



Bits & Pieces

www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/

March 2024

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

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Three T's of Serving: Time Talent, Treasure

Time, talent, and treasure. Community Service chair Sally Jones uses these terms to suggest ways to serve. School employees provide support to learners giving their time, talent, and often treasure. Retirees continue giving generously. We thank you all.

TCSRA members demonstrated their commitment to giving to the community during the holidays, a total of \$2,865 as well as items for 70 Mom Bags.

Recently, the TCSRA board agreed to support All Kids Win through a food drive in February and March. Members donated 64 cans of chili and tuna in February to help feed students across the county, and some members donated their time to pack lunch bags.

For many years TCSRA has awarded mini-grants to active teachers and other staff, supporting student learning. Since 2018-2019, we have given \$66,805.50 in grants. Wow! Congratulations, members.

We want to continue providing mini-grants into the future. One way to ensure that we can is to grow our fund managed by the Community Foundation of South Puget Sound. Donations can be designated to the spendable portion which can be used immediately, or to the principal for long-term investment. More information can be found at <https://www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/donate-2/>.

You can send a check, but online tax-deductible donations are simple to make. On the website, click on the link to go directly to the form. Be sure to indicate to which portion of the account you are giving in the "additional notes" box.

Another option to consider is to designate all or part of your Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) directly from your IRA to our Endowment Fund at the Community Foundation. A qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) would keep that money from increasing your taxable income for that year. If you are considering a QCD, we recommend consulting your financial and tax advisors as well as your financial

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FAN FAVORITE ART DOLAN!



We are delighted to once again welcome Art Dolan to our March meeting to share a fascinating presentation, "Women of the American Revolution."

Art Dolan is an active member and Past Commander of the George Rogers Clark Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution (S.A.R.). He is a direct descendant of a Revolutionary War patriot, Jeremiah Fitch, member of the Bedford militia 1775. Art was born near his patriot ancestor's home in Bedford, Massachusetts.

After serving in the military during the Viet Nam war, he became a science teacher in Spokane Public Schools. In 2003 after retiring from teaching, Art relocated to Olympia and began researching his Revolutionary War roots, discovering the S.A.R.

Art has presented four other programs for TCSRA: "George Washington's Secret Navy," "Espionage, The Second Oldest Profession," "Stars and Stripes Revolutionary Road," and "Thomas Paine: A Reflection on the Revolution." His presentations are entertaining and informative. You won't want to miss it!

Bobbie Andreas/Hospitality

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



Friday, March 15, 2024—12 noon
The Ember's Restaurant
Indian Summer Golf and Country Club



Corned Beef with cabbage
Or Stuffed Mushroom (v)
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, March 8**.

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, March 8 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 2024 Washington State Legislative Session is half complete. When you receive this newsletter, legislators will be close to or at the finish line. There's never a guarantee, but legislators have provided enough information for us to make educated guesses about the outcome of 2024 Legislative Session.

Legislators seem set on providing a Plan 1 COLA this year. The House passed Substitute House Bill 1985 to provide a 3% benefit increase to Plan 1 retirees. The increase would be capped at \$110 per month. House and Senate members have indicated they plan to make room for this proposal in the budget.

Health benefits are trickier. We've learned that the state is likely to lose some future federal funding used for subsidizing retiree health plans. The Senate indicated they intend to make up the difference somehow. We're watching the House and Senate budget proposals closely for any changes in retiree medical benefits.

The DRS sponsored Month of Death bill is not moving. HB 2013 would have paid a surviving spouse or a retiree's estate the full month's pension benefit during a retiree's month of death. The House Appropriations Committee favored a cheaper proposal to pay the retiree's PEBB insurance premium during the month of death. The new bill, HB 2481, passed out of all the necessary House committees and was waiting for a vote by the full House of Representatives. It is unknown if the Senate will be interested in the pared-back bill.

House Bill 2471 to increase the pension income for Plan 2/3 employees working past thirty years of service has died in the House Appropriations Committee. Passage was a tall order for a first-time bill. We were pleased to get it sponsored and get analysis started. The bill sponsors are working with WSSRA to get all the needed financial information on the proposal so that it could move farther in the process if it submitted again.

Peter Diedrick, WSSRA Legislative Director

NEW NAEP SCORES SHOW THAT ACADEMIC RECOVERY EFFORTS AREN'T EFFECTIVE

The new test score data from National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show numbers that are truly dire. In reading, average scores have declined to levels last seen in the 1970s. In math, the bottom 10% of students are back to their all-time low. The latest NAEP scores show that this record low achievement is after two years of intensive tutoring, summer school programs, and other academic supports, and despite nearly \$200 billion in emergency federal education spending to address the impacts of the pandemic on student learning. Evidently, the extra monies and programs are not doing the job of bringing students back to pre-pandemic academic levels.



One factor is the sharp drops in attendance. Some have pointed to quarantine rules that kept students at home for two weeks following close contact with ill classmates during the 2021-22 academic year. Now it seems that widespread absenteeism has become a new normal. Bad habits of late night video gaming and sleeping late developed during months of prolonged closures and virtual instruction has disrupted learning and consequent educational achievement. Some areas in the country are having volunteers reach out to homes where students are chronically absent to get these kids back in school.

Another approach to addressing the problem of low academic achievement is called Instructional Commons. The best educators in the state in any given subject would receive time off and a substantial payment to record a year's worth of lessons. The videos and all supporting materials (lesson plans, worksheets, quizzes, etc.) would be posted online for other teachers to use.

Then, there is the mastery-based approach to learning, where students are allowed to progress at their own pace toward established benchmarks, rather than holding every student to a fixed timeline of learning. Rather than maintaining the current system of organizing students by grade level, high achievers would reach the benchmarks sooner and be allowed to move on to more advanced goals, and this would free up resources for the students with slower rates of progress.

Our country is in a pivotal moment in K-12 public education, and it is time to decide whether we are willing to make the necessary changes to the current system for our students' academic and future success.

ZiNita Carrell, Education Committee



"March 4th, the only day that's also a sentence." — John Green

PLASTIC CHEMICALS IN OUR FOOD, PART 1

In a January 4, 2024, article, "The Plastic Chemicals Hiding in Your Food," Lauren F. Friedman gives *Consumer Reports'* (CR) findings on testing 85 foods including prepared meals, fruits and vegetables, milk and other dairy products, baby food, fast food, meat, and seafood, all packaged in cans, pouches, foil, or other materials. They were looking for bisphenols and phthalates as well as chemical substitutes for them in the food. They found that "despite growing evidence of potential health threats, bisphenols and phthalates remain widespread in our food."

Phthalates are plasticizers that make plastic more flexible and durable. Bisphenols are used in plastic to make it strong and resilient. Ms. Friedman states that these chemicals "show up inside almost all of us. . . and have been linked to a long list of health concerns, even at very low levels." Research shows that they are endocrine disruptors and can increase the risk of "diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease, certain cancers, neurodevelopmental disorders, premature birth, birth defects, and infertility." These problems can develop slowly over decades as the body works to eliminate these chemicals from our systems, but constant exposure means that they enter our blood and tissues almost as quickly as they are eliminated.

These chemicals are used in plastic wrap and packaging, storage containers, flexible tubing, gloves, conveyor belts, metal can linings, jar gaskets and many other plastic products. These chemicals leach into food that touches them. CR found **per serving**, 7,467 nanograms (ng) of phthalates in Coca-Cola (plastic bottle); 9,847 ng in Hormel Chili with Beans (can); 10,948 ng in Yoplait Low Fat Yogurt (plastic); 33,980 ng in Wendy's Crispy Chicken Nuggets (paperboard); 20,167 ng in Burger King Whopper with Cheese (paper); 10,980 ng in General Mills Cheerios (box and plastic bag); 4,267 ng in Similac Advanced Infant Milk-Based Powder Formula (can); 6,768 ng in Campbell's Chunky Classic Chicken Noodle Soup (plastic); and 24,321 ng in Chicken of the Sea Pink Salmon (can).

These chemicals leach into water and soil from landfills and are released in production and incineration into the environment. Plants take these chemicals up along with nutrients they need from the soil and water, and cows and other animals consume contaminated water and plants.

Regulators in the U.S. and Europe have set thresholds for only bisphenol A and a few phthalates in products such as children's toys and baby bottles; however, there are no limits on these chemicals in food packaging or production. Manufacturers are not required to test their food products for these chemicals. Consumer Report's food safety scientists and others say that the Food and Drug Administration

must update its regulations. Erika Schreder, the science director at Toxic-Free Future, an advocacy group, states, "Since bisphenols and phthalates are hazardous chemicals, they should not be allowed at all in food-contact materials."

Green chemistry companies are trying to help as their goal is to create "safer, more sustainable materials," which are "functional, but also nontoxic and biodegradable and renewable." says Hanno Erythropel, Ph.D., at the Center for Green Chemistry and Green Engineering at Yale University.

Next month, Part 2 "How to Reduce Your Exposure to Plastic in Food"

Pat McLachlan, Health and Member Services

Each month we 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:



Teresa Wallace
North Thurston Public Schools



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

Welcome, New Members:

Active, not-yet-retired members are underlined.

<u>Jaffe LeTourneau</u>	<u>Anna Bigelow</u>
<u>Katie Omdahl</u>	<u>Sarah Bourque</u>
<u>Lee Giske</u>	<u>Lesley Bowser</u>
<u>Marie Demme</u>	<u>Casey Crawford</u>
<u>Rachel Annan</u>	<u>Michelle Fayette</u>
<u>Melinda Atkinson</u>	<u>Debora Fellows</u>
<u>Emily Aufort</u>	<u>Kitty Fishburn</u>
<u>Kaitlyn Beesley</u>	<u>Wendy Fisher</u>
<u>Corrine Flatz</u>	<u>Sonny Foster</u>
<u>Greta Gustavson</u>	<u>Tonya Harding</u>

Please report any address and telephone number changes to the **WSSRA Office** at:

360-413-5496 or michele@wssra.org

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE (Continued from page 1.)
institution before making a donation of this type.

And last, please consider giving of your time and talent to the association. The nominating committee will present the slate of officers in March. We also are inviting folks to serve as committee chairs and members. The association's strength rests on having committed leaders in these positions. Won't you join us for camaraderie and service in 2024?

Sue Shannon, TCSRA President

Thurston County School Retirees' Association
P. O. Box 3051
Lacey, WA 98509-3051

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COMMUNITY SERVICE

As a teacher, the month of March was always my least favorite. It is long and often dreary with endless days of rain. Not only that, there is no holiday to break it up unless an evening of drinking green beer counts. Spring break usually came in April. For me, March was “depressing” to use the term loosely as we often do when we are feeling blue.

Depression in seniors has become a “hot topic” recently with countless articles citing ways to lift it or avoid it. One frequent suggestion is to get out of the house and volunteer. We tend to feel better when we help someone else feel better. (Proviso: This is not intended to be advice for clinically diagnosed depression.)

In Thurston County there are countless service organizations always in need of volunteers. As we all know from our working careers, public schools use volunteers for a variety of tasks. Despite the demise of the United Way Reading Buddy program, kids still need help learning to read. Contact the school district or individual school volunteer coordinator.

The All Kids Win volunteer organization assembles weekend food bags every week for kids in middle

and high school, as **Dorn Barr** explained in last month's *Bits & Pieces*. This is a volunteer opportunity we hope to explore more in April. In the meantime, **bring cans of water-packed tuna and/or chili to the March luncheon.**

So, if March is not your favorite month, either, or if at any time you find yourself feeling down, unmotivated, or “unuseful,” consider taking stock of your own gifts, talents, and interests, and start looking for a volunteer organization that serves a group or cause you are passionate about. It's a win/win situation: you may very well begin to feel useful and appreciated again and the program you choose to work with will benefit from your contribution.

Sally Jones, Community Service Chair

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Please email copy to editortcsra@gmail.com