



Bits & Pieces

IN-PERSON
LUNCHEONS ARE
CANCELED
UNTIL
FURTHER NOTICE!

www.wssra-units.org/thurstoncounty/

February 2022

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

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

February. What an interesting month it is! It commemorates things like Ground Hog Day, Rare Disease Day, National Chocolate Covered Nut Day, and World Thinking Day.

For me, February is a month when I start reflecting on age . . . as in getting older. A few years ago, **Billie Williams** (1926–2020) included in this publication a list of people who accomplished things later in life. I started keeping a list of people who can inspire me when I feel a little creaky getting out of bed or frustrated when I can't remember a detail. Here are a few:

Violet Robbins is 107 years old and is still volunteering at the Prince of Wales Hospital in Sydney, Australia.

Ida Herbert is a 95-year-old yoga instructor.

Johanna Quaas, from Germany, is the world's oldest gymnast at 92.

Yuichiro Miura is the oldest person in the world to climb Mt. Everest. (Okay, I don't aspire to do that!)

At 95 Nola Ochs became the oldest college graduate, receiving a BA from Fort Hays State University. She continued on and earned a master's degree.

Did you know that Betty White is in the Guinness Book of World Records as having had the longest TV career for an entertainer? At being told this, her response was, "I consider myself to be the luckiest old broad on two feet."

Which brings me back to what an interesting month February is. On February 1 we commemorate Spunky Old Broads Day. (It's true. Look it up!)

On a more serious note, COVID continues, now in the form of Omicron. We are regretfully pausing our plans to begin in-person meetings, but we have a fantastic Zoom program planned! Please read about it in the next column. We hope to see you then.

Pat Slosson, TCSRA President

THE SECOND OLDEST PROFESSION

Do you know what the second oldest profession is? I admit to taking a guess at the *oldest* profession, but **Art Dolan**, one of TCSRA's favorite guest speakers, will enlighten us as to the second in his February 18th presentation, "Espionage, the Second Oldest Profession." Art will focus on his area of expertise, American Revolutionary espionage. He will end with how the philosophy of spying at the time of the Revolution is still the framework for espionage today.

Art Dolan is President of the George Rogers Clark Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution, Olympia, WA. Like all members of the Sons of the American Revolution, Art is a direct descendant of a Revolutionary War patriot. In his case, that was Jeremiah Fitch, Bedford, MA, a member of the Bedford militia, 1775. Art has presented two other programs to us: "George Washington's Secret Navy" and "Stars and Stripes Revolutionary Road." We are glad to have him back with us again this year.

Come and enjoy this intriguing topic! Please share this information with retirees who are not members and might like this program.

The Zoom meeting room will open at 9:50 a.m. and Art will be introduced at 10:00. **Remember you don't need a computer to participate.** You can call in on your phone and listen to the presentation by dialing the following number and then following the prompts to enter the meeting ID and the passcode:

Dial: 1-253-215-8782
Meeting ID: 896 2974 3928
Passcode: 362417

Zoom computer links will be available on the Program page of our website, on our Facebook page, and in a reminder email notice sent out from ZiNita Carrell or Tara at WSSRA.

Pat Slosson, TCSRA President

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Rep. Bergquist (steve.bergquist@leg.wa.gov)
Senator Conway (steve.conway@leg.wa.gov)

The 2022 Washington State Legislative Session is in full swing. It's a short session, scheduled to end March 10. The WSSRA legislative team is working on 4 issues right now: securing a Plan 1 COLA, protecting retiree medical benefits, increasing the number of hours that retirees can work in schools, and equalizing PEBB benefits between Plans 2 and 3. A fifth proposal mentioned in the January column was dropped—a DRS administrative issue made the bill much more complicated than anticipated.



Our bills are:

- **Securing a Plan 1 COLA:** House Bill 1721 and Senate Bill 5676 are the COLA bills recommended by the Select Committee on Pension Policy (SCPP). They would provide a 3% increase on the first \$44,000 in pension income. WSSRA is offering an amendment to increase the percentage to 5.9%, so it would match the Social Security Increase. Bill sponsors are Representative Stokesbary (R-Auburn) and Senator Conway (D-Tacoma).
- **Protecting the Medicare Eligible Health Benefit:** The \$183 discount on PEBB Medicare supplemental insurance is completed through the state budget. We won't have bill numbers until the end of the legislative session.
- **Increasing Retiree Work Hours:** HB 1699 would temporarily increase the number of hours retirees can work in schools without losing any pension benefits. Allowed hours would increase from 867 to 1,040 and the bill would expire in 2025. Sponsors are Rep. Bergquist (D-Renton) and Rep. Dolan (D-Olympia).
- **Equalizing PEBB Health Benefits:** House Bill 1911 and Senate Bill 5700 would give TRS/SERS Plan 2 members the same PEBB deferral rights as TRS/SERS Plan 3 members. Currently, Plan 3 members can defer their insurance if they are retirement eligible but separated from service without drawing a pension at age 55. A Plan 2 member would get locked out of PEBB in that same situation. Sponsors are Rep. Bronoske (D-Lakewood) and Sen. Conway (D-Tacoma).

Please ask your legislators to support our bills. Also, please feel free to thank our bill sponsors:

Rep. Dolan (laurie.dolan@leg.wa.gov)
Rep. Bronoske (dan.bronoske@leg.wa.gov)
Rep. Stokesbary (drew.stokesbary@leg.wa.gov)

Contact information for all legislators is readily available at www.leg.wa.gov, or you can always call the WSSRA office (360-413-5496, extension 117) to get the information you need.

Peter Diedrick, WSSRA Legislative Director



BACK TO SCHOOL OR NOT?

The Omicron virus has been a logistical nightmare and has taken an emotional toll on schools and the families they serve. It has forced district leaders to make complicated decisions about how to handle rising case counts and staff absences, and whether it is best to allow in-person learning or to return to remote learning.



Since the Omicron virus entered the United States, it's pushed new and breakthrough infections to some of the highest levels since the start of the pandemic. Some districts have delayed the return to in-person learning for several days and even weeks. As of the 6th of January, 4,783 public schools had decided not to offer in-person instruction for one or more days of that week, according to Burbio, a firm that tracks COVID-related school closures. But that's less than 5% of our 98,700 public K-12 schools. The vast majority are offering face-to-face learning, although often altered because of limited staffing and absent students.

The U.S., of course, is not the only country grappling with these issues. Ontario, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Belgium have enacted extended winter holiday breaks. As most students are returning to classroom worldwide, schools in some countries have been closed for 18 months or more. About 300 million students worldwide live in countries with full or partial school closures, according to UNESCO.

UNESCO and UNICEF have called for schools to be open, arguing that another round of widespread closures would be "disastrous" for children. A report released by UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank in December warned that the current generation of students risks losing \$17 trillion in lifetime earnings because of the COVID-related school closures. Millions of poorer or marginalized students

(Continued on page 3. See "EDUCATION.")

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:



Jonathan Levy-Wolins

North Thurston Public Schools



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

UPDATING ESTATE PLANS

It’s a good idea to review your estate plan from time to time, perhaps near tax time when finances are on your mind. Life circumstances change. People pass away, marriages and divorces occur, new grandchildren are born.

Update your **WILL**, **TRUST**, and community property agreements to your current situation and any tax law changes. Whoever will be managing your affairs after you pass should know where the will or other documents can be found. These days this may include knowing where to find passwords to your phone, computer, and financial accounts.

Review **BENEFICIARY DESIGNATIONS** for retirement plans and insurance policies. With the exception of your spouse, retirement plan assets, such as IRAs, are one of the most highly taxed assets to leave to your family. However, they can be left to a nonprofit, such as a charity, tax free. Decide if you still need a life insurance policy, and if you do, make sure you have enough coverage.

If **NEARING RETIREMENT**, consult a financial planner to make plans for maximizing your savings. Included in this would be decisions about when to start taking Social Security. There are financial advantages to waiting until age 70. Also consider if buying a long-term care policy is right for you. There are traditional and hybrid policies. The best time to purchase is between ages 55–65. You may need \$10,000–\$12,000 a month for assisted living or nursing home care.

Review your **HEALTH CARE POWER OF ATTORNEY** so someone you trust can make decisions for you in case of illness or disability.

Create or update your **LIVING WILL** to reflect your wishes regarding prolonged health care and end-of-life decisions. This may or may not include a do not resuscitate order (DNR) which is a separate document. You might also consider pre-planning

and pre-paying for your funeral.

Provide a **FINANCIAL POWER OF ATTORNEY** so someone you trust can handle financial decisions for you if you are unable to do so. Note that a power of attorney document becomes null at your passing. The person named therein does not have the authority to handle your affairs after your passing unless you have designated them to do so in a will or other document.

ENCOURAGE your adult children to create or update their own estate plans. If your parents are still living, have them review their plans so you will know what to do to follow their wishes.

REMEMBER, if you want your wishes followed at end of life and after passing, it’s very important to state them in writing and have your documents in order. Elder law attorneys are a good source of information on these issues.

Gail Feagins, Health and Member Services



EDUCATION (Continued from page 2.)

are at risk of never returning to school at all.

According to results of studies in many countries including Canada, Japan, and the U.S., school closures have only **limited impact** on the spread of the virus. According to **Brandon Guthrie, an epidemiologist and global health expert at the University of Washington**, “It’s now quite clear that schools have **not** been a major driver of transmission” of the virus, especially when schools require mask wearing. In fact, Guthrie adds that children are at greater risk of becoming infected through community transmission.

So, even though most schools are open for in-person instruction, and it appears safe for the students when masks are worn and guidelines are followed, teachers are saying they have to alter or even eliminate parts of their curricula due to student absences and staffing problems.

The plans for a stabilizing year, when students could make up for lost time, are crushed. School district administrators, teachers, and other staff are just doing the best they can to keep things afloat. Hopefully, the Omicron virus will peak soon, and the last part of the school year can be successful.

ZiNita Carrell, Education Committee Co-Chair

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REMINDER: ZOOM MEETING

**Friday, February 18
10:00 a.m.**

See page 1 for details!

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Use it up. . .Wear it out. . .Make it do. . .Or do without

This is how folks handled material possessions during the Great Depression and World War II. I'd venture to say that garbage dumps (i.e., landfills) did not pose the problems they do today. From 1960–2018 per capita waste generation in the U.S. increased from 2.68 to 4.9 pounds per day!

Today's version of the Great Depression mantra is: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. Whereas thrift was the key factor during the Depression, today's need is to decrease the amount of waste overtaking the land and the oceans nationwide and even worldwide.

The overwhelming emergence of Omicron once again precludes planning a group community service project, so what can we do as individuals to Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle?

To REDUCE waste, look for products with the least amount of packaging and/or products that are already packaged in recyclable material. Use the bulk bins available in several local stores. Rather than buying products packaged in individual serving sizes, get large sizes and divide them yourself. For example, buy soda in 2-liter bottles and yogurt in 32

-ounce containers. If you feel you must buy water, at least buy it in gallon containers and use permanent individual water bottles for family members. Better yet, use tap water which is remarkably potable locally or make a one-time purchase of a filter system. Finally, patronize restaurants and stores that use recyclable packaging and take-out containers.

Next month, I'll provide tips on reusing and recycling, so stay tuned!

Sally Jones, Community Service Chair

In Memoriam

We note the passing of **Bruce Anderson** and **Marilyn Callender**. We offer sincere condolences to their families and friends.

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: Sharon Dennis, 360-438-5351. **Information for the March 2022 issue is due by February 9.** Please email copy to bitsandpieces-editor@hotmail.com.