



# NEW YEAR, NEW ORTA!



Kara Mendenhall,  
2020-2022 ORTA President

## FROM OUR PRESIDENT

A very Happy New Year to all ORTA members! We have seen the last of 2021 and look forward to the new year as a new beginning and as the fulfillment of the expectations of our work last year. Although I am grateful for the ease of travel with warm temperatures this holiday season, it doesn't really feel like January. I think it would be easier to be isolated, for me, if the weather was colder.

As I face this new year, it is my hope that we can progress in our endeavor to restore the STRS COLA, and that we have heightened the awareness of our members of staying informed

about our pension. It is an achievement for all of us to look back on the speed with which we raised the funds for the forensic audit, and once completed, the pressure our members maintained on STRS to own up to the need for greater transparency. That pressure continues and has spread to the Auditor of State and to many news outlets as well.

It is my hope that I will be able to visit local chapter meetings in 2022 and to listen to your concerns in person. Many chapters have done a good job of keeping in touch with members through Zoom meetings or newsletters and we commend those efforts. I have not had the pleasure of visiting many county meetings, and have not had the in-person contact that my predecessors had. Since that personal outreach is a major part of this job, it makes me feel like I am handicapped when talking about concerns throughout the state. Of course, my own chapter is in the same situation. It is out of an abundance of safety that we choose not to meet.

So, we stand at the start of a potentially positive year. We are the people who choose to make it so. We have seen what working together can and is able to accomplish, so let's keep that upward motivation in full swing! Let's progress together and remember that each of us makes choices to help or hinder. We have influence in our communities, and we can work with each other to affect the change we need to heal. Let's face this new year with a goal of healing. Healing relationships, healing the earth, healing our nation, healing our world. We know we can't make it if we don't try. As Charlotte the spider said, "Chin up!"

Warm Regards,

*Kara Mendenhall*

Kara Mendenhall, ORTA President 2020-2022

## ORTA BOARD MEMBERS

**Kara Mendenhall**  
2020-22 President

**Bee Lehner**  
Past-President  
2018-2019

**Chris DeMarco**  
President-Elect  
2022-2023

## ORTA OFFICE STAFF

**Robin Rayfield**  
ORTA Executive  
Director

**Mia McLean**  
ORTA Administrative  
Assistant &  
Membership  
Coordinator

## IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE:

- Messages from our Executive Director and all ORTA Executive Board Members
- ORTA Committee formed for STRS Board Recommendations
- News and Announcements
- ORTA Night(s) Out!
- New Travel Partner





Dr. Robin Rayfield, ORTA  
Executive Director

## FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Members,

January of 2022 feels a lot like January of 2021. We are still waiting to get out of the grips of the pandemic. If there is any consolation, it appears (for now) that the virus that we are fighting today is less deadly than the virus we were battling in 2021. I have weathered some health issues, but the doctor tells me I am doing well.

I did visit a few chapters in 2021. I made nineteen visits to chapters that were excited to hear about the findings of the forensic audit and what is taking place. I suppose that I should bring everyone up to speed with what we have learned throughout 2021 regarding Mr. Siedle's work and our forensic audit.

What I have provided below are ten reasons significant change at STRS is imperative:

1. Mr. Siedle's 128 page report *The High Cost of Secrecy* identified several issues with the operations of STRS. Most notably is the lack of transparency that is pervasive at STRS. The fact that members are not allowed to know details about our investment program is bad enough, but this lack of transparency extends to our trustees as well. How can our trustees perform their duties as fiduciaries if they are not permitted to know the details about our investments?
2. Although STRS has rejected Mr. Siedle's report in its entirety, the Auditor of State in Ohio has launched an investigation into STRS. The auditor is digging into whether fraud has been committed. Instead of taking a closer look at their own at their practices and culture, STRS management attempted to credit Mr. Siedle. Now, understand that Mr. Siedle is the preeminent authority on forensic audits of public pensions in the world. Public pension employees are fearful of Mr. Siedle as he knows the tricks that pension leaders use to make themselves look better than they are. He also knows the consultants that are known through the industry as the consultants that will write a positive report... as long as the payment is large enough.
3. Board member Wade Steen (appointed by the governor) has been an outspoken critic of the performance incentives for a few years. He asked that the 'bonuses' paid to STRS staff be delayed that a through review could be conducted to determine if the bonuses had been earned. STRS management and a thin majority of the board would not delay the payment of the bonuses. After the payment, board members learned that the staff and consultants had not been straightforward and honest in their discussions with the board. People were paid bonus despite not having met any external benchmark.
4. Retiree elected board member Dr. Rudy Fichtenbaum wrote a detailed report that

contradicts STRS staff's claim that STRS staff add \$100,000,000 to the STRS portfolio through their 'active management'. Dr. Fichtenbaum's report indicates that STRS staff's efforts reduce the portfolio by \$400,000,000. This loss instead of gain is confirmed by an independent analysis by leading economist Richard Ennis.

5. Former board member Bob Stein has also joined in the discussion of problems with STRS management and STRS consultants offering that he is no longer convinced that board members are receiving accurate information from STRS.
6. An analysis of 'risk and return' over the last 20 years from Cliffwater (a highly paid consultant to STRS) shows that STRS has much higher risk and much lower returns than many public pensions in the US. This directly contradicts the claim that STRS has lower risk and higher returns.
7. We know that active STRS members have the worst deal in the U.S. Active members pay 14% in contributions but receive a pension that is only worth 10.5%. Where does the money go? NOT TO RETIREES! Retirees were promised (in writing and in Ohio law) a 3% COLA. STRS has not lived up to their promise. On the other hand, STRS employees have the best deal in the US. More employees at STRS are in the top two hundred of all public pensions than any other pension in the country.
8. STRS has not had a state required audit in over 16 years (the law requires that the legislators conduct an audit every 10 years). The last audit (2006) resulted in eighty-eight recommendations. STRS address many of these recommendations, however, STRS did not address several 'big recommendations. Two of these recommendations that were ignored were:
  - a. Bonus payments need to be tied to an external benchmark. Using your own performance as a benchmark is not acceptable. STRS still uses its own performance as a benchmark. In other words, bonus is earned regardless of the performance of our investment staff.
  - b. STRS consultants must disclose potential conflicts of interest with Wall St. investors reducing the possibility that consultants could be paid by the investor (STRS) and the firm investing the money from STRS. This recommendation has not been addressed.

I recognize that our current situation is frustrating. It seems like the employees at STRS and the majority of the board at STRS do not care about retirees or active members. If you go to the meetings and observe our board, this indifference is apparent. I can offer some hope. At the last few STRS meetings the board has looked at what can be done to improve the situation for retirees and for active contributors. Some form of lowering the contribution rate coupled with some form of COLA have been discussed at length. STRS expects to receive a report from their external actuary that will shed light on how STRS has performed compared to the projections. If all goes well, we may know the real possibility of what can be done in March.

*(con'd on next page)*

In the meantime, there are a few things to watch for:

- ◇ The Auditor of State's special audit report
- ◇ A class action lawsuit filed by two retirees is in state court
- ◇ Our forensic audit has sought to receive public records not provided by STRS through legal means at the Ohio Supreme Court
- ◇ Ohio's legislators are conducting a fiduciary audit of STRS. (Unfortunately, the ORSC has hired a company that is closely connected to STRS's current consultant to do this fiduciary audit)

Please know that ORTA will remain engaged in this battle to stop the constant reduction of our pension benefits. Your continued support and assistance at growing our membership will strengthen our voice.

Best,



Dr. Robin Rayfield, ORTA Executive Director

## ORTA NIGHT OUTS!

### ***ORTA Night with the Cleveland Cavaliers!***

The Cleveland Cavaliers welcome all members, family, and friends of the Ohio Retired Teacher's Association to our season finale vs. the Milwaukee Bucks, April 10th, 2022!

Tickets start at \$45

Discounted tickets can be found by emailing Austin Towns (atowns@cavs.com)

*NOTE: Seats in C119-C112 include a \$15 credit value for food and beverage at FanFuel concession stands!*



### ***Educator Nights with the Buckeyes!***

We are excited to welcome all educators, teachers, faculty, staff and your family and friends to our Educator Nights with the Buckeyes this season. Check out your special rates for Men's and Women's Basketball, Men's Ice Hockey, Wrestling and Women's Gymnastics. Come be a part of the action and join Buckeye Nation cheering on our teams to victory.

To see a list of games available:  
<https://tinyurl.com/2p85nkmz>

Use PROMO CODE: Teacher



# FROM OUR PAST-PRESIDENT



Bee Lehner,  
2018-2019 ORTA President

Friends,

In 2017 I accepted the position of ORTA's President-Elect, to follow on the heels of Randy Overbeck. It began as a 3-year commitment, but through several unfortunate incidents, has become 6 years. However, no complaints on my part!

It has been filled with wonderment, suspense, concern, excitement, a moment of sadness, and many more moments of celebration and laughter!

With the dismissal of one director, the search and hiring of a wonderful, new director, the death of one of our Executive Board members, and the COVID pandemic on our country, my time with the ORTA Executive Committee has been stretched out. But as I've stated, "No complaints on my part!" Thank you so much for giving me the time to work with such supportive folks, to meet new friends, and gain a new respect for the work ORTA puts into supporting educators across Ohio and those retirees who live outside our state!

Finally, I have a picture hanging in my new home that shows 20 beautiful birds of many colors and species, all huddled on an electric line. The inscription below the picture says, "But encourage one another daily." Hebrews 3:13. I read that verse each morning when I get out of bed and try to apply that thought to my daily living. I hope you'll do the same to our director, our Executive Committee members, and your own local officers.

Blessings, my friends.

Bee Lehner

ORTA Past-President 2018-2019

## MEMBERSHIP CARDS ARE NOW AVAILABLE!

If you're a paying dues member and would like to receive a membership card, please contact our office.

**Please note, 2022 Membership cards are only sent upon request and if you are current on your membership status.**

Call today to verify your membership standing to receive a 2022 Member ID.



# FROM OUR PRESIDENT-ELECT



Chris DeMarco, 2022-2023  
ORTA President-Elect

Greetings and Happy New Year,

As we move into 2022, I hope we can all maintain a healthy portion of optimism, as there is much to accomplish. Increasing our membership is at the center of my concerns going forward. Membership is the hub from which many spokes radiate, including power of influence, dissemination of information, and the financial health of the organization, required to accomplish our various missions. After surveying a number of methods to target membership growth, including wider use of media and professional public relations services, I am left feeling that one of, if not the most effective and economical method, is to take advantage of the resource of our existing membership to provide word-of-mouth contact to increase our numbers. I am convinced that the personal invitation of a friend carries more weight than expensive billboards or slick postcards.

So, let's all make a stronger effort to promote ORTA and our local county Chapters this year, to our friends, both retired and active teachers. The stakes have never been higher, as inflation and the rising cost of health care are challenges to our quality of life.

Looking back at 2021, it was a year filled with hope the various vaccines engendered, and happily saw a return to "normal," with some Chapters returning to in-person meetings, a chance to rekindle friendships, and begin to once again resume our service projects in our communities. 2021 also saw vigorous interest and activity in ORTA advocacy, related to STRS matters. This advocacy underscores the importance and vitality of the Ohio Retired Teachers Association, and the role it plays in our lives.

Please be sure to vote in the upcoming STRS Board election. We are working hard to help our members to be as informed as possible when making your choice. There will be more information about this forthcoming. Watch this space!

I wish everyone a healthy and prosperous 2022, and look forward to meeting our members around Ohio, at your respective local meetings.

Best Regards,  
Chris DeMarco,  
ORTA President Elect 2022-2023

# STRS BOARD NOMINATIONS SCREENING COMMITTEE

On December 28th, a Zoom meeting was convened to plan for ORTA's screening and potential endorsement of candidates for the upcoming STRS Board election. A committee for this purpose, chaired by ORTA President-Elect Chris DeMarco, is being formed and questionnaires for candidates were discussed. The proposed questionnaires include questions addressing background information, proposed planks, skill sets, additional thoughts, and how ORTA can help the candidate. The purpose of this process is to help develop a more informed electorate and encourage more participation in this important event.

Applications to STRS are due at the end of February, with the Election being held from April 1 – May 3, 2022. There are three methods to vote in the Election: by phone, email, or paper ballot.

The ORTA Leadership Handbook provides guidance on the formation of State-Wide Committees. Keeping in line with the guidance provided by this document, the ORTA President will appoint a committee to tackle the issue of ORTA endorsement for STRS Board of Trustees. The 'requirements' for service on any state-wide committee include:

President shall appoint State Committee Chairs and members

All committees are to be chaired by a member of the ORTA Board

Committee members should be a blend of Board members and general ORTA members

## **Charge (goals) of the committee:**

1. Identify and vet candidates that will support the mission of ORTA (Monitor, advocate for, and protect the pensions and benefits of its members). Encourage individuals to improve the social and economic changes and issues relevant to their retirement.
2. The committee shall reach out to all candidates for STRS trustee and collect basic information through the use of a survey instrument. A template for this survey will be provided by ORTA, however, the committee may adjust this tool to collect relevant information.
3. Face to face interviews with the committee for each candidate shall be scheduled at the ORTA office. Interviews scheduled through technology can be used, although in person interviews are preferred.
4. ORTA shall pay mileage to all committee members for work associated with service on this committee.



# ORTA'S 5 REGIONS



## ORTA NORTHWEST LIAISONS

B.J. Woodruff  
Carole Wolfe  
Bruce Hodges

## ORTA SOUTHWEST LIAISONS

Evelyn Yockey  
Becky Cropper  
Dean Dennis

## ORTA CENTRAL LIAISONS\*

Karen Butt  
Paul Kauffman  
OPEN

## ORTA NORTHEAST LIAISONS\*

Carol Kinsey  
June Logan  
OPEN

## ORTA SOUTHEAST LIAISONS

Brenda Davis  
Don Ullmann  
Bee Lehner

\*Region has open position for a Liaison; please contact ORTA for details and contact information for your region



## FAIRFIELD COUNTY CHAPTER SCHOLARSHIP WINNER!

Pictured is Samantha Lowe, winner of the Fairfield County chapter's scholarship. The scholarship is valued at \$500. Ms. Lowe will be using the scholarship during her student teaching experience. Ms. Lowe was a student teacher at Berne Union Local Schools in Fairfield County.



*Jay Bahnsen, Fairfield County Scholarship Committee Co-chair (left) and Samantha Lowe (right).*



## HAVE NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS TO SHARE?

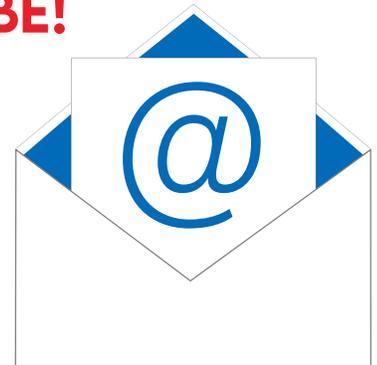


ORTA is happy and proud to make announcements on behalf of your local chapter in our monthly newsletters! If your local chapter has information that they would like to share, please just email: [publications@orta.org](mailto:publications@orta.org) and we will include it in our next available communication!

## DON'T FORGET TO SUBSCRIBE!

Every month, ORTA sends an e-newsletter full of the latest in STRS news, chapter events and important ORTA advocacy. If you're not signed up, visit [www.orta.org](http://www.orta.org) today and start getting the latest ORTA news.

If you want to share chapter news, please email your stories and photos to: ORTA Publications and Communications Coordinator at: [publications@orta.org](mailto:publications@orta.org)





# BENEFITS STILL FIT?

## TIME TO EXPAND YOUR COVERAGE.

As your life changes, consider some of these benefits and discounts from **ORTA & AMBA**:

- Dental & Vision Insurance
- Long-Term Care
- Home Health Care
- MASA (Air and Ground Ambulance Plan)
- Cancer, Heart & Stroke Policy
- Medicare Supplement Policy
- Easy Issue Life Policy
- Tax Deferred Annuity
- Hearing Benefits
- Discounts on Travel, Dining & more

Learn more: **1-877-556-4582**

[myambabenefits.info/orta](http://myambabenefits.info/orta)

OHIO RETIRED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION



## TIME TO RENEW?

Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Current Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Street/Apt./Suite #

\_\_\_\_\_

City State Zip

\$30 Annual Renewal Enclosed

Please send me a 2022 ORTA Membership Card

Current E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Year of Retirement: \_\_\_\_\_

Need to renew your dues? Just fill out this form and send in your payment to:

**250 East Wilson Bridge Road  
Ste. 150  
c/o Mia McLean,  
Membership  
Worthington, OH 43085**



**\*Check out page 9 of this mailing to learn how to renew your dues online, and skip the mail!  
\*\*Your new due date is the date your payment is processed (i.e. payment processed on 02/02/2021, new due is date 02/02/2022)**

*Thank you!*





THE ONLY PODCAST THAT ADVOCATES, SERVES AND BUILDS  
FRIENDSHIPS FOR BOTH RETIRED AND ACTIVE EDUCATORS

AVAILABLE ON THESE PLATFORMS:



***Ohio Retired Teachers Association is  
pleased to welcome our newest travel  
partner OVERSEAS ADVENTURE  
TRAVEL!***

More than 500 groups, like ORTA, travel with Overseas Adventure Travel (O.A.T.) each year because they are the leader in international travel for mature Americans and solo travelers. ORTA members will also enjoy their small groups, experienced trip leaders, flexible itineraries, and reasonable prices. Not to mention one-third of O.A.T. travelers are retired educators, what a perfect fit!

O.A.T.'s trips are especially fitting for solo travelers, because 92% of their Single Supplements (private rooms) are at NO EXTRA CHARGE! The remaining 8% have the lowest single supplement fees in the industry. O.A.T. also includes gratuities for drivers, guides, luggage porters and camp staff, as well as most other extra fees.

Which O.A.T. trips are right for ORTA? One size does not fit all, so O.A.T. offers small group adventures for 10 to 16 travelers, small ship river and ocean cruises for groups of up to 24 travelers, and longer, more immersive vacations for groups of up to 40 travelers. With O.A.T., ORTA can form a group trip with only 11 travelers!

Visit: <https://www.oattravel.com> for more info!

Name  
Address 1  
Address 2  
City, State ZIP

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## 2022 ORTA OFFICE CALENDAR (1ST QUARTER)

*ORTA 2022 Spring and Fall Board Statewide meeting dates are TBA. These meetings may be held virtually.*

**February 9th**-ORTA Monthly Executive Committee Meeting\*

**March 9th**-ORTA Monthly Executive Committee Meeting\*

**April 13th**-ORTA Monthly Executive Committee Meeting\*

**April 15th**-Good Friday, ORTA Office Closed 

**May 11th**-ORTA Monthly Executive Committee Meeting\*

**May 30th**-Memorial Day, ORTA Office Closed 

**June 8th**-ORTA Monthly Executive Committee Meeting\*

*\*Dates are subject to change*

## IMPORTANT CONTACTS

### **ORTA (Ohio Retired Teachers Association)**

250 E. Wilson Bridge Road | Suite 150

Worthington, OH 43085

614-431-7002 | [www.orta.org](http://www.orta.org)

### **STRS (State Teachers Retirement System of Ohio)**

275 E. Broad Street | Columbus, OH 43215

(888) 227-7877 | [www.strsoh.org](http://www.strsoh.org)

### **AMBA Benefits (Association Member Benefits Advisors)**

6034 W. Courtyard Drive | Suite 300

Austin, Texas 78730

(800) 258-7041 | [www.myambabenefits.info/orta](http://www.myambabenefits.info/orta)

