

- Update from Executive Director
- STRS Forensic Audit Information
- ORTA Obituaries



Kara Mendenhall, ORTA
Executive Director

FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Happy Halloween to all my fellow ORTA members! We are again facing the frenzy of the presidential election. Each day brings new happenings and, lucky for us, the ability to vote early or by mail so we can tune out some of the political noise that is clamoring for our attention. I am a poll worker and convinced my husband to get involved as well, so we will be busy election day. Whatever your ideology, please make time to VOTE. It is a right and a privilege we all must treasure and use.

The fall colors have been doing their best to cheer us up as we march into autumn. I have most of my summer flower pots put away and now need to finish mulching some plants for the winter and cutting some of the dead parts away so they don't gather leaves this fall. My garden and fruit trees were a bounteous delight this year and had me busy canning and freezing and sharing the produce wealth whenever I could. It seems that many folks were doing the same thing this summer as ALL of the canning lids have disappeared from the store shelves.

Our family is planning the holiday visiting schedule. It seems that we may not have as many visitors, if any, as in years past. Thanksgiving looks to be solitary with Christmas a bit more open to folks coming in for a few days. Thank goodness for facetime and zoom calls! It is not the same as being together, but it allows visiting in a safe way. I would much rather wait a while to see people in person than have them get sick and not be able to see them at all. ORTA has been meeting via zoom and continues to push forward with our goals of protecting your benefits and restoring the COLA.

Please make sure to check out Robin Rayfield's column regarding the forensic audit of STRS we hope to be able to fund through donations. This looks to be the best bet to get some movement in the right direction for retirees to again receive their COLA payments. If you are able to contribute, please do! We hope this is a tool ORTA can provide our members to help make the case for restoring the COLA.

We all face additional challenges with the prospect of being indoors as the colder weather approaches. Keep your spirits high and remember we wear the mask for each other! Watch out for those ghosts and ghouls!

Kara Mendenhall



Dr. Robin Rayfield, ORTA
Executive Director

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Hello ORTA Members!

STRS News

The STRS Board met in a virtual meeting on October 15, 2020. The meeting consisted of several presentations by the investment department and by the finance department. There is no 'good news' to report from either group, however, there were some contentious moments. To begin with, there were problems with getting the minutes of the September meeting approved. Board member Steen wanted the minutes to reflect that there was some concern on the part of board members that the STRS staff feel pressure that the retirees are not receiving a COLA. After significant discussion on the matter the minutes were tabled.

Even though STRS chooses not to record meetings, Mr. Steen offered to provide a copy of September's meeting so that the minutes could accurately reflect the discussion from that meeting. An important take away from this exchange is related to transparency. It would seem reasonable and appropriate for STRS to record meetings and make this recording available to STRS members that are unable to attend or listen to the meetings. No active teachers can 'listen' or be present at STRS meetings, so it would seem reasonable for a recording of the meetings to be available. It is also worth mentioning that board member Wade Steen recognizes that many members of STRS are not satisfied with the current status quo. This dissatisfaction, especially for retirees, has led ORTA to make the difficult decision to engage an outside and independent expert to conduct a forensic audit of the STRS pension system. I have included a separate announcement in this newsletter. I hope that all ORTA members can get behind this effort.

House Bill 13

ORTA received information regarding Ohio House Bill 13 last week. This bill is an effort to expand internet access to rural Ohioans. ORTA is supportive of this for many reasons. The Pandemic has brought to light how important broadband access is to education. With so many schools forced to hold classes in a virtual fashion, it is important that all children have access to this technology. For seniors, the ability to meet with their medical caregivers in a virtual setting could be very beneficial. After discussion with ORTA's State Legislative Chair, Carol Kinsey, she is optimistic that this bill will be supported. ORTA encourages all members to reach out to your legislators and ask that they approve Ohio House Bill 13.

HR Bill 141

The US House of Representatives has, once again, introduced legislation to repeal the GPO/WEP. This is legislation that would impact many STRS retirees. This is a piece of legislation that is introduced every two years and is aimed at correcting the unfairness of the GPO/WEP that reduces the social security benefits for STRS retirees. Do not get your hopes up on this bill. It has died in committee every congressional session since the 1980s. Like most 'political issues' this will probably be re-introduced in January 2021. Maybe with a new congress this bipartisan issue will gain enough support to get out of committee for a floor vote.

ORTA Podcast

ORTA's 2nd podcast was posted to the webpage earlier this month. We are currently working on the 3rd podcast with publication expected in the next week.

Best,
Dr. Robin Rayfield, ORTA Executive Director



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****Remember, the date we process your payment is your new due date for the following year (i.e. 09/30/20, new due date is 09/30/21). If you pay your ORTA dues to your local chapter, your payment is applied upon receipt to our office.**

Thank you!



NOBLE CO. NEWS

The **Noble County Retired Teachers** scholarship committee selected **Sarah Yurco** as their 2020 scholarship recipient. Sarah will be awarded a \$500 book grant. This book grant is awarded each year by the NCRTA to a Noble County graduate who seeks a career in the field of education.

Sarah is the daughter of Brian and Amanda Yurco and is a 2020 graduate of Caldwell High School. She is currently enrolled in online courses through Ohio University and seeks a degree in Early Childhood Education with a major concentration in Special Education.

Congratulations, Sarah, and best wishes for a successful future!



Above: Nobel Co. delivers \$500 scholarship to Sarah Yurco, a student at Ohio University



The Noble County chapter also met on October 8, 2020, in the Fellowship Hall of the Caldwell United Methodist Church. Following the COVID-19 safety guidelines, masks were worn, social distancing was observed and hand sanitizer was made available. Festive Fall and Halloween masks were made and provided to all members by Deloris Ullmann. Deloris has made a variety of masks since April, over 2200 in all - given to friends, family, members of the community and many others.



Food and beverages were provided by Don and Deloris Ullmann, Marvin Felner and Lori Tilton. Those present enjoyed pizza and wings from Wally's Pizza, salad and dessert.

Dr. Robin Rayfield, ORTA Executive Director, honored the group with his presence as our guest. He gave a very informative presentation as he spoke of the latest news from ORTA and STRS.



Above: Nobel Co. enjoys meeting festivities that included lunch, guest speaker Dr. Robin Rayfield and masks made by Deloris Ullmann

It was very nice social get-together for our October meeting. The group joyed delicious food, carried on meaningful conversations with fellow retirees and came away with a great deal of information.

ORTA AND THE STRS FORENSIC FINANCIAL AUDIT

The Ohio Retired Teachers Association (ORTA) is proud to announce an effort to engage Benchmark Financial to conduct a forensic audit of the STRS Pension System. Edward ‘Ted’ Siedle (principal of Benchmark Financial Services) is a former U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission attorney and globally recognized expert in pensions. His firm, Benchmark Financial Services, Inc., has conducted well over \$1 trillion in reviews of pensions on behalf of pension plan sponsors and pension participants. To learn more about Mr. Siedle you can visit <http://www.siedlewhistleblowerforensics.com/whistleblower-forensics-6.html>.

The decision to engage in a review of what is taking place with our pension system did not come easy. For several years STRS has failed to live up to its obligations to retirees. The loss of our guaranteed pension benefits beginning in 2015 with the reduction of our promised increase of pension benefits followed by the elimination of our promised increases in 2017 have forced retirees into this decision. STRS is in the best financial shape of the 5 public pension systems in Ohio, however, STRS retirees have gone several years without any increase in benefits. Some retirees have gone 8 years without an increase in retirement benefits! The loss of COLA, despite being promised by STRS and guaranteed in Ohio law at the time of retirement has no end in sight. When pressed for answers, STRS leadership simply say ‘STRS will only consider providing any COLA after the pension system has reached a funding level of 85%’. Keep in mind that in over 100 years of existence STRS has only been at funding level of 85% or above a handful of times and has not been at 85% or more in the past decade. At the October STRS meeting the paid financial consultant for STRS (Cheiron) indicated that STRS is not likely to reach the 85% funding threshold for many years. If STRS is unable to pay its obligations to its retirees at a time when the stock market is at record levels and the burden on active teachers is 40% higher than it was a decade ago, it is time for a deeper look at the manner in which our retirement is managed.

Thus, ORTA has agreed to participate in the collection of donations from STRS members to pay the fees associated with this external and independent review of STRS. To collect these donations ORTA has established an account at our partner Education First Credit Union. All donations collected for this purpose will be deposited into the Forensic Audit Account. There are several ways that you can donate towards our goal of raising the \$75,000 required for this forensic audit:

1. Current ORTA members can contribute any amount by writing a check to ORTA Forensic Audit. Your donation will be recorded in your name and deposited into the appropriate account. (Form on next page)
2. You can go online to www.orta.org and click on the Forensic Audit link to make a donation by credit card. Again, your donation will be recorded in your name.
3. If you are not a member of ORTA and would like to donate to the forensic audit you can donate any amount towards the forensic audit account. Your donation will include an annual ORTA membership at a rate of 50% (\$15). The remainder of your donation will be deposited into the forensic audit account in your name.
4. People that do not want to join ORTA at the 50% discounted rate may ‘opt out’ of ORTA membership by calling our office and donate desired amount by phone at 614.431.7002

If the donation levels do not reach the required levels to engage Mr. Siedle, donations of \$50 or more to the forensic audit account will be returned to the person making the donation. Donations of less than \$50 will be converted to ORTA memberships. If our donation levels exceed the fees paid to Mr. Siedle, the remaining funds will be deposited into the ORTA Foundation.

AWARDED IN ASHLAND CO.

Haley Rhoades, 2020 Ashland High School graduate, has been awarded the **\$500 Ashland County Retired Teachers Association Scholarship**.

Haley was selected based on her grade point average, her A.C.T. score, her leadership skills, participation in extracurricular activities and her many community service activities.

Haley has been accepted to Capital University in Bexley, Ohio where she will study integrated language arts education for students in grades 7-12. She also plans to minor in music (instrumental performance). Haley served as band president her senior year as well as piccolo/flute section leader both her junior and senior years of high school.

Haley is the daughter of Cory and Barbara Rhoades to whom she is thankful for their love and support. Haley would also like to thank her excellent teachers at Ashland High School and her private music teachers, **Mrs. Karen Ebert** and **Mrs. Margaret Burkholder**.

Ashland County Retired Teachers serving on the Scholarship Committee are **Dr. Alice French**, **Martha Pendleton** and **Bernice Becker**. **Steve Willeke** is president of the organization.



Ashland County Scholarship recipient Haley Rhoades



FORENSIC AUDIT DONATION FORM

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If you would like to donate to the STRS forensic audit, please mail a check noting “donation to audit”. Please fill out the form and mark the applicable box below and mail payment to:

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250 E. Wilson Bridge Road, Suite 150
Worthington, OH 43085

\$30 Renewal Payment **AND** Donation Enclosed

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Thank you!

LUCAS CO. HONORS BOARD MEMBER



Above: Marion Boyer, LCRT
longtime Board Member

The Lucas Co. Retired Teachers Association has lost a big part of their organization. Marion Boyer, the associations Secretary passed away from ALS in May of this year. Below is a tribute submitted by the group written by her husband Jim. We extend our condolences to the chapter and Marions family for their continued grief with their loss.

“A year ago, Marion Boyer, a retired middle school teacher and librarian was diagnosed at the Cleveland Clinic with ALS. Although she can no longer walk and speech is becoming more difficult, through the encouragement and support of the Board of the Lucas County Retired Teachers Association she has continued to be involved with association activities.

Marion is a long time member of the Association and member of the Board of Directors. For many years she was in charge of the college scholarships awarded by the association to university students demonstrating financial need and outstanding potential as future teachers. Currently. As secretary of the Board, Marion compiles minutes of the LCRT activities and meetings.

Recently, she was hospitalized and in rehab for six weeks but is happy to be back with her colleagues and friends. Marions philosophy of living with ALS is to focus on the living, move forward with lifes activities and each be thankful for her blessings and what she can do.

Her husband said “ *President Rhea Hollaran and Board Members are a shining example of compassion and concern. One would expect no less from retired teachers who spent their careers encouraging students. A special thanks to Nan Fetter, Community Participation Chairperson who notices what Marion needs and is right there to help.*”

—Jim Boyer, husband of Marion Boyer

LATEST FROM LOGAN CO.

Logan County Retired Teachers met in September for the second time this year. This meeting was a make up meeting for the cancelled April meeting. It was held at noon at the West Liberty First Church of God. Pastor Ron Irick presented the interesting program of stories about landmarks and legends of Logan County. The meeting was led by President, Emerson Brown. Vice President, Pat Ortlí discussed the October meeting. It is planned for October 15th at the Friendly Senior Citizen Center in Bellefontaine at noon. Members will be informed about the menu in the future. Member Bill Davis discussed possible officers for next year. More information can be obtained by calling **Emerson Brown at 937-404-9453** or looking at Logan County Retired Teachers Facebook page

MORE FROM MERCER CO.

The **Mercer County Retired Teachers Association** awarded their 2020 scholarship to Ally Kaiser from Ft. Recovery High School. Ally will be a secondary English major at the University of Dayton. Congratulations to Ally!



Above Ally Kaiser and her parents on graduation day





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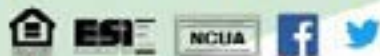
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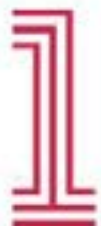


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IN MEMORIAM

Lake Co.

Wilbur Henry Black, October 25, 2020, LCRTA and ORTA Member

Barbara Bacon Inscho, October 22, 2020 LCRTA and ORTA Member

Ahmed Fellague, September 20, 2020 LCRTA and ORTA Member

Lucas Co.

Marion Elizabeth Boyer, May 16, 2020 LCRTA and ORTA Member

Sandusky Co.

Mary Stuckey May 1, 2020 SCRТА and ORTA Member

Eilene Perry March 14, 2020 SCRТА and ORTA Member

Wood Co.

Lois J. (Benzino) Sonnenberg, October 10, 2020 WCRTA and ORTA Member

Carolyn Ulsh, Septmeber 24, 2020 WCRTA and ORTA Member

***Deceased Member submission Policy update:
If you submit member(s) passing, please forward any obituary or funeral arrangements for our records.**

***“When our time on Earth has been complete,
Our spirit moves on, more mysteries to seek.
Celebrate what this person meant to you,
Cherish the memories when this life
you review.”***

—B.J. Woodruff



IMPORTANT CONTACTS

ORTA (Ohio Retired Teachers Association)

250 E. Wilson Bridge Road | Suite 150
Worthington, OH 43085
614-431-7002 | www.orta.org

AMBA Benefits (Association Member Benefits Advisors)

6034 W. Courtyard Drive | Suite 300
Austin, Texas 78730
(800) 258-7041 | www.myambabenefits.info/orta

STRS (State Teachers Retirement System of Ohio)

275 E. Broad Street | Columbus, OH 43215
(888) 227-7877 | www.strsoh.org

