



Bits & Pieces

www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/

February 2026

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

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcome again to 2026. I look ahead with some hesitancy as so many challenges are ahead for me personally, for TCSRA, and for our state legislature. Our active teachers are facing challenges as the school culture continues to change. I recently read an article in the *New York Times* that really disturbed me. It was reported that assigning complete novels is fading, because students are not willing to engage with lengthy or complex texts. *New York Times* author Dana Goldstein contacted 2,000 teachers and found that, overall, their curriculum represents less required reading. The assignments typically require reading short stories, articles, and excerpts from novels, usually online using their laptops. Teachers report that they assign one, perhaps two, novels in print a year, and even this is often a challenge. One teacher noted that in his early career he assigned 4 or 5 novels a year; this year he assigned one, leading to a decline in reading habits, he felt.

TCSRA is also facing challenges as the New Year begins. Due to several circumstances, we find ourselves without a secretary and treasurer and continue to search for replacements. This is also the time that TCSRA needs to determine who will continue their leadership positions. I, for one, will not be available to continue in a leadership position because of my health challenges. We will also need a new *Bits & Pieces* editor next year. If you value TCSRA—an organization that provides yearly mini-grants to active teachers, outreach to the community, retirement information and support, and continued emphasis with the legislature to protect retiree health care benefits and to pass a COLA for TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees—NOW IS THE TIME to step up and volunteer!

Patty Gee, TCSRA President

In Memoriam

We note the passing of **Alan Burmester, Bianca Causin, Vivian Forrester, and Antonio Maldonado**. We offer sincere condolences to their families and friends.

HUMAN CONNECTIONS, NETWORKING, AND FINDING JOY

We are excited to welcome Joe Miller, Jr. as our guest and speaker for February's luncheon. Joe is a professional networking authority, author, speaker, and podcaster in the greater Seattle area. He has been teaching and coaching most of his life. He is involved with Inter-city Transit and is a Commissioner of Pro Networking League.



Pro Networking League helps train people and businesses in leadership development, public speaking, training and marketing consulting, budgeting, and change management. Joe has also developed videos and podcasts as part of the process. He states that "Professional networking is a strategic endeavor in which individuals cultivate and foster connections with other business professionals to facilitate the exchange of information, opportunities, and support."

Joe has done training and mentoring for Fire Departments, Civil Service Safety Training, and for churches. He is a member of Toastmasters and has also coached and refereed basketball.

The topic he will speak about is "Human connections, networking, and finding joy in what we focus on in our later years."

We look forward to meeting Joe and hearing about this important topic.

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

Vicki Carter, Hospitality Committee Chair

Friday, February 20, 2026—12 noon

Indian Summer Golf and Country Club

Menu: Cobb salad with chicken
OR Cobb salad with plant-based chicken (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, February 13.**

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 13** at **253-381-2592**.

To be added to the email list for notification, please send me your email address.

ZiNita Carrell, Email Committee Chair



LEGISLATIVE REPORT



On January 12, the Washington State Legislature convened for what will be a 60-day legislative session. The legislature's primary goal is to balance another multi-billion dollar budget deficit. The WSSRA Legislative Committee is working hard to protect our health insurance benefits, keep our pensions responsibly funded, and provide a COLA for TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees.

Unfortunately, legislative leaders have informed us that Substitute Senate Bill 5085, which would restore an ongoing COLA for TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees, will not be moving forward. The bill, which Senate Democrats championed last session, proposed funding the ongoing COLA by merging TRS 1 and PERS 1 with LEOFF 1, an overfunded pension plan for retired firefighters and police officers. However, it now looks more likely that the excess LEOFF 1 money will be used to help the state balance the budget.

This is a major disappointment for TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees, who are the only retired public employees in the state to not receive automatic annual COLAs. These retirees saw their ongoing COLA taken away by the legislature in 2011 to help balance a budget deficit, resulting in most pensions losing 29%+ of their purchasing power. We are grateful to our members who worked so hard to advocate for SB 5085 last year.

In reaction to this news, we have shifted our focus to supporting House Bill 1474, which would provide a one-time COLA for TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees in 2026. Due to the lack of available funds, passing this bill will still be a difficult task. We are also on the alert for any proposed cuts to the PEBB Medicare benefit that many of our members receive. Please watch your email inbox for opportunities to contact your legislators on our behalf.

Emmett Mills, WSSRA Legislative Director

MODELING CITIZENSHIP



As educators we're both life-long learners and citizens who value informed civic participation. And now I hear many educators and others share that they wonder if, and hope that, civics is still being taught in schools. So in that vein, let's start by modeling both learning and informed citizenship. Here's a means to set new learning goals for self, or share with others the citizenship knowledge we require immigrants to have:

Here are a few of the 100 questions we require for naturalization. Should all of us, including our elected leaders, know this? Here goes:

- The idea of self-government is in the first three words of the Constitution. What are these words?
- The words "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" are in what founding document?
- What is one right or freedom from the First Amendment? What are the other four?
- There are three branches of government. Why?
- We elect a U.S. Senator for how many years?
- Name your U.S. Representative.
- What are two Cabinet-level positions?
- Who is the Governor of our state now?
- When was the Declaration of Independence adopted?
- When was the Constitution written?
- What territory did the United States buy from France in 1803?
- Name one war fought by the United States in the 1800s. In the 1900s.
- What ocean is on the East Coast of the U.S.?
- Name one of our two longest rivers.
- Name one U.S. territory.

Thanks for learning, caring, and sharing! For more, go to <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/questions-and-answers/2025-Civics-Test-128-Questions-and-Answers.pdf>

Gery Gerst, Education Committee Chair

Each month we randomly draw the name of one of our "active" (not-yet-retired) members to receive a Starbucks gift card in the mail.



This month's winner is:

Cassie White

Olympia School District



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

ALL ABOUT SCAMS

"HEY, HELLO, CAN WE TALK?"

Have you ever gotten texts from numbers you don't recognize? These are attempts to set up a friendship scam relationship with you. The object is to eventually hit you up for money or steal private information. According to the Federal Trade Commission, consumers lost \$470 million to these scams in 2024. Consumers have gotten wary of unsolicited phone calls and emails, so now scammers are using texts. Consumers open 98 percent of texts and perhaps only 20 percent of emails. Text and email scams have included package delivery problems, bogus job offers, invoices or fraud alerts for things you never purchased, and highway toll fees. These scammers can and will impersonate your grandchildren, celebrities, banks, credit card companies, computer tech support services, Social Security, the IRS, and Medicare.

You get a text or email from a company saying you were charged for something you didn't buy. It says to call a number if you want to cancel the charge. You call the number and they ask for your credit card number or bank account number to reverse the charge. You are actually talking to a scammer, and they now have your personal information. Scammers have told people who think they are talking to their bank that their money is in danger of being stolen and they need to withdraw it, put it in another account, or into a bitcoin machine, or buy gift cards. Never call the number or click on a link in the text or email. Look up the number of your bank or the company in question and call them yourself.

Concerned about sliding your debit or credit card into a machine that may have a hidden reader in it? Use the tap and pay option whenever you can.

The AARP Fraud Watch Network Helpline is at 877-908-3360.

Gail Feagins, Health and Member Services



IT'S A SMALL WORLD!



When he was about 23 years old, **Kevan Hagen** began his first continuing-contract teaching position in a 5th grade classroom at the old Michael T. Simmons Elementary School on Linwood Avenue in Tumwater. He replaced **Lillian Clark**, who had just retired. Coincidentally, Kevan's mother,

Arlene Anderson, and Lillian were friends when they were students at Washington State College (now WSU) in Pullman in the 1940s. Arlene was also a TCSRA member until she passed away in 2022. Years later, Kevan is retired, too. Pictured are Lillian, now nearing her 98th birthday, and Kevan at our December luncheon.

COMMUNITY SERVICE NEWS

There is a plethora of data citing that people of all ages are reading fewer and fewer books over time. At the advent of the world-wide-web there were predictions that the book would disappear and that teachers would be replaced by internet teaching modules. Indeed my personal experience as a teacher-librarian bore this idea out to the extent that the book budget was slashed in favor of purchasing computers because "all information is available online."

Nevertheless, to my delight, these dire predictions regarding books and teachers have not fully come to fruition. Olympia has several thriving bookstores and local school districts are still hiring teachers. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that books, particularly reference books, have succumbed to the ease of using Google. Should I be ashamed or proud to say that I still consult the dictionary? It's a habit I have not yet unlearned.

The latest proliferation of AI-generated analyses and amazing manipulation of information comes as a new threat to plain old-fashioned reading. AI is a super version of Cliff Notes. Essays on complex questions and topics can be produced in minutes. One of the scariest stories I found on this topic is as follows: A professor at a prestigious, elite university asked his students after four years of study to name the best book they had read. After a prolonged silence, a student said, "You don't understand. We read just enough of the books for the class," presumably to pass.

Perhaps the greatest threat of AI is the potential loss of the ability to think for oneself and differentiate fact from fiction.

So what can we do? Keep reading to our kids from the earliest age and teach them to read. Read, comment, ask questions, and solicit the child's comments and thinking about whatever you may be reading together. One of my happiest memories is sitting in a big comfortable chair, reading *The Little Red Hen* for the hundredth time to the little girl in my lap.

I believe that establishing thoughtful literacy in the next generation of our children is a true form of community service to the whole world.

News Flash! February 24, 1–3 p.m.

We can contribute immediate community service by spending 2 hours on **Feb. 24 from 1–3 p.m.** at the newly renovated South Sound Reading Foundation, located at 200 Sleater-Kinney RD NE. We will be "spiffing" up donated children's books. A helpful person will direct our activity. It is easy and provides a lovely time to visit with other TCSRA friends while we work. Not to mention that we are likely to see some delightful books that make us laugh.

To learn more about SSRT, please google them.

Sally Jones, Community Service Chair

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Mini-Grant team members **Karen Keller**, **Dennis Crisp**, **ZiNita Carrell**, and **Lorene Rang** have been out in schools distributing checks. Here are a few photos:



Clockwise: Karen presents to Jacqueline Collett, Jefferson MS; Dennis presents to Littlerock Elementary Principal Tamara York; Lorene presents to Yelm HS teacher Dawn Lantz.



Karen and ZiNita present to Principal David Crane for the library at Salish Middle School..

BITS & PIECES, the newsletter of the Thurston County School Retirees' Association, is published nine times a year, September through May, as a membership service. It is a means of communication between officers, committees, and both retired and active (not-yet-retired) members.

Editor: Pat Slosson, 360-561-3232.

Information for the March 2026 issue is due by February 12. Email copy to pslosson1@comcast.net.