



www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/

December 2023

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

#### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The holidays are especially joyous when shared with children. I spent a few days in early November basking in the company of two in Kansas City, my great niece and nephew, ages 13 and 12, respectively. Folks who know me well know I have no grandchildren, so I have to borrow from other people, most often my sister. Kamea and Kai are bright, talented, affectionate youngsters on whom "Auntie Sue" loves to dote.

As school employees, students—children and young people—are the reason for our existence. TCSRA members have devoted their lives to the young through the various roles in which they serve or have served: teachers, counselors, administrators, office professionals, bus drivers, cooks, and all of the myriad other special positions they have held.

TCSRA continues to touch many lives. Among our service projects, we donate to the Thurston County Food Bank and to the Salvation Army. These donations help support children and families in our area. At our November luncheon, our generous members donated \$1,425 for the Food Bank!

Mini-grants for students provide more direct support to students. We are pleased to award 59 projects this fall representing all eight school districts in Thurston county to total \$12,657. These projects will touch dozens of students, perhaps hundreds.

During the holidays, in addition to remembering current and past youth, perhaps members can reach out and make new connections through volunteer efforts or gifts that we may be able to provide.

And, of course, let's remember one another at this festive time of year. Developing and maintaining relationships remain a priority for me.

Happy holidays and warm regards to all TCSRA folks!

Sue Shannon, TCSRA President

# JOIN US FOR HOLIDAY MUSIC



TCSRA is honored and excited to welcome the NTHS Jazz Choir, directed by Caitlin Van Zee to entertain us at our December luncheon.

The Jazz Choir is the top auditioned choir at North Thurston High School. These students, sophomore through seniors, are hard working, fun, dedicated, and busy young people. They are not only involved in choir but also in numerous activities, volunteer opportunities for the community, and jobs. They all share the goal of spreading the love of music to others!

Caitlin Van Zee has been the choir director at North Thurston High School for eleven years. Caitlin grew up in Spokane and attended Eastern Washington University receiving her BA in Music Education. She then completed her Masters in Curriculum and Instruction at Washington Governors University. Caitlin loves teaching music and is the Vocal Arts Coordinator for the district.

In her free time she enjoys playing billiards, reading, and being with her husband and five-year-old son.

Fun Fact: Caitlin received a WSSR Foundation Scholarship as a high school senior.

Bobbie Andreas, Hospitality

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

#### Friday, December 15, 2023—12 noon

The Ember's Restaurant Indian Summer Golf and Country Club

**Menu:** Roasted Pork with a Mushroom Herb Au Jus, served with oven-roasted potatoes and vegetables

OR

Pesto Tortellini (V)
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, December 8.

If you do not receive an email, or if you need to cancel or if you need to add to your reservation, email me at <a href="mailto:dazicar88@gmail.com">dazicar88@gmail.com</a>, or call me no later than noon on Friday, December 8, (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



# "GROW YOUR OWN" PRGRAMS: ENCOURAGING YOUNG PEOPLE TO GO INTO THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

We all know that there are not enough young people going into teaching. We have a serious problem in America with a shortage of teachers in our schools, with many retiring, some dropping out, and not enough students entering teaching programs.

Here's a new idea I stumbled upon. In West Virginia, there is a program called "Grow Your Own" for high school students. It is a statewide coherent approach in which high school students sign up for 24 hours of dual enrollment or advanced placement credits, including four Introduction to Education classes and 115 hours of field experience in classrooms. They enter college as sophomores and immediately are accepted into the education program. During their third year of college they can earn a salary and are listed as "teacher of record" in a classroom under close supervision. The second phase of this program is that, as juniors in high school, they can be federally registered teacher apprentices and receive a salary of \$11.00/hr., and as seniors they can receive a salary of \$12.00/hr. (West Virginia's minimum wage is \$8.75/hr.) This program has been slow to get started, as counties are required to fund it. If the state could pick up the cost, this program could really take off! Of course, the school districts would have to offer good teaching salaries to attract and retain talented, young teachers!

In addition, this gives these students a chance to see if teaching is something they'd like to pursue. Food for thought?

ZiNita Carrell, Education Committee Co-Chair

## LEGISLATIVE REPORT

It's always fun sharing good news. On November 14 the legislature's Select Committee on Pension Policy (SCPP) voted to sponsor Plan 1 COLA legislation for the 2024



legislative session. If passed by the legislature next year, Plan 1 retirees would receive a 3% increase of up to \$125 per month starting July 1, 2024. The previous cap had been \$110 per month but WSSRA and our partners successfully lobbied for the increase to \$125.

The 2024 Legislative Session starts January 8 and will last 60 days. It is a short window for passing legislation. Advocates must move swiftly to ensure a Plan 1 COLA, protect medical benefits, and enhance pension opportunities for members in Plans 2 and 3. Projections of government insolvency continue to be proven untrue. Once again, the state has an additional billion dollars to spend—plenty of money for a Plan 1 COLA and other pension enhancements.

Unfortunately, every other advocacy organization—from dog catchers to funeral home directors—are also asking for state money. Our success is directly tied to **your** ability to advocate to **your** elected representatives. We are set up for success with retirees in every district across the state, legislators just need to hear from constituents about what is most important.

Peter Diedrick, WSSRA Legislative Director

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Each month we draw the name of an "active" (not-yet-retired) member, who will receive a Starbucks gift card in the mail.

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This month's winner is:

Mark Tate

North Thurston Public Schools

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

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# In Memoriam

We note the passing of *James Theiss* and *Hal Williams*, and we offer sincere condolences to their families and friends.

# MINI-GRANT RECIPIENTS NAMED

In 1997 TCSRA began awarding mini-grants to school employees in order to supplement and enrich the educational environment. This year TCSRA received 48 elementary and 31 middle school/high school applications, including 17 from TCSRA members. The applications described a variety of worthwhile projects, covering a wide array of academic areas. We were able to fund 59 requests, totaling \$12,657. Congratulations to the recipients! Best wishes for a successful year ahead.

#### **Tumwater School District:**

Karlie Pasion	Michael T. Simmons Elem.
Carisa Shaw	Black Lake Elementary
*Sarah Haseman	Black Lake Elementary
Gabi Jones	Black Lake Elementary
Katie Frazier	Black Lake Elementary
Kathy Spieles-Flaatrud	Bush Middle School
Laurie Harris	Tumwater Middle School
Emma-Kate Schaake	Tumwater High School
*David Heywood	Black Hills High School

## Olympia School District:

*Catherine Annie Bailey	Margaret McKenny Elem.
*Keary McCowan	Madison Elementary
*Patti Francis	Margaret McKenny Elem.
Angi Swan	Hansen Elementary
*Rebecca Rutzick	Hansen Elementary
*Molly Sjoboen	Garfield Elementary
*Marti Buck	Transitions Academy
Bryan Keister	Capital High School
RoAnn Gutierrez	Washington Middle School

## **Griffin School District:**

Frank Joseph Ehresmann	Griffin Elementary
Johanna Dowler	Griffin Elementary
Wendy Potkonjak	Griffin Elementary
Jenna Anderson	Griffin Elementary
Suzanne Stottlemyre	Griffin Middle School

# Yelm Community Schools:

*Linda Crawford	Fort Stevens Elementary
*Susan Buchmiller	McKenna Elementary
*Cyndy Freshour-Johnson &	Team Prairie Elementary
Mylisha Lanegan	McKenna Elementary
Jo Foley Robles	McKenna Elementary
Hillary Hull	Yelm High School

#### Rochester School District:

Robert Fry	Grand Mound Elementary
Kay Marquez, Karey Richards	Rochester Primary School
Christina Bailey	Grand Mound Elementary
Echo Quarnstrom	Grand Mound Elementary
Shaundi Robarge	Grand Mound Elementary
*Velynda ReneeHubbard	Rochester Middle School
*Susan Holmes	Rochester Middle School
*Amy Norton	Rochester Middle School
*Carrie Black	Rochester Middle/High School
Amber Parsons	Rochester Middle School

#### Tenino School District:

Colleen Taylor	Parkside Elementary
Brooke Hart	Parkside Elementary
Noreen Ryckman	Parkside Elementary
Andrew Bowerly	Tenino High School
Cecelia Meade	Tenino High School

#### **North Thurston Public Schools:**

*Carly Stigall	South Bay Elementary
Krista Mikealson	Seven Oaks Elementary
Denise A. Whitesel Mallek	Seven Oaks Elementary
Katie Tingle	Ignite Family Academy
Ami Smith	Horizons Elementary
*Mathew Landers	Pleasant Glade Elem.
Anndria Cook	Woodland Elementary
Carol Richardson & Team	Evergreen Forest Elem.
Dena Green	Salish Middle School
Mindy Atkinson	V.O.I.C.E. Program
Jimi Sharp	V.O.I.C.E. Program
Veronica French	Salish Middle School
Scott Gagnon	Salish Middle School
Dainian Cabaal Diatriate	

#### Rainier School District:

Kate Gurnsey	Rainier Elementary
Shanna Martin	Rainier Elementary

#### \* TCSRA member

Elementary Mini-Grant team: Nancy Zabel, Patti Colombo, Sue Koch, Laurie Jones, Laurie Gieblehaus

Secondary Mini-Grant team: Karen Keller, Duane Olson, Will Gentz, Linda O'Shaughnessy, Diane Kildow

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#### ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



# **COMMUNITY SERVICE**

Though some who live in neighborhoods may regard October as the start of the giving season (i.e., when "how many kids came to your house?" becomes a common thread of conversation), December marks the true crux of our collective charitable nature. We at TCSRA gave to the food bank in November, but December is when we seem to feel most acutely the need to give. The airwaves, retailers, holiday decorations, bazaars, concerts, parties, and multiple ubiquitous Santas conspire to remind us that this is the season of giving, even though kindness and charity are not necessarily the impetus for all of this activity. However, many do respond in a true spirit of generosity. In December at TCSRA we will collect monetary donations for the Salvation Army.

And for the past two years we have responded by making "mom bags" for the moms of the Salvation Army Adopt-a-Family program, believing that moms

often tend to deny themselves in an effort to give their kids the best possible holiday. In December 2022, we gave 50 "mom bags" jointly with a group from the Olympia Christian Reformed Church, organized by TCSRA member

**Terry Lowe**. In order to continue this project for 2023, your donations of small gift items or cash to purchase some are needed by December 10, which is, alas, before the December luncheon. So there will be collection boxes at the WSSRA office, at Gull Harbor Lutheran Church—open in the mornings, Monday through Friday—and at my house. In addition, I will gladly pick up donations from your homes beginning December 1. Contact me at: 360-866-8039 or 360-480-0972 (call or text) or by email at <a href="mailto:slipox@gmail.com">slipox@gmail.com</a>.

Should you enjoy the creativity of filling an entire bag (or bags) on your own, I will pick them up or you may deliver them directly to the Salvation Army on 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Olympia by December 13.



Sally Jones, Community Service Chair

**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 January 2024 issue is due by December 13.

Please email copy to <a href="mailto:pslosson1@comcast.net">pslosson1@comcast.net</a>