

Bits & Pieces

IN-PERSON
LUNCHEONS ARE
CANCELED
UNTIL
FURTHER NOTICE!

www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/

October 2021

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

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Fall has arrived! I looked out the window yesterday and saw leaves falling. The nights are cooler. Football has begun. Days are shorter. The kids are talking about Halloween costumes. The fall colors are beautiful! If you are an *Anne of Green Gables* fan, you may recall this line: "I'm so glad I live in a world where there are Octobers." Indeed!

Planning is ongoing for our June 6–8 WSSRA convention at the Great Wolf Lodge in Grand Mound. I admit that I had never set foot in the Lodge until **Ron Crawford** and I decided to go on a scouting mission. It is really quite awesome! The convention area is very spacious with banquet rooms, rooms for breakout sessions, and a comfortable lobby where we can have information tables. You will be hearing more next month about the various opportunities our unit will have to be involved.

I hope everyone was able to attend the 2020-2021 WSSRA Convention Awards and Recognition Ceremony webinar on September 15. Unit 28 was conferred the Unit of Highest Distinction Award in recognition of the achievement of our 2020-2021 goals. We are well on our way to achieving our goals for this year as well! [If you didn't attend this webinar on September 15, you may want to watch the recorded version available at www.wssra.org.]

Are you interested in becoming more involved in our association? I am currently looking for someone to work on our membership committee. Ideally, this person would have worked or taught in a Thurston County school. The person who fills this position will work with Keitha Bryson, reaching out to both active and retired school employees and inviting them to join. Want to learn more? Please email me at pslosson1@comcast.net.

Stay well! Stay safe!

Pat Slosson, TCSRA President

MEET EMILY HAMILTON,

OLYMPIA SCHOOL DISTRICT'S TEACHER OF THE YEAR!

The challenges of distance and hybrid learning are many. Out of necessity, students and staff became better acquainted with technology tools for teaching and learning. Retired and active teachers all became proficient at Zoom. But one aspect of this type of learning, this type of living during COVID, was separation from friends, family, and community. Out of a need to connect, *Community Connections* was developed at McLane Elementary, championed by third grade teacher **Emily Hamilton**.

Emily Hamilton is a National Board Certified teacher in her 10th year of education. She is always busy, serving on her Building Leadership and Equity Teams as well as chairing *Community Connections*, a committee that works in conjunction with the PTSO to connect with and enhance the McLane community. She has a Bachelor of Science in Biology from the University of Washington (go Huskies!) as well as a Masters in Teaching from Heritage University. When not crafting engaging lessons for her brilliant pupils, she enjoys reading—particularly books about equity and racial justice—as well as gardening and spending time with her amazing partner, their two kitties, and a grumpy bearded dragon named Steamboat.



Olympia School District named Emily as the 2021 Teacher of the Year. *Community Connections* continues to grow and serve students, parents, and the community.

Please join us on **Friday, October 15, at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom** to meet Emily and learn more about the *Community Connections* program. The Zoom meeting "room" will open at 9:50 a.m. and Emily will be

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WSSRA FALL WEBINARS ANNOUNCED



The following events sponsored by WSSRA have been scheduled to inform members about Medicare health care options and retirement planning. Please mark your calendar and join us!

Tuesday, October 26, 9:00 to 10:15 a.m., HCA/PEBB 2022 Medicare Rates. Medicare supplemental insurance rates are changing for 2022, and in the case of the Uniform Medical Plan (UMP), going up significantly. Ellen Wolfhagen, Health Care Authority Manager for the United Healthcare (UHC) Medicare Advantage-Prescription Drug (MA-PD) program, will present information about the new UHC option to the Uniform Medical Plan. The 2022 costs for Kaiser Permanente and Premera Blue Cross also will be mentioned.

Thursday, October 28, 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., The Department of Retirement Systems (DRS) and the Health Care Authority (PEBB) will present the first part of a 101-level review of basic retirement planning. This will be similar to the WSSRA-sponsored webinar that took place last April. Active employees within five years of retirement particularly will benefit from the information provided.

Thursday, November 4, 4:30 to 6:15 p.m., the second part of the basic review of retirement planning will focus on **Social Security/Medicare** and **VEBA**. This also will follow the format of last spring's presentation. We found that having two separate sessions avoided the "too-much-information-at-once" challenges that came with one lengthy presentation.

Do you know a new school hire? The following webinar is exclusively for newbies!

Tuesday, November 9, 4:30 to 5:45 p.m., WSSRA and DRS are sponsoring a New School Employee Retirement Planning Webinar. By that date, all newly-hired school personnel will be approaching their **non-revocable 90-day deadline** to choose between Plan 2 or Plan 3 as their pension plan. This is a **major** decision that often is missed due to the time crunch that new teachers and support personnel endure during their first few months on the job. DRS will be on hand to explain the differences between the Plan 2 and Plan 3 pension systems and will provide information on state-sponsored deferred compensation. In addition, a financial planner will discuss the advantages of establishing a long-term savings plan and thinking about retirement security at the beginning of a K-12 career.

Registration for these events can be arranged through an email to Tara Teitzel (tara@wssra.org) or by hitting

the link under the "Events" tab on the WSSRA website (www.wssra.org). An opportunity for Q&A will be provided following the presentations.

Alan Burke, Ed.D, WSSRA Executive Director



WASHINGTON STATE LEADERSHIP ENSURES A SAFE START BACK TO SCHOOL

This is a tough start to a new school year. Even as the Delta variant is on the rise, schools are reopening because we all know our students can't—and shouldn't have to—face another year like the last one. They need in-person learning and socialization with their friends and classmates. We have learned from experience that in-person learning is not something we can completely replace with virtual learning. But the COVID-19 cases and deaths are rising, our hospitals are overflowing, and kids under 12 aren't vaccinated.



At this point we are losing the battle with the virus because too many adults have refused to do their part to contain it, in the misguided name of personal freedom. Thank goodness, Governor Inslee, who earlier required all state employees and health care workers to get fully vaccinated by October 18 or face termination, expanded the order to include all staff at public K-12 schools, at higher education institutions, in early education, and in private and charter schools. "We won't gamble with the health of our children, our educators, and school staff, nor [with] the health of the communities they serve."

Furthermore, Washington State's Superintendent of Public Instruction, Chris Reykdal, said that his office filed an emergency rule outlining how schools may be denied state funding if they don't comply with safety measures including mask and vaccine mandates within a certain time frame.

Unfortunately, these regulations and mandates are not required in all states, with some governors even denying schools the right to require masks and allowing school employees to work while unvaccinated. Sadly, our public health has become politicized.

But in Washington state, with our good leadership, these requirements and mandates are in place. Hopefully, we can keep our state's viral spread in our schools at a minimum, and our students can have a successful school year. It's up to all of us to get vaccinated, get the booster when available, wear our masks, and avoid crowds. And *please* promote vaccinations and mask-wearing with your family and friends. We all need to do our part to win this war.

ZiNita Carrell, 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:



Mary Ziegert

North Thurston Public Schools

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



COMMUNITY SERVICE

The latest wave of Delta virus infections in Thurston County denies us once again the opportunity to participate in person in TCSRA community service projects. Herd immunity will be the best and safest way to resume normal life, but we are not there yet.

Consequently, getting vaccinated is probably the most important community service one can do at this time. Having done that—as I presume most members have done—please do whatever you can to encourage and help any unvaccinated people you know to get the vaccine. It could be as easy as offering someone a ride or as difficult as persuading someone to change his/her mind regarding the personal and public value of the vaccine.

Even though the TCSRA board has decided that we will not meet in person for the time being, we have decided to continue our regular charitable contributions. We will collect and deliver **little and big kids’ socks and underwear** for *The Little Red Schoolhouse*, **toiletries** for *The Other Bank*, and **cash donations** for the *Thurston County Food Bank* and the *Salvation Army*, just as we did last year. In addition, when you’re shopping for Halloween treats, please consider buying and donating some prepackaged snacks such as chips, nuts, granola bars, raisins, individual hot drink packets or whatever else you think a person sleeping at the Interfaith Homeless Shelter might enjoy before bedding down.

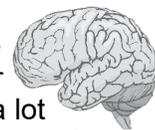
The community service committee will accept your donations on **Saturday, October 30, 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.**, by the big tree in the South Sound Mall parking lot—between the old Sears Store and Applebees.

Please write checks to the organization you choose to support, not to TCSRA. Contributions will be delivered en masse to each organization.

Sally Jones, Community Service Chair

BRAIN HEALTH

As we age, we may become more concerned with our “senior moments” or slight memory lapses. There has been a lot written lately about brain health. For example, Dr. Sanjay Gupta offers a 12-week program for improving brain health in his book, *Keep Sharp*.



Some signs of cognitive decline are memory loss, frequently asking the same question or repeating the same stories, difficulty performing routine tasks, not coming up with the right words to name objects, frequently forgetting events or appointments, or not recognizing familiar places and persons.

There are risks to brain health such as smoking, hearing and vision loss, diabetes, long term depression, heart disease, poor sleep habits, and certain medications that can increase the risk of dementia.

There are many ways to improve memory and take care of your brain. First of all, control your risk factors for brain health. Get regular physical exercise, eat a healthy diet including fruits and vegetables, maintain close ties with family, friends, and community. Volunteer. Engage in intellectually stimulating activities. Read, learn something new—a language, a skill, a sport. Try doing something in a different way or changing your routine: brush your teeth with your non-dominant hand or go home by a different route. These all create new pathways in the brain.

Start with a small change. Maybe add a 10-minute walk the first week; the next week add a fruit to your diet, etc. New research shows that older adults who have busy lifestyles do better in cognitive function tests. Studies have shown that those who are cognitively active develop dementia at a later age than those who are cognitively inactive.

Establishing a routine like putting keys in the same place, paying attention, avoiding multitasking, taking breaks, using a calendar and alarms can all help improve memory.

Gail Feagins, Member and Health Services



In Memoriam

We note the passing of **Margaret Cody, Emily Peters**, and **Sallie Richards**, and we offer sincere condolences to their families and friends.

Thurston County School Retirees' Association
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 If you are leaving for your Snowbird location, please let the WSSRA office know to change your address or temporarily to stop your mailings:
Email michele@wssra.org, or call 360-413-5496.
Remember, the Post Office charges our unit for each forwarded or returned copy of *Bits & Pieces*.

ATTENTION PUBLIC SCHOOL EMPLOYEES: MINI-GRANT APPLICATIONS ARE DUE SOON!



Time is running short! Applications for elementary and secondary mini-grants are due on **Wednesday, October 13**. Please go to the TCSRA website—www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/—to fill out and submit your application online.

All school employees currently working for public school districts in Thurston County are eligible for grants of up to \$250. **Just for the 2021-2022 academic year, TCSRA members are eligible for grants up to \$500.** WSSRA/TCSRA membership information is available on our website, and it's not too late to sign up to qualify for a larger grant.

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.

Grants will be awarded at the beginning of November 2021.

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

OCTOBER PROGRAM (Continued from page 1.)

introduced at 10:00. **Remember, you don't need a computer to participate.** You can call in on your phone and listen to this presentation by dialing the following number and then following the prompts to enter the meeting ID and the passcode:

Meeting ID: 920 1313 6559

Passcode: 842773

To join by phone, call 1-253-215-8782

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**.

Pat Slosson, TCSRA President



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