

Bits & Pieces

www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/

January 2024

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

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Happy New Year to all TCSRA members, retired and active. As you probably know, 2024 is the Year of the Dragon on the Chinese Zodiac, the fifth in a twelve-year cycle. The year goes from February 10, 2024 to January 28, 2025.

The distinctive calendar intrigues me. The Chinese Zodiac consists of 12 animal signs. Additionally, each year includes a natural element: metal, water, wood, fire, and earth. The dragon, according to the Chinese Horoscope for 2024, represents authority, prosperity, and good fortune.

"Specifically, the Wood Dragon Year of 2024 combines the dragon's characteristics with the nurturing wood element. This combination is expected to bring about growth, progress, and abundance. It's seen as an ideal period for fresh starts and laying down the groundwork for lasting success. This alignment suggests a time for renewal and establishing foundations that pave the way for long-term achievements," states Soumi Pyne in the *Hindustan Times*.

Hopefully, the Year of the Dragon will bring us growth and progress as we work to increase our numbers and participation. We are grateful to those of you who maintain your annual membership and to those who have recently joined us.

A big thank you to the **membership** and **mini-grant committees**—chaired by **Dorn Barr**, **Nancy Zabel**, and **Karen Keller**, respectively—and **treasurer Will Gentz**, who have been doing their parts presenting 2023-2024 mini-grant checks and certificates to the elementary and secondary recipients in Thurston County public schools. In their presentations, they are sharing information about our association and inviting staff members to join. Their efforts are helping us grow our membership numbers back to our high of a few years ago of over 1,000 members.

Best wishes for the incoming year, TCSRA folks. May you enjoy good health, good friends, and good times!

Sue Shannon, TCSRA President

WELCOME ELENA HUIZAR, PRESENTING "BEWARE! SCAMMERS AND SCOUNDRELS!"

January's luncheon speaker is Elena G. Huizar, from the Washington State Attorney General's Office. Elena is part of the Outreach Services Team within the Consumer Protection Division.

Prior to moving to the Seattle area in 2014, Elena was a librarian in Eastern Washington. She has been with the Attorney General's Office for over ten years.

Elena travels throughout Washington, educating and informing consumers about ways to protect themselves and what their rights are in given situations. As well as speaking to groups such as ours, she helps both consumers and business owners of limited English proficiency learn what their rights and responsibilities are under the Consumer Protection Act.

The Consumer Protection Division covers a large variety of issues including scams. Elena will inform us about different types of scams and what protective measures we, as individuals, can take. The division believes that the best way to prevent fraud is to give people ways to avoid it before they become victims. The division also works with other government agencies, businesses, and non-profits.

There will be time for questions and answers at the end of the presentation.

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 19, 2024 —12 noon

The Ember's Restaurant
Indian Summer Golf and Country Club

Menu: Chicken Parmigiana with pasta
OR
Eggplant parmigiana (Vegetarian):

Dessert: Chef's Choice

(\$20 includes tax and gratuity)



LUNCHEON RESERVATIONS



I will be sending out emails to remind you of our January 19 luncheon. Please respond to that email if you plan to attend. We need our reservation count by **noon on Friday, January 12**.

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 dazicar88@gmail.com, or call me **no later than noon on Friday, January 12, (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



We're off to the races. The 2024 legislative session begins January 8. It is scheduled to be a shorter 60-day session, assuming all goes to plan.

Deadlines arrive quickly—almost spontaneously—during short sessions. Bills must be sponsored and passed out of their initial committees by Monday, February 5.

WSSRA is working on legislation for members of **all** school employee pension plans:

Plan 1: The Select Committee on Pension policy is recommending a Plan 1 COLA for the summer of 2024. This bill must be passed during this legislative session. The SSCP is also working on a study to implement a permanent, automatic Plan 1 COLA in the future. WSSRA is working with the Office of the State Actuary on that study.

Plans 2/3: WSSRA is sponsoring legislation to provide extra pension credit to school employees who serve more than 30 years. This would improve financial security for future retirees and help to alleviate staffing shortages that are currently ailing school districts.

Health Benefits for All Members: All retirees participating in PEBB insurance receive insurance premium subsidies from the state, **and none of those benefits are contractual obligations**. Medicare retirees receive the monthly \$183 benefit that we regularly discuss. Pre-Medicare retirees are kept in a PEBB insurance pool with younger employees—a highly valuable benefit that we don't discuss as much. We must keep working to ensure both of these benefits stay in place.

The legislative session always unfolds in unexpected ways. The WSSRA legislative team will keep in touch. Bill numbers for WSSRA priorities will be distributed as soon as they're available.

Peter Diedrick, WSSRA Legislative Coordinator

THE BREAKTHROUGH IS THAT THERE IS NO BREAKTHROUGH



In September of 1973 OSPI required that all districts and thus all teachers write down the goals and objectives for every class. Fearing they would be evaluated based on student achievement, teachers quickly winnowed down their listings on the GO project to things they thought almost every student could meet. They set the bar pretty low. So, the first statewide effort to improve student outcomes via “breakthrough” failed. We are plagued by a breakthrough mentality, always searching for the “one thing” that can be managed top down that will make everything better. No matter how you want to measure it, everything we have tried since 1973 has failed too.

What have they tried?

- Every teacher should have a masters' degree. *No change.*
- Much stricter licensure requirements. *No change.*
- Board certification for teachers. *No change.*
- Chromebooks for every student. *No change.*
- Widespread use of Canvas or Google—software that manages assignments and text materials. *No change.*
- Mini school boards in each school to improve learning outcomes. *No change.*
- Restructuring governance models. *No change.*
- ITIP (Instructional Theory Into Practice) instruction for every teacher. *No change.*
- Ever more lengthy and burdensome evaluation models such as Danielson. *No change.*
- Whole reading. *No change.*
- High stakes testing. *No change.*
- Less drill and practice in elementary math instruction. *No change.* (Actually things got worse.)
- Common core standards. *No change.*

It's a 50-year trend. I have a list of more than 75 things we have tried that had no effect on student outcomes. Yet, we persist in looking for the breakthrough that will never be found. My great-grandmother taught grades 4 through 8 in a two-room schoolhouse near Black Lake, and she had virtually the same outcomes that we have today. She used cooperative groups, peer tutors, and generous amounts of drill and practice. If a kid acted out, she told the parents who then took the kid back to the farm to pull stumps for a few days.

The only breakthrough is realizing that there will never be a breakthrough. Learning and test scores only improve when we find skilled, caring teachers who can connect with their students and get them to engage in meaningful work. Everything else is secondary. Students are not the products of our enterprise. They are the workers who create knowledge and skill.

Jim Slosson, 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:



Ryan Aufort

North Thurston Public Schools

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

ONE RELIABLE RESOURCE FOR ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT HEALTH ISSUES

Where do you look for answers to your questions about health problems or issues? One reliable resource is the AARP Bulletin.

In the December 5, 2023, *AARP Bulletin*, the cover story is "Your Most Urgent Health Questions Answered." AARP gives the answers from experts for 18 common health questions, such as: Should I get the new RSV vaccine or this fall's new COVID vaccine? Is long-term use of proton pump inhibitors taken for acid reflux linked to dementia? Since I am living above the 37th parallel, I am at risk of vitamin D deficiency in winter, so how much should I be taking in a supplement?

The *Bulletin* also features insightful, researched articles, such as: "How States Are Expanding Home Care." In this article, Washington State is second in home and community-based care spending but it lags on adult day services, so it ranks 8th on the state scorecard. A second article answers the question: "Why Do I Have IBS?" It explains 4 causes and their solutions. A third article explains "The Risks of Medical Credit Cards." Research shows that consumers paid \$1 billion in deferred interest from 2018 to 2020, averaging interest rates of 27 percent on these credit cards as compared to 16 percent on conventional cards.

In addition to the 10 issues of the *Bulletin* a year, AARP publishes 6 issues of the *AARP Magazine* and 4 weekly niche lifestyle newsletters, *Sisters*, *The Girlfriend*, *The Ethel*, and *The Arrow*. The *Magazine* contains useful articles on money, health, travel, and lifestyle as well as profiles of intriguing people.

"AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering people 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. AARP

(Continued on page 4; see "One Reliable Resource for Answers To Your Questions About Health Issues")

In Memoriam

We note the passing of **Doris Burke, Milton Bronsdon**, and **Joanne Goodwin**, and we offer sincere condolences to their families and friends.



COMMUNITY SERVICE



For the third year, TCSRA created 46 "Mom Bags," bags of small gifts to the Salvation Army Adopt-a-Family program. The generosity of our members has been overwhelming and the bags are nicer than ever. Thanks to members **Jo Edwards** and **Joanne Borden**, who stepped in to help when Jo's sewing machine broke down mid-project, and to Kathleen Newcomer from Gull Harbor Lutheran Church who sewed 28 creative bags. Thanks also to member **Terry Lowe** and Darlene Soost from the Bible study group at the Olympia Christian Reformed Church who coordinated a contribution of 24 complete bags. 70 bags in total!

This year each of our bags includes a packet of delightfully unique cards designed and donated by Olympia artist Pam Corwin. In addition, each bag has a pair of fuzzy or holiday socks, at least one nice toiletry/bath item, a holiday decoration, a candle item, several small candy canes, an emergency fridge magnet, a notepad or journal and at least one or two other items from the array of interesting donations. These include kitchen items and colorful potholders and hot pads hand-woven by member **Signe Feeney**.

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to the "Mom Bag" project.

Additionally, at our December luncheon our generous members donated \$1,425 for the Salvation Army.

Sally Jones, Community Service Chair

Welcome, New Members:

Active, not-yet-retired, members are underlined.

Keith Sorensen
Linda Nelson
Brian Hardcastle
Karina Champion
Lovette Farler
Carly Stigall

Mary Keating
Matthew Landers
Rebecca Rutzick
Annette Wells
Keary McCowan
Molly Sjoboen

Please report any address or telephone changes to the **WSSRA Office** at: **360-413-5496** or michele@wssra.org

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**Happy
New
Year!**

*ONE RELIABLE RESOURCE FOR ANSWERS TO YOUR
QUESTIONS ABOUT HEALTH ISSUES (Continued from pg 3)*

strengthens communities and advocates for what matters most to the more than 100 million Americans 50-plus and their families: health security, financial stability, and personal fulfillment.”

To learn more, visit www.aarp.org/about-aarp/. Membership is \$16 per year or \$12 on automatic renewal. These information resources can come to you on paper and/or digitally, and the *ARRP Publications App* for your computer and smart phone is included in your membership and contains archives of these publications.

Pat McLachlan, Member & Health Services Committee

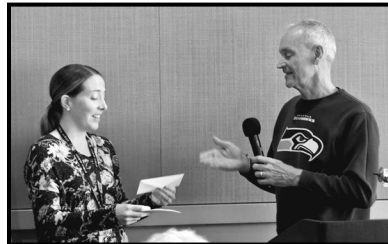
BITS & PIECES, the newsletter of the Thurston County School Retirees' Association, is published nine times a year, September through May, as a membership service.

Editor: Pat Slosson, 360-561-3232.

Information for the February 2024 issue is due by January 15.

Please email copy to editortcsra@gmail.com

THANK YOU NTHS JAZZ CHOIR



The NTHS Jazz Choir entertained us at our December luncheon, performing an outstanding selection of holiday songs under the direction of **Caitlin Van Zee**. President **Sue Shannon** awarded Caitlin a one-year membership to TCSRA. Treasurer **Will Gentz** presented a \$150 honorarium to the NTHS Jazz Choir. What a wonderful event!

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If you would prefer to receive only emailed copies of *Bits & Pieces* rather than paper ones in the mail, please send your request to **Sharon Dennis** at sed6501@outlook.com

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