



# Bits & Pieces

[www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/](http://www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/)

January 2023

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

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Happy New Year! For centuries civilizations have celebrated the beginning of a new year. It was in 46 B.C. that Julius Caesar introduced the Julian calendar. As part of his reform, he instituted January 1 as the first day of the year, which in part honored Janus, the Roman god of beginnings. However, four thousand years ago, according to recorded history, Babylonians celebrated the new year on a day in March at the time of planting crops. The ancient Egyptians celebrated the new year at the time of the Nile's annual flooding. The Chinese New Year is one of the oldest traditions still celebrated today. It is believed to have begun over 3,000 years ago during the Shang Dynasty. Other cultures have traditions that also celebrate new beginnings.

New Year's resolutions may be attributed to the ancient Babylonians. Part of their tradition was to affirm loyalty to the king. They also made promises to the gods. Romans offered sacrifices and made promises for good conduct in the new year. In 1740, John Wesley created the Covenant Renewal Service held at the new year, which became a time for contemplating one's past and future actions.

Food enters into the New Year's festivities of many cultures in the hope of bringing good luck. Eating Hoppin' John, king cake, tamales, soba noodles, 12 Lucky Grapes, lentils, pickled herring, pork and sauerkraut, and New Year's Pretzel are only some of the treats said to bring good luck in the U.S., Mexico, Japan, Spain, Italy, Scandinavia, and Germany. Fireworks and music to welcome the New Year are featured worldwide.

Whatever your family traditions, I wish you the blessings of a new year and success with your New Year's Resolutions. Perhaps you may include one or two resolutions related to TCSRA, e.g., attend a program, volunteer for a committee, or invite someone to join. Any of these efforts will increase the success of our organization.

*Sue Shannon, TCSRA President*

## WELCOME DR. JENNIFER BONDS-RAACKE: PRESIDENT OF SAINT MARTIN'S UNIVERSITY

We are pleased to welcome Dr. Jennifer Bonds-Raacke as guest and speaker at our January luncheon. As of July 1, 2022, she became the 11th president of Saint Martin's University and the first woman to serve as president of the 127-year old institution.

Dr. Bonds-Raacke received her B.A. in psychology and sociology from Christian Brothers University in Memphis, Tennessee. She earned her M.S. and PhD in experimental psychology from Kansas State University.

Prior to coming to Saint Martin's University, Bonds-Raacke worked at both private faith-based colleges and public colleges, including Briar Cliff University, University of North Carolina at Pembroke, Fort Hays State University, and St. Norbert College. During her varied career and administrative roles, she has worked with first generation students, adult learners, and military students.

The Benedictine values of hospitality, listening, justice, respect for persons, and stewardship have been a foundation for Dr. Bonds-Raacke. As she has at previous universities, she plans to help Saint Martin's develop curriculum and conditions that foster equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging (EDIB).

*Vicki Carter, Hospitality/Luncheons*

[Bring a friend, and be sure to make reservations for your entire party. See page 2 for reservation info.]

**Friday, January 20, 2023—12 noon**

**The Ember's Restaurant  
Indian Summer Golf and Country Club**

**Menu: Asian Steak Salad:** marinated steak served on a bed of greens with stir fried vegetables and sesame dressing

**OR**

**Pesto Tortellini (Vegetarian):** Baked cheese tortellini with pesto cream sauce served with fresh vegetables

**Dessert:** Chef's Choice

**(\$20 includes tax and gratuity)**



## LUNCHEON RESERVATIONS

I will be sending out emails to remind you of our upcoming luncheon. Please respond to that email if you plan to attend. We need our reservation count by **noon on Friday, January 13.**

If you **do not receive an email**, or if you **need to cancel or add to your** reservation, email me at [dazicar88@gmail.com](mailto:dazicar88@gmail.com), or call me **no later than noon on Friday** at **253-381-2592**. Please do not call the restaurant with reservation changes. To be added to the email list for notification, please send me your email address.

*ZiNita Carrell, Email Committee Chair*

## LEGISLATIVE REPORT



The eggnog is gone. The Christmas tree took a leap down the gully. It's time for legislators, lobbyists, and advocates to get back to work.

The 2023 Washington State Legislative Session will officially kick off January 9. It is a 105-day long session and should adjourn in April if all goes to plan. The Democratic Party remains in control of Olympia by controlling the Governor's Office and both chambers of the legislature. There are 32 new legislators this session—a turnover rate of 22%. Practically speaking for retirees, that means one out of five legislators know next to nothing about pension and retirement issues. All new legislators need to be educated on our issues. Hopefully, we will gain some champions for retiree issues out of this cohort!

The WSSRA Executive Board and WSSRA State Legislative Committee have approved a list of legislative goals for the 2023 Legislative Session. The Legislative Committee and professional political team will spend the next four months working on:

**Plan 1 COLA:** The Select Committee on Pension Policy (SCPP) has recommended Plan 1 legislation for the 2023 Legislative Session. The recommendation has two parts. The first is a 3% COLA up to \$110 per month. The second is a study to examine potential funding mechanisms for a permanent and automatic Plan 1 COLA. WSSRA supports this proposal; however, we will be sponsoring amendments to increase the COLA amount.

**Medical Benefits:** Medicare and pre-Medicare retirees may purchase retiree health insurance from the Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB). Each group receives a subsidy from the state. Pre-Medicare retirees are grouped with active employees and enjoy reduced premiums from being grouped with younger workers. Medicare retirees receive a 50% premium reduction of up to \$183 per month, per person. This Medicare benefit is not a contractual benefit, and it

*(Continued on page 4; see "Legislative Report")*

## "The Alarming State of the American Student in 2022"

I attempted to find something positive to write about this time, but try as I might, the news is pretty grim at this point. Even though many articles that list the top ten or twenty countries with the best school systems list the USA as number 1, I still found countless articles naming the MANY challenges facing our public schools today.



The pandemic was a "wrecking ball" for U.S. public education. Recent results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed unprecedented declines in American students' knowledge and skills and widening gaps between the highest- and lowest-scoring students. The first annual "State of the American Student" report analyzes nearly three years of research on the impacts of the pandemic on our students' academic progress and mental well-being. Here's what they have learned so far:

1. Students lost critical opportunities to learn and thrive.
2. The typical American student lost several months' worth of language arts and even more in math.
3. Students suffered huge increases in anxiety and depression.
4. Students who were behind before the pandemic are even further behind now, especially ESL students and those with disabilities.

The deeply negative consequences of this pandemic will probably be felt for decades and must be addressed quickly to lessen the impact on individual students, our future workforce, and our society. To address these needs, districts and states must immediately use their federal dollars for proven interventions, such as well-designed tutoring programs, extended learning time, additional mental health support, mentoring, and college and career guidance. Education leaders and researchers must adopt ways to reinvent our public schools and ways to ensure that the system is resilient and will withstand another potential crisis in the future. The "State of the American Student" report is the first report in a series of annual reports that the Center on Reinventing Public Education will produce over the next five years. Hopefully, during that time, American public education will become transformed and reinvented to better suit the varied, profound, and multifaceted needs of students across the country.

*ZiNita Carrell, Education Committee 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:



**Stephen Coker**

**North Thurston Public Schools**

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



## **OVER-THE-COUNTER HEARING AIDS, FDA APPROVED, NOW ON THE MARKET**

Over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids can be worn by adults age 18 and older with perceived mild to moderate hearing loss. The FDA now regulates them as medical devices, and they can be purchased from pharmacies, big-box and consumer electronics stores, and online directly from the manufacturer. One does not need a hearing exam, prescription, or appointment with an audiologist. The average cost is \$1,600 per pair which is \$3,000 less than the average cost of prescription hearing aids.

Of the 28.8 million Americans who need hearing aids, just 16 percent of adults under 69 and 30 percent over 70, have purchased them.

Hearing health is important to a person's overall wellness. Hearing loss can lead to other health problems such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, cognitive decline, isolation, reduced mobility, falls, and even dementia. Corrected hearing can improve a person's brain function and quality of life.

The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) states that you may have mild to moderate hearing loss “...if speech or other sounds seem muffled. You have trouble hearing when you're in a group, in a noisy area, or on the phone. You have to ask others to talk louder or to repeat what they said. You turn up the volume higher than other people prefer when watching TV.”

Frank Lin, co-author of, “Hearing Loss for Dummies,” published by AARP, says that you can test at home using a smartphone app self-test and also calibrate the hearing aid yourself. Manufacturers have also set up help desks to assist customers with fitting and tuning. But, it may take weeks for a new wearer's brain to become

accustomed to processing sounds that have been muffled for years, so fine-tuning and patience are needed. The NIDCD has published a study showing that people with hearing loss can learn to successfully adjust the settings on their own hearing aids.

In “The 6 Best OTC Hearing Aids of 2022,” the National Council on Aging's (NCOA) credentialed Reviews Team shows the results of hand-testing all the top brands, consulting hearing specialists, and surveying hearing aid users. They cover the pros and cons of the brands; Jabra Enhance, Lexie, Audien, Eargo, MD Hearing, and Audicus. The costs of these OTC hearing aids range from \$99 to \$2,998. NCOA's research covers price, hearing aid style, rechargeable battery, blue tooth and mobile app capabilities, adjustment, standard warranty, and financing.

*Sources for this article:*

NCOA Adviser 's article, “The 6 Best OTC Hearing Aids of 2022,” November 10, 2022. Authored by Cara Everett. Medically reviewed by Brian Murray, and Kathleen Cameron. Found at <https://www.ncoa.org>>NCOA Adviser>Hearing Aids.

NIDCD's article, “Over-the-Counter Hearing Aids,” August 2022 and updated on November 14, 2022. NIH Pub. No. 21-DC-8172.

AARP Bulletin, “The Future of Hearing Aids Has Arrived,” October 2022. Authored by Sari Harrar.

**Pat McLachlan, Member & Health Services Committee**



## **COMMUNITY SERVICE**



Despite the ongoing loom of COVID 19 in 2022, TCSRA has taken some giant steps towards normalcy with the in-person convention and recent luncheons. We also continue to make a positive mark on the community through service and donations. Our November and December donations to the Food Bank and the Salvation Army totaled \$2,056.77. Mini-grants and scholarships were awarded to practicing teachers and college students in the amounts of \$13,061 and \$2,000 respectively. Members assembled and donated twelve beautiful baskets for the annual convention raffle and several items for the silent auction.

For the second year in a row (and possibly a new tradition) I delivered 50 “mom bags” of small gifts to the Salvation Army Adopt-a-Family program. Many thanks to everyone who contributed items, especially **Jo Edwards** who sewed lovely holiday-themed bags, and member **Terry Lowe** who coordinated the project with Darlene Soost and their Bible study group at the Olympia Christian Reformed Church. They contributed a impressive 23 bags.

**Sally Jones, Community Service Chair**

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### **LEGISLATIVE REPORT** (Continued from page 2)

must be reauthorized every two years in the state budget. This is the budget writing session, so retirees must ensure it is placed in the state budget this year.

**Pension Governance:** WSSRA is supporting several changes to the pension system to support full funding and equal benefits. The Office of the State Actuary has the state on a repayment plan to pay off pension liabilities. This plan is working, and WSSRA fully supports it. Also, not all school retirees have the same medical benefits in retirement. Plan 3 members get a better deal than Plan 2 members when deferring their insurance. WSSRA has a bill—HB 1008—to enhance and equalize those benefits.

**How To Get Involved:** WSSRA has an email database for emergency legislative contacts. You can sign up on [www.wssra.org](http://www.wssra.org). Updates are sent as conditions warrant, not on a daily or weekly basis. I promise you won't get any emails about aluminum siding or an extended car warranty. It's the best way to keep you informed when critical votes or decisions are being made affecting your interests as a school retiree. A greater level of involvement would be participating in TCSRA, your local unit. **Ann Chenhall** is our unit's legislative representative who can explain what's happening on The Hill. In addition to reading

your copy of *Bits & Pieces* each month, you can get updates at the monthly meetings, where you'll also hear about the need for folks to help with unit tasks. Volunteers keep WSSRA/TCSRA going, so please contact unit leaders if you'd like to be more involved.

**Conclusion:** The 105-day session is set to expire April 23. Legislators have a lot on their minds—not just pensions. Every letter, email, and postcard you send elevates retiree concerns above the rest. The goals set before you are realistically achievable if we work together. Please join us and add your voice to the marble lined trenches of the state capitol.

*Peter Diedrick, WSSRA Legislative Director*

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