD

How do you start a country from nothing, let alone, design a flag to represent every immigrant community? At our March 19 Zoom "luncheon" meeting, you will hear flag truths and myths in 35 fast-paced minutes, while witnessing more than 20 significant Revolutionary War flags.

Presented by **Art Dolan**, President, George Rogers Clark Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution, Olympia, WA. Like all members of the Sons of the American Revolution, Art is a direct descendant of a Revolutionary War patriot. In his case, that was Jeremiah Fitch, Bedford, MA, a member of the Bedford militia, 1775. Art was our guest last year with a program about George Washington's Secret Navy. It was a hit, and we are glad to have him back with us.



Come to enjoy this convoluted tale of the "Stars and Stripes Revolutionary Road" and see the many faces of Old Glory. Please share this information with retirees who are not members and might like this program.

The Zoom meeting room will open at 9:50 a.m. and Art will be introduced at 10:00. **Remember you don't need a computer to participate.** You can call in on your phone and listen to his presentation. To call in on your phone, dial the following number and then follow the prompts to enter the meeting ID and the passcode:

Dial: 1-253-215-8782
Meeting ID: 936 3362 3760
Passcode: 942924

Zoom computer links will be available on the Program page of our website, on our Facebook page, and in a reminder email notice sent out from ZiNita Carrell.

Karen Keller, Program Chair

In Memoriam

We note the passing of **Gary Danielson** and **Mary Pike**. We offer sincere condolences to their families and friends.

LEGISLATIVE REPORT



WSSRA's advocacy team has been busy meeting with legislators. A BIG THANK YOU to our legislative volunteers. School retirees from across the state have been logging onto Zoom and lobbying their legislators.

The lobbying effort has especially focused on protecting retiree medical benefits. The Medicare Eligible Healthcare Benefit lowers the cost of PEBB Medicare plans by up to \$183 per month, per person. It would be a tremendous loss for retirees if legislators were to cut it.

WSSRA sponsored two bills to assist retirees in the COVID-19 outbreak; however, it appears neither will pass this session. HB 1032 is designed to reduce early retirement penalties for school employees over the age of 60. It would stay active only through the health emergency. HB 1040 would create a one-time PEBB open enrollment window for retirees who do not currently have PEBB access. Both are good bills, but appropriators are not keen on moving them out of committee.

Fortunately, other retiree-friendly bills are moving through the legislature. Senate Bill 5021 is teed up to pass the Senate. It would ensure that COVID-19 related furloughs do not affect pension benefits. SB 5203, legislation to allow the state to bulk purchase prescription drugs, is getting traction in the Senate Healthcare Committee. The House is moving an AARP bill to ensure that nursing homes and long-term-care facilities keep an adequate supply of personal protective equipment. That bill number is HB 1218.

The session is about a third done. Please keep talking to your legislators about the \$183 medical benefit. As our lobbyists say about budget politics, "If you're not at the table, you're on the menu."

Peter Diedrick, WSSRA Legislative Director



Ways to Contact Your Legislator

1. If you would like to speak to a person, call the Legislative Hotline (800-562-6000) to leave a message for your legislators.
2. If you have a computer, go to www.leg.wa.gov to send a secure email or to get an address for mailing a note. Click on "House of Representatives" or "Senate" on the homepage and go from there.

CHANGES ARE COMING

TO THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Part 2

Last month, I introduced **Dr. Miguel Cardona**, the nominee for our new U.S. Secretary of Education. He attended public school in Meriden, Connecticut, and later became a teacher, a principal, and an assistant superintendent in the same district. He also served as co-chair of the Legislative Achievement Gap Task Force with a focus on the success of all students.



Dr. Cardona will hold Charter Schools accountable, to wit: in 2020, the Connecticut State Board of Education placed three local school districts in the charter network on probation after they repeatedly violated "the state's ground rules for operating a public school." He said, "The network's repeated non-compliance with state regulations made it seem like they thought of their oversight as 'somewhat of a nuisance.'"

Cardona, with Biden's support, wants to help the nation "address systemic inequities, tackle the mental health crisis in our education system, give educators a well-deserved raise, ease the burden of education debt, and secure high-quality, universal pre-K for every three- and four-year-old in the country."

He and Biden want to triple Title I funding for the neediest schools, to provide free pre-school for all, and to diversify the teacher pool. If confirmed, his first task will be setting new federal guidelines on school opening decisions and establishing a "large-scale" Education Department effort to identify and share the best ways to teach during a pandemic. Cardona's position on reopening schools has sometimes put him at odds not only with teachers' unions, which have called for school buildings to be closed until safety measures are met, but also with some parents who say schools should be ordered to open.

In Cardona's own words: "I, being bilingual and bicultural, am as American as apple pie and rice and beans," a background that he said gives him perspective on how to address the nation's education inequalities. "I know how challenging this year has been for students, for educators, and for parents. I've lived those challenges alongside millions of American families." That empathy, vision, and experience purports to change the nature and role of the nation's Education Secretary from the recent past. Stay tuned.

Gery Gerst, Education Co-chair

Each month we will randomly draw the name of one of our “active” (not-yet-retired) members, who will receive a Starbucks gift card in the mail.



This month's winner is:

Helen Bowden
Olympia School District



Check this box each month to see if YOU are the lucky member.



The Nominating Committee is pleased to recommend the following members as officer candidates for 2021-2022:

President: Pat Slossen

Vice President/President-elect: Lorene Rang

Secretary: Pat McLachlan

Fiscal Treasurer: Will Gentz

Membership Treasurer: ZiNita Carrell

Nominating Committee: Gail Feagins

Additional nominations, with the consent of the nominees, will be accepted. Voting will take place in April via email and USPS mail. More information will be forthcoming in the April Bits & Pieces.

*Ron Crawford, Jay Wood, and Sue Shannon
Nominating Committee*

NOMINEE BIOGRAPHY

Lorene Rang, Vice President/President-elect:
Lorene served as the TCSRA Membership chair for two years and was instrumental in recruiting over 100 new members for our organization. Born in Aberdeen, Washington, Lorene moved with her parents to Fife, where she graduated from Fife High School. Upon graduation, Lorene earned her AA at Tacoma Community College and her bachelor's degree from Central Washington State University, where she played varsity women's tennis for two years. She spent her next 20 years as a junior high, middle school, and high school health and physical education teacher in Tacoma Public Schools. She also coached volleyball and softball at all the levels. Lorene then earned her master's degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Puget Sound and began her 15-year administrative career as Yelm Middle School Principal. Upon retirement from Yelm, she worked for Pacific Lutheran University as an instructor in Educational Leadership, overseeing school administrators as they earned their Administrative Pro-Certification. Lorene loves to travel in their

motorhome, aspiring to visit all of our National Parks. She enjoys spending time with her family, her two grandchildren, and her adoring dog, Teddy. She loves the outdoors—walking, hiking, golfing, and tennis.

A biography of **Gail Feagins** will be published in the April Bits & Pieces. Biographies of the other nominees for office—**Pat Slossen, Pat McLachlan, Will Gentz**, and **ZiNita Carrell**—are available at www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/. If you would like a printed copy, please call Sharon Dennis at 360-438-5351.



MINI-GRANTS AWARDED

In this year of distance learning and hybrid schedules, staff members at schools throughout our county have been faced with overwhelming circumstances. TCSRA was happy to be able to help in a small way with our elementary and secondary mini-grants. We are disappointed that more people did not apply, but we are happy that we were able to fund everyone's request. Our elementary mini-grant committee awarded seven grants totaling \$1,620. Our secondary mini-grant committee awarded eight grants totaling \$2,198.

North Thurston Public Schools:

Maria Dunn	Lakes Elementary
Maria Gisi	Chambers Prairie Elementary
Amanda Clark Fuller	Komachin Middle School
David Srein	Salish Middle School
Johannes Barksdale	Aspire Middle School
Erin Mann	Aspire Middle School
Kristina Lawley	Aspire Middle School

Olympia School District:

Heather Randolph	Roosevelt Elementary
Suzanne Fowble	Garfield Elementary
Catherine Anne Bailey	McKinney Elementary

Tumwater School District:

Kevan Hagen	Bush Middle School
Adi Khalsa	Bush Middle School

Yelm Community Schools:

Jo Foley Robles	McKenna Elementary
Cyndy Freshour-Johnson	Prairie Elementary
Mary Middleton	Yelm Middle School

*Nancy Zabel and Patti Colombo, Elementary Co-chairs
Pat Slossen, Secondary Chair*

Thurston County School Retirees' Association
P. O. Box 3051
Lacey, WA 98509-3051

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

**PRSR STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
OLYMPIA, WA.
PERMIT #5**

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

You will not want to miss our upcoming Zoom "luncheon" events. The programs will begin at 10:00 a.m., and complete information will be published in *Bits & Pieces*, on our Facebook page, and on the TCSRA website.

- **March 19:** History of the American Flag, Art Dolan.
- **April 16:** Mini-grant recipients
- **May 21:** Installation of 2021-2022 Officers

COMMUNITY SERVICE



As I stated last month, community service does not always have to involve a grand gesture or monetary donation. In fact, staying home and doing nothing in the community can be seen as a kind of service because of COVID. Perhaps now we should consider a small gesture of community service to help alleviate the loneliness that COVID has produced in all of us. We long to hug our friends and families, especially our children and grandchildren. We long to visit with them, have a meal together around the dining room table or in a restaurant or coffee shop, sitting just a foot apart.

Loneliness is hugely amplified for people who live alone or in residential facilities that have curtailed group activities and banned visitors. Technology to communicate with others may not be available to them, and worse yet, we know that there are folks who don't receive visitors in the best of times.

So the small gesture that I recommend this month is for each of us to reach out to someone who is apt to be especially lonely and send them a thinking-of-

you card in the mail including a meaningful, interesting, or funny message. If you are like me, getting the mail is no fun at all anymore because personal messages are so rare. An actual personal card or letter makes me smile. Let's help bring smiles to those who may need it the most right now!

Sally Jones, Community Service Chair



School Retiree Appreciation Week
March 15 – 21, 2021

Thank you for all your years of service in schools, whether you worked on buses, in lunchrooms, on playgrounds, in offices, or in the classrooms.

BITS & PIECES, the newsletter of the Thurston County School Retirees' Association, is published nine times a year, September through May, as a membership service. Editor: Sharon Dennis, 360-438-5351. **Information for the April 2021 issue is due by March 15.** Please email copy to bitsandpieces-editor@hotmail.com.