

Bits & Pieces

IN-PERSON
LUNCHEONS ARE
CANCELLED
UNTIL
FURTHER NOTICE!

www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/ September 2021

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

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

September! We all know the feeling of anticipation as a new school year begins. At TCSRA September is the time we look forward to getting back together. It has been my fervent hope that this year September would be a time of health and hope and energy as we jump into the activities of the association. Unfortunately, we are not ready yet. But every day we hope to get a little closer.

TCSRA Mini-Grants: Although some activities will be on hold a little longer, we are ready to begin receiving mini-grant applications, for both elementary and secondary, on September 1. This year we are pleased to announce that **active TCSRA members**—members who are currently working for public school districts in Thurston County—will be eligible to apply for mini-grant awards of up to **\$500** to fund their school projects. This is a one-time increase to our award amounts, available only this fall. Non-members are eligible for awards of up to \$250. [See page 3 for more details.] If you are interested in membership in TCSRA, or you know someone who is, please go to our website at www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/.

WSSRA Virtual Awards Ceremony, September 15: This webinar will include the recognition parts of the June 2021 convention, such as the announcement of the Patrick Hoban and Stan McNaughton awards, unit awards, scholarship recipients and the President's award. There will also be a celebration of life for members from all over the state who have passed away this past year.

WSSRA Convention, June 6-8, 2022: We are excited that this year's convention will be held at the Great Wolf Lodge in Grand Mound. Our unit will be involved in many aspects of this event, so stay tuned for opportunities to help!

Stay safe! Stay well!

Pat Slosson, TCSRA President

WHAT TO EXPECT THIS FALL

Welcome to the beginning of the 2021-2022 year. We have been hoping and planning for a different year, one filled with our "normal" association activities. However, we also know that we are not back to "normal."

As I write this in August, most states are being impacted by the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus. A new Lambda variant is starting to spread. In some states, including ours, mask wearing is once again mandatory, and in most states mask wearing is strongly recommended. In some states a vaccination card is required to visit a hotel or restaurant. Some travel restrictions are being imposed. In Thurston County the number of new cases is soaring. Vaccinated adults are testing positive for the virus and are sick. The CDC announced today that vaccinated adults can be carriers of the virus. What will the situation be in September? And throughout the year? How will the reopening of schools impact the spread? We will carefully watch the CDC and our own Thurston County Health Department for changes to their recommendations.

Our primary concern is the health and well-being of our members. And that necessitates flexibility as we plan the year. There will be no luncheon/program in September. In October and in November we will have our programs via Zoom. We will re-evaluate for the second half of the year—January through May—and make that decision later. The latest program/luncheon information will be available each month right here, in *Bits & Pieces*.

Pat Slosson, TCSRA President

October 15: Emily Hamilton, Olympia School District Teacher of the Year, a 3rd grade teacher at McLane Elementary, will present "Community Connections."

November 19: WSSRA's Legislative Director, **Peter Diedrick**, will present a "Legislative Review and Preview."

LEGISLATIVE REPORT



Welcome back! We at WSSRA—Alan, Peter, Debbie, Tara, and Michele—hope you had a happy and COVID-free summer. There are three items of legislative business to bring to your attention: the 2022 WSSRA legislative agenda, Plan 1 COLA developments, and the development of next year's PEBB plans.

WSSRA's legislative agenda will be finalized at the November '21 Executive Board meeting. That said, our legislative team has standing instructions to pursue policies to enhance the lives of retirees and all seniors. We know our lobbying team will be working on a Plan 1 COLA, on protecting or improving medical benefits, and on enhancing retirement opportunities for our Plan 2/3 members. Our political staff is also drafting legislation to allow school retirees who retire in August to receive COLAs the following July.

WEA-Retired, Retired Public Employees Council of Washington, WSSRA, and the University of Washington Retirement Association are closely working together on Plan 1 COLA legislation for 2022. The current task is getting the Select Committee on Pension Policy to produce cost estimates for various COLA proposals—including a full Plan 1 COLA restoration. Next, we will be working with the Governor's Office on a Plan 1 COLA to include in the Governor's 2022 supplemental budget proposal.

The Public Employees Benefits Board is completing its work on the 2022 retiree health premium rates. WSSRA will be hosting a Zoom meeting with HCA in October to discuss any rate and plan changes. The meeting date will be published as soon as it is finalized.

Our hunch is that autumn will be a busy political season. Work on the Plan 1 COLA will continue, and the flood of money pouring into the state from the federal government will require attention from legislators. As always, WSSRA will keep you up to speed on what's happening at the capitol.

Peter Diedrick, WSSRA Legislative Coordinator

SOCKS, ETC.

YES! We are planning to resume our regular charitable collections this year: **little and big kids' socks** and **underwear** for *The Little Red Schoolhouse*, **toiletries** for *The Other Bank*, and **cash donations** for the *Salvation Army* and for the *Thurston County Food Bank*. Since we won't be able to have in-person meetings this fall, however, we may plan another drop-off event. Stay tuned!

WHAT IS CRT?

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is all the buzz lately. It's simply the study, since the 1970s, of racism at the systemic level, examining how policies, laws, and court decisions can perpetuate racism. Researchers include sociologists, educators, and public health experts.

Suddenly, certain lawmakers claim that it is anti-American, racist, and divisive. Half of U.S. states have proposed or passed laws that ban teaching any of CRT's findings or any U.S. history that aligns with its conclusion that racism and resulting inequities have negatively impacted certain groups in our nation's past and still do.

Two conservative "think tanks" are lead writers and promoters of laws that prohibit the teaching of CRT OR ANY RELATED FINDINGS AND CONCEPTS. Violations result in the firing of public school teachers or the defunding of a whole school or district.

Such laws ban:

- Teaching history that could be "divisive," that "scapegoats a particular race," or that alleges that there is/has been "white privilege."
- Studying the nature/history of racism in our nation's past, including people or institutions in our past, that might lead students to think that we were systemically racist, thus "further dividing America."
- Teaching "anything that alleges our nation has been sexist, anti-LGBTQ, bigoted, biased, privileged, or oppressive."
- Teaching that the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution contained racist elements or intent.
- 'Divisive teaching' that claims "one race or sex has been dominant over another or [has] been adversely treated solely or partly because of his/her race or sex."

Proponents of these bans suggest that such critical examination of our nation's history "will cause irreversible damage to our children who hold the future of our great country" and will promote 'anti-patriotism' plus make certain students "uncomfortable or feel guilty."

There you have it in a nutshell. Our state is not considering such bans. But read your Voters Pamphlet carefully for legislative and school board races and see (or ask) where a candidate stands on this issue.

*"Those who fail to learn from history
are doomed to repeat it."*

—Sir Winston Churchill

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:

Karyn Abernathy

North Thurston Public Schools



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

ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY MINI-GRANTS



It's elementary and secondary mini-grant time! All school employees currently working for public school districts in Thurston County are eligible for grants of up to \$250. For the 2021-2022 academic year, **TCSRA members are eligible for grants up to \$500** if their memberships are current on October 13, 2021. TCSRA membership information is available at www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/.

Applicants are asked to describe their project, detail the costs, and summarize how the project promotes student learning while meeting district goals. Grants are one way that TCSRA provides a visible example of our support for students and teachers.

Grant applications must be submitted online and will be available beginning September 1 on our website at www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/. The deadline for all applications is **October 13, 2021**. Grants will be awarded at the beginning of November 2021.

Nancy Zabel & Patti Colombo, Elementary Co-chairs
Pat Slosson, Secondary Chair

HOME IMPROVEMENTS TO AGE IN PLACE

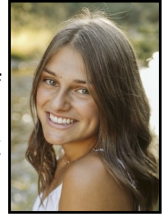
With assisted living facilities now averaging between \$4,115–\$6,500 a month and with fees for home health aides, adult day care, and skilled nursing skyrocketing, more people are wanting to age in their homes. Improvements can be made to allow this. Some can be done on your own; others require a professional.

If there are steps at your entrance, there are permanent or temporary ramps with railings that can be installed. Other options are a vertical platform lift or modified walker steps that have deep treads and short rises. An entry-way light should be low enough for you to reach it easily to change the bulb. Solar pathway lighting is another option. Doors need to be 32 inches wide and 80 inches high to accommodate wheelchairs. There are also swing-clear hinges for

(Continued on page 4. See “Home Improvements.”)

THREE THURSTON COUNTY STUDENTS RECEIVE SCHOLARSHIPS

Allyson Holder has been awarded the Robert J. Handy Scholarship of \$900, renewable for 4 years. A graduate of Olympia High School, Allyson also earned her AA degree from South Puget Sound Community College as part of the Running Start Program. She will major in education at Northwest University in Kirkland, WA, to achieve her goal of becoming a middle school math teacher. Allyson thinks that the middle school years are critical, particularly for girls, for developing confidence in their math studies. In high school, Allyson took challenging classes, earned good grades, and participated in choir, cross-country, and track and field. She spent 5 years as a caregiver for a girl her own age with severe special needs.



Emily Karnes, a graduate of Rainier High School, has been awarded a TCSRA \$1,000 scholarship. She will attend Centralia Community College for one year to complete her AA degree, and then she'll major in education at Central Washington University to pursue her goal of becoming a special education teacher. Emily has spent much of her time helping other students who were struggling and has been inspired by her mother, who is a teacher. In high school, Emily was an honor roll student, and she played volleyball and was on the fastpitch varsity team. She was an FFA officer, a counselor at Bible camp, a dog and house sitter, and a volunteer at the Rainier Community Garden.



Mya Wild, a graduate of Rochester High School who has also earned her AA degree from Centralia Community College, has been awarded a TCSRA \$1,000 scholarship. Mya will major in psychology at Washington State University, and her ultimate goal is to become a clinical child psychologist. In high school, Mya has been a cheerleader and has played fastpitch, basketball, and soccer. She has worked as a sales associate/brand ambassador for Polo Ralph Lauren, averaging 23 hours per week, for nearly two years. Mya has also participated in leadership programs offered by the Association of Washington Student Leaders (AWSL) and Camp Cispus.



TCSRA wishes these young women success in their further education and chosen fields.

In Memoriam

We note the passing of **Robert Freund** and **Linda Barnes**, and we offer sincere condolences to their families and friends.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

We at TCSRA have been contacted several times about the following volunteer opportunity because it is a desperate need, and it is for children. Obviously, it involves a major commitment, but if even one of our members has the heart to take this on, it will be a win for the program and for some child.

A volunteer **Dependency Guardian Ad Litem** (DGAL) advocates for the best interests of children who have been removed from the home due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment. The DGAL carefully researches the child's situation by interviewing parents, foster parents, family members, and all relevant service providers, and reports back to the court with recommendations regarding appropriate services and placement for the child.

After the initial 30-hour core training, there is a yearly minimum requirement of 12 hours of on-going training. A DGAL devotes approximately 5–15 hours per month to each child's case and will stay with the case until it is permanently resolved. Each volunteer is assigned a case supervisor employed by the court who provides guidance and support. For more information, contact Wendy Mayo, Program Manager, at 360-709-3231.

Sally Jones, Community Service Chair

UNIT MEMBERS NOMINATED FOR PRESTIGIOUS AWARDS



Jo Edwards is our nominee for this year's *Patrick Hoban Meritorious Award*. Nominees for this award are individuals who have given above and beyond to their units and to the association as a whole, inspiring others to serve.

Sally Jones has been nominated for the *Stan McNaughton Outreach Award*. Nominees for this award are individuals whose tireless and selfless work in the community raises the reputation of school retirees.



The TCSRA Board is pleased to nominate these two members. The recipients of these awards will be announced during the Wednesday, September 15, WSSRA Virtual Awards Ceremony. Previous unit recipients of these state level awards have been: **Joyce Gillie**, 2015; **Margaret Bland**, 2011; **Bruce Reeves**, 2009; **Gene Forrester**, 2007; **Winnie Olsen**, 2000; and **Mary Farrington**, 1997.

TCSRA Executive Board

HOME IMPROVEMENTS (Continued from page 3.)

doors to widen the entrance. Add a grab bar at the entrance. Video doorbells and digital door locks are helpful. Lever style door handles are easier to use than knobs.

Entryways should be free of clutter and have a bench to sit on. There should be an area for hanging items and for storing shoes.

In the kitchen you might want a table to prepare food while sitting down. Lower-level cabinets could have pull-out shelves or drawers to reach items easily. Horizontal handles on cabinets are easier than knobs for some to use. Single handle faucets are better. For appliances it's better to have controls at the front. Keeping the microwave on the counter eliminates having to reach up and over something to use it. French door style fridges are easier for reaching to the back and have pull out drawers.

A wide-open, roll-in shower or a walk-in tub are possible bathroom modifications. Commode chairs, transfer benches, shower benches, toilet risers, and handheld shower heads can all come in handy. Grab bars have to be attached to 2 x 4s behind the wall to be secure.

In your living spaces tall cabinets should be anchored to the wall. Electrical cords should not be frayed or create a falling hazard. Cords from blinds or drapes should be secure. Area rugs can be eliminated or kept secure with strong tape. Keep a couple feet of clear space to move around furniture. Furniture with rounded corners is safer. Use chairs with arm rests and sturdy legs widely spaced. Use lightweight serving trays that can sit on top of a walker.

In the laundry use a cart to push clothes to the washer/dryer. Front door placement and front controls are easier to use.

There should be good lighting in all areas. Natural light, night lights, motion light sensors, glow in dark light switches, and swinging arm lights are some options.

For more details see AARP's Home Fit Guide at AARP.org/Homefit. For reviews of medical alert systems and other products for independent living, visit seniorsafetyreviews.com.

Gail Feagins, Member & Health Services

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 October 2021 issue is due by September 13.** Please email copy to bitsandpieces-editor@hotmail.com.