



Bits & Pieces

www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/

February 2023

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

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Happy Valentine's Day, Ground Hog's Day, President's Day, and Super Bowl Sunday! We also recognize February as Black History Month and International Month of Black Women in the Arts, celebrating the contributions of African Americans. February is also National Cancer Prevention Month. February also recognizes special weeks such as Random Acts of Kindness Week and National Jell-O Week. Throughout the year, the calendar is peppered with national days, weeks, or months, which range from the frivolous to profound. In February, food-related days include national days for cheddar, tortellini, gumdrop, almond, cabbage, sticky bun, toast, and many more.

In TCSRA, there are activities requiring our attention in February. Patty Gee and the Finance Committee are preparing next year's budget. The draft budget will be presented to the Board in February, to the membership in April, and brought to a vote in May. Ann Chenhall and the Legislative Committee are back at work and met with Sam Hunt on Zoom in January. The Bylaws Committee meets in February. Dorn Barr and Board members made school visits near the end of January and will continue into February. Gail Feagins and the Nominating committee are recruiting candidates for next year's officers. A slate needs to be presented in March. Unit 28 has openings for two representatives on WSSRA committees: the Nominating and Review committee and the Rules and Resolutions committee.

Unit 28 will select our nominees for two WSSRA awards that are due March 17: the Patrick T. Hoban Meritorious and the Stan McNaughton Outreach Awards. A member who has worked to achieve WSSRA goals is eligible for the Hoban award. A member who worked to enhance community lives and improve the image of WSSRA is eligible for the Outreach award. Please consider potential nominees and give your ideas to Sue Shannon. Help us accomplish these tasks, and on February 7 you might observe National Send a Card to a Friend Day or enjoy National Sticky Bun Day on February 21.

Sue Shannon, TCSRA President

WELCOME HWEQUIDI HANFORD MCCLOUD, CULTURAL SPECIALIST AND HISTORIAN.

We welcome Hwequidi Hanford McCloud as our guest speaker at the luncheon on February 17.

A member of the Nisqually Tribe, Hanford McCloud is a tribal leader and has been a Tribal Council member since 2016.

McCloud is a cultural specialist and historian. Education of both tribal members and others is a priority. He often speaks in schools, at the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge

and at other organizations and events. McCloud has been interviewed by different TV stations and newspapers.

Hanford McCloud is the coordinator of the Nisqually Canoe Family. Paddling is the historic way that people traveled from place to place. It is a way to connect with other coastal tribes and villages. The Canoe Journey is an event that includes canoes from many different places. It inspires youth with culture and history.

McCloud is also part of the Emergency Management Department at the Nisqually Indian Tribe, the Leschi Heritage Foundation Director, and on the Board of Directors for the Nisqually Land Trust.

He went to Yelm High School and studied at the Northwest Indian College in Bellingham.

Vicki Carter, Hospitality/Luncheons

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

Friday, February 17, 2023—12 noon

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

Menu: Classic Caesar Salad with chicken or plant-based chicken (v), with house croutons and freshly grated Parmesan

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, February 10**.

If you **do not receive an email**, or if you **need to cancel or add to your** reservation, email me at 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



GOOD NEWS FOR WASHINGTON SCHOOLS!

Want some good news for Washington schools in this pandemic era?

- 2022 saw near record-high graduation rates for students in their fifth, sixth, and seventh years, and the graduation rate for the Class of 2022 was 80+%.
- Enrollment numbers are up! Transfers to private schools and homeschooling peaked during the height of the pandemic in 2020 and have since returned to pre-pandemic rates, even higher in some grades.
- Federal emergency relief dollars went to support health and safety, access to educational technology, mental health counselors, and academic interventions. Thousands of individuals employed with these dollars are paid to provide direct academic support to our students. These and other pandemic dollars provide dedicated staffing to support students to graduation, free mental health services, and access to post-secondary education while in high school at no cost to the student.

Good news indeed, and challenges remain. This money is about 5% of districts' budgets; we still need to fix our school funding methods this legislative session, increase support for students with disabilities, fully fund meals for kids, and provide access to books for all, enhance school safety for kids and educators, and more. Please make your support for such things known to your state legislators <https://leg.wa.gov/> They're in town now!

Gery Gerst, Education Committee Co-Chair

In Memoriam

We note the passing of **Burt Backman, Dennis Davey, Alfred Lynch, and Ronald Scamfer**. We offer sincere condolences to their families and friends.

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

The first quarter of the 2023 Washington State Legislative Session has ended. As you would expect, over one thousand bills and amendments have already been sponsored. School retiree issues are currently in good shape. WSSRA request bills have been drafted, sponsored, filed, assigned bill numbers, and referred to committees. Many have already received committee hearings. Here's the rundown:



- **Plan 1 COLA:** Three Plan 1 COLA bills have been sponsored. Two were approved and requested by the Select Committee on Pension Policy. House Bill 1057 and Senate Bill 5350 are identical and would provide a 3% Plan 1 increase of up to \$110 per month. Both bills also call for a study on funding a permanent Plan 1 COLA. House Bill 1294 sets up an annual permanent 3% COLA. House Bill 1294 is the superior bill for retirees, but it was not supported by the Select Committee on Pension Policy.
- **Medicare Eligible Healthcare Benefit:** The \$183 monthly medical benefit is approved in the budget process. Governor Inslee recommended the program be continued. WSSRA is lobbying the House and Senate budget committees to ensure it is funded again.
- **Plan 2/3 Medical Insurance Deferrals:** This is a technical issue. It's easier for Plan 3 members to separate from service and retain their retiree health insurance. House Bill 1008 equalizes health benefits for Plan 2 and Plan 3 members by making it easier for Plan 2 members to separate from service and retain rights to PEBB retiree insurance.
- **Pension Funding:** The legislature is currently on track to have unfunded pension liabilities paid off by the year 2025.
- **Equalizing Post Retirement Employment:** The Select Committee on Pension Policy endorsed legislation to allow all retirees at least 867 hours of post retirement employment. Currently, some classes of early retirees are not allowed to work one hour without losing their month's pension payment. The rule is confusing, and the Department of Retirement Systems would like to simplify it and create a less burdensome system. This bill, HB 1056, received a public hearing in January.
- **Jury Duty Deferrals for Seniors:** Your very own **Thurston County School Retirees' Association**

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HEALTH BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

There are many health benefits from volunteering, especially for those over 65. It can improve your physical and mental health. It keeps you moving physically and thinking at the same time. A volunteer's experience of a sense of purpose and a feeling of appreciation can help reduce stress. Stress reduction decreases risks of heart disease, stroke, anger, and anxiety, etc. Research by Carnegie Mellon University showed that older adults who volunteered at least 200 hours a year were 40% less likely to develop high blood pressure. A Longitudinal Study of Aging showed that those who volunteer have a lower mortality rate than those who do not.

Volunteering has mental health benefits. Volunteering is a great way to make new friends, expand your social network, and find people with common interests. Teaching valuable skills to others and practicing social skills can give you a sense of community and connectedness. This prevents feelings of isolation. Your body releases endorphins during positive social contact, giving you a sense of happiness, combating depression. Volunteering can improve life satisfaction, self-esteem, and self-confidence.

There are many volunteer opportunities in every community whether you are interested in youth, environmental, health, religious, political, or community causes. Check with local nonprofit and cultural organizations, schools, churches, and hospitals. (Read the companion article below.)

Your Thurston County School Retirees' Association has many opportunities. We will soon be looking for volunteers for our leadership team of officers for the next year. There are also committees needing help. We were not able to fill all positions for 2022–23, and we want to keep our organization strong. Consider stepping up in 2023–2024.

Gail Feagins, Health and Member Services



READY TO RESUME VOLUNTEERING?

As established in this month's health article, volunteering is good for you, the volunteer, as well as for the entity you choose to support. TCSRA is by nature a service-oriented organization. We participate in a few group activities each year and make annual charitable donations, but do these few things release the healthy endorphins in the same way that does regular, in-person volunteering in an activity you are passionate about?

Organizations that rely on volunteers took a huge hit

during COVID as people simply stayed home. Now is the time to resume volunteering and consider the myriad opportunities available.

So where to begin? Choose a group or a cause that would benefit from your personal gifts and passion. It might be young people, old people, sick people, lonely people, homeless people, hungry people, immigrants, animals, or the environment. Choose something that tugs at your heart.

If children's education is still most important to you, despite being retired, all the local school districts have many and varied opportunities to volunteer. With a little prior preparation, you can probably choose the school, subject, and even the teacher you'd like to work with, but you will be required to fill out a formal, detailed application.

The South Sound Reading Foundation (SSRF) is an organization dedicated to encourage reading. SSRF welcomes volunteers to collect, prepare and distribute books to kids. We know that illiteracy in today's world is an enormous roadblock in everyday life. The Little Red School House is another organization that supports kids.

If you are moved by the frightening sight in downtown Olympia of people who lack basic necessities, look no further than the Thurston County Food Bank, The Olympia Union Gospel Mission, Interfaith Works, City Gates Ministries, the Family Support Center of South Sound, the Salvation Army, SafePlace, or The Olympia Free Clinic for opportunities to volunteer.

To help meet some of the less visible emotional needs of both children and elders, consider volunteering for the Senior Services for South Sound, the Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Southwest Washington, or the Dispute Resolution Services.

Many other local organizations depend on volunteers to function, and they span almost any interest you may have. Look to the Olympia Film Society, the Washington Center, The Friends of the Library, Habitat for Humanity, the Children's Hospital Store, gift shops in the local hospitals, the Bargain Boutique at the Olympia Senior Center, and Concern for Animals.

If gardening, working outdoors, and environmental issues are for you, consider Grub, the Parks Departments, the Coalition for Ecosystem Preservation, and the Center for Natural Lands management. There are work parties for weeding, planting, and pulling Scotch broom, etc. If you are affiliated with a religious group, they often sponsor service projects for the community.

There is virtually no end to what you can do to share your gifts and talents with the community.

Sally Jones, Community Service Chair

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LEGISLATIVE REPORT (Continued from page 2.)

has raised the issue of jury duty deferrals. A proposed change by the Thurston County retirees would align the state and federal deferral rules, allowing seniors over the age of 70 to request to be excused from jury duty for health reasons without a letter from their doctor. The bill number is HB 1312.

An update will be provided in your next newsletter. Following along more regularly is easy at the legislative webpage www.leg.wa.gov! Click on the bill information tab, enter the bill number, and the computer will tell you exactly where a bill is.

Peter Diedrick, WSSRA Legislative Director

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: Pat Slosson, 360-561-3232.

Information for the March 2023 issue is due by February 8.

VALENTINE'S DAY FUN FACTS

Teachers receive the most Valentine's cards each year, followed by mothers and wives.



In the US, Valentine's Day industry is currently at \$14.7 billion.

Americans spend more on Valentine Cards than they do on Christmas cards.

Hallmark Cards released its first Valentine's card in 1913.

The ubiquitous Conversation Hearts Valentine candy has a shelf life of 5 years.

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:

Becky Schiedick
Yelm Community Schools



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