

Bits & Pieces

www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/

February 2024

Unit 28 of the Washington State School Retirees' Association

Serving retired and active school employees and our community.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Needed: Suggestions for WSSRA Award Nominees

Happy February with its holidays—Valentine's Day and Presidents' birthdays. It is also the awards season in the entertainment world. Are you a fan? We saw the Golden Globes and Emmys ceremonies in January; Grammys, SAG, BAFTA, and Spirit Awards are scheduled for February; the Oscars will follow in March. I catch an occasional ceremony, hit or miss. I like to learn about the many shows I haven't seen!

We are also beginning the awards season for WSSRA and TCSRA. **March 17, 2024**, is the deadline for nominations of candidates for the association's annual awards, which will be announced in June at convention.

We have three awards to consider, and we ask members of TCSRA to please help. The Patrick T. Hoban and Stan McNaughton awards have been given traditionally. This year, the Ester Wilfong Legislative Advocacy Award will also be awarded. Brief statements of the essential criteria for the awards follow:

The Hoban Meritorious Award looks internally to recognize a WSSRA/TCSRA member who has performed beyond the norm to accomplish his/her assigned duties for the association.

The McNaughton Award looks outwardly as it recognizes a member whose volunteer participation in the community has helped improve the image of school retirees.

The Ester Wilfong Legislative Advocacy Award will recognize a member who has worked on behalf of WSSRA's legislative priorities and who has served multiple years in this work at the state or local levels.

Our unit wants to nominate viable candidates for these awards. Please review the membership of TCSRA, perhaps using the current directory. Send the names of any potential nominees to Sue Shannon by **February 26**, including pertinent information about the candidate. We appreciate your participation in this process. We hope that TCSRA makes a strong showing!

Sue Shannon, TCSRA President

DOWN BUT NOT OUT, THE EFFECTS OF DEPRESSION

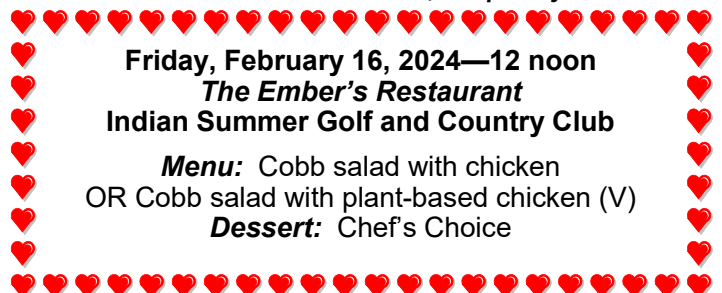
TCSRA member **Leslie Hammaker** will present a program on depression at the luncheon on February 15, 2024. Leslie is familiar with the disease, upfront and personal, through her son's experiences. She will cover topics including: how to recognize depression in yourself, a friend, or a relative; and then what to do, how to get help, and how to give help. She states, "We all need to realize there should be no stigma attached to mental illness; we are not alone; hope is real."

Leslie grew up in Olympia, left for college in 1965, and did not return to live here until 2007. She and her husband Bill taught with DODDS in Germany, Italy, Okinawa, and Misawa, Japan. They then taught in International Schools in Cairo, Egypt; Islamabad, Pakistan; Brasilia, Brazil; and Manila, Philippines. They also lived in Cuba. Bill was a high school English teacher and a football coach. Leslie taught kindergarten through 5th grade.

Leslie returned to Olympia, teaching at Madison Elementary, when it was evident that her younger son was not doing well at the University of Washington. Her son was diagnosed with depression and the "saga of finding help began...sort of like the children's movie *The Never Ending Story*," she said. In 2010, Leslie took a class, *Family to Family* from the National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI). The class supports and educates family members with a loved one who has a mental condition. Leslie concludes, "It saved my sanity. In 2014, I became a volunteer leader for NAMI classes. Last year I got an award for volunteering 400+ hours!"

This will be an informative program. Bring a friend and be sure to make reservations for your entire party. (See page 2 for reservation info.)

Sue Shannon, Hospitality Committee



Friday, February 16, 2024—12 noon
The Ember's Restaurant
Indian Summer Golf and Country Club

Menu: Cobb salad with chicken
OR Cobb salad with plant-based chicken (V)
Dessert: Chef's Choice

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 9.**

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, February 9 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



Here's the latest as of January 15. The 2024 regular legislative session started January 8. This is a short 60-day legislative session, and it's moving fast.

The first deadline to pass bills out of committee is January 31.

Critical retiree issues are receiving public hearings and legislators' attention. The Plan 1 COLA (HB 1985) and the legislation granting benefits for the full month of death (HB 2013) received public hearings on January 15. WSSRA is pushing for a fast vote so the bills move ahead of the critical deadlines. Legislators are also reviewing proposals from the Governor to lower retiree health costs. The next newsletter will have updates on committee, and, hopefully, on the House floor votes.

A bit of inside baseball: Legislators made a strategic decision NOT to introduce House and Senate companion versions of our retiree priorities this year. This means that the Plan 1 COLA (HB 1985) MUST pass the legislature for Plan 1 retirees to get a COLA this year. There's not a backup bill waiting in the wings in case someone drops the ball. That is true for the "month of death" legislation (HB 2013) as well. The decision to have one bill makes sense for the prime sponsors, but means we need to pass HB 1085 and HB 2013 through all the critical steps by mid-February so both chambers can build the costs into their 2024-2025 budget proposals.

Legislative updates are being posted every Friday on Facebook and our website: www.wssra.org.

Peter Diedrick, WSSRA Legislative Director

In Memoriam

We note the passing of **Milton Bronsdon, James Grosso**, and **Sharon LaBuda**. We offer sincere condolences to their families and friends.

INFORMED VOTES MATTER

Our schools are affected by decisions in the political arena, national to local, including by **your** vote, so I offer this information because you care about public education.

Our state ballot this year will likely have 6 initiatives by Let's Go Washington (LGW). Aim? To rescind laws. LGW is funded by Redmond businessman Brian Heywood who gave more than \$6 million to gather the initiative signatures.

One LGW initiative would end Washington's recent capital gains tax, so here are the facts:

- According to a 2018 report released by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, we have the most regressive tax system in the U.S.
- The new state capital gains tax is an effort to introduce more progressive taxation in Washington. It was upheld by the State Supreme Court.
- 41 other states have tax capital gains, but ours exempts the first \$250,000, an exemption that's among the highest nationally.
- In its 1st year, nearly \$900 million was collected from this tax, which taxes 7% on profits exceeding \$250,000 gained from the sale of stocks and bonds.

This tax goes to fund K-12 education and early learning programs. \$500 million per year increases funding for childcare, early learning, and other education services. Revenue above \$500 million per year is used to build/improve schools.

Our law doesn't tax profits from real estate, sale of family-owned small businesses, timber/timberlands, livestock, commercial fishing privileges, AND retirement accounts (including 401Ks, deferred compensation plans, IRA/Roth IRA, employee defined contribution plans & defined benefit plans).

Thus, it applies to the wealthiest 0.2 percent of taxpayers. FYI: if approved by voters, this initiative would retroactively rescind school revenues acquired for 2 years.

Perhaps save this for reference when you see ads on this initiative. Your informed vote matters.

Gery Gerst, 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:



Nicole Winkley

Olympia School District



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

THE EPIDEMIC OF LONELINESS



The World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have recognized loneliness and social isolation as an epidemic. Dr. Amit Shah of

the Mayo Clinic defines loneliness as a subjective feeling or perception when someone is not feeling connected to others.

Loneliness and social isolation can lead to the risk of strokes, heart attacks, anxiety, depression, and suicide. The Surgeon General's report concluded that those who lack close confidants are twice as likely to die prematurely than those who are not lonely. Loneliness is a worse risk than obesity, inactivity, high blood pressure, or a bad diet. The need for a basic human connection is a need seen from babies on.

How did we get so lonely? In the past, friendships and social connections were made in many public places like grocery stores, choirs, sewing circles, barber shops, and clubs like the Elks, Eagles, and VFWs. With the rise of the internet, social media, and smart phones, people started doing things alone. They stopped joining and participating in churches, sports leagues, social clubs, and civic organizations. More people live alone now, are less likely to be married, and have fewer kids. More people live across the country from family and friends. Our governments stopped investing in libraries, community centers, parks, and public health. The COVID-19 pandemic particularly seniors in nursing homes and school children who were forced into an isolated virtual learning situation at home.

Loneliness can be found in all age groups, but people over 60 seem to be one of the most affected groups. As seniors, age, hearing, and mobility issues affect their ability to get out of the house. Hearing issues make it harder to socialize and follow conversations. Hearing issues can also contribute to dementia. Seniors would do well to have their hearing checked, get a hearing aid if needed, and know how to use it.

The pandemic showed us that online connections don't seem to completely satisfy the emotional need for connectivity. A face-to-face conversation, a handshake, a hug, a pat on the back provide that connection we all crave. Many studies show that health and happiness depend on the strength of our

relationships not only with family and friends, but also with acquaintances, neighbors, and the rest of our broader social network. Get to know your neighbors, invite them over for a meal or a walk. Strike up a conversation with your grocery clerk, the receptionist at the dentist's office, your barista. The monthly TCSRA luncheon is an excellent opportunity to socialize with like-minded people (retired school employees). There are many opportunities to serve on committees or as an officer to keep the organization strong and to contribute to your overall health and well-being.

Gail Feagins, Health and Member Services



ALL KIDS WIN, A COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECT



ALL KIDS WIN began as "Homeless Backpacks" when a group of friends realized that homelessness didn't just mean someone on the street corner holding a sign asking for help. "What about the children?" Finding a gap in serving these children, they turned to the Thurston County Food Bank to find out how they were addressing this gap. And so began the pilot program in 2005, serving three high schools in Thurston County, only 12 students.

Hoping to break down the barriers to the students who needed food, local high school counselors from those three schools passed on the information to other school counselors. Eventually, "Homeless Backpacks" was serving all the high schools in the county with the food bank taking care of the elementary and middle school children.

Currently, *ALL KIDS WIN* serves all the middle and high schools in North Thurston, Olympia, and Tumwater school districts. In addition, it serves K-12 grades in the Rainier, Rochester, Tenino, and Yelm

Continued on page 4. See "ALL KIDS WIN".

Thurston County School Retirees' Association
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"ALL KIDS WIN" (Continued from page 3.)

school districts and K-8 grades at the WaHeLut Indian School. Each bag of food which is given out weekly costs \$10.02. There are now over 1,100 students in 48 schools who receive these bags each week.

This amazing feat could not happen without hundreds of volunteers donating their time and money to make this happen. These volunteers, ranging in ages from 5 to 92, come from all backgrounds and local community groups and businesses. Interested in helping? Go to their website, *ALL KIDS WIN*, and sign up for their newsletter or send an email to events@allkidswin.org. Their name may have been changed to *ALL KIDS WIN*, but their mission has not!

One of the ways you can help as a member of TCSRA is to bring cans of chili or tuna to the February luncheon. Both of these items are part of every bag that goes out each week from ALL KIDS WIN .

Dorn Barr, Community Service



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

ARE YOU A NEW MEMBER?

If you joined TCSRA in November or December, you would have received our 2023-2024 Directory in the mail at the beginning of January. Please take a look at the last page in your copy. If there are handwritten lists of new and recently deceased members, please let me know at sed6501@outlook.com or at 360-438-5351. I will send you a new copy, along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope, for you to return the used copy to me. Thank you!

Sharon Dennis, Communications Chair

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Please email copy to editortcsra@gmail.com