

ORTA NEW BEGINNINGS IN 2021



Kara Mendenhall,
2020-2021 ORTA President

FROM OUR PRESIDENT

A very Happy New Year to all my fellow ORTA members! We have many reasons to be hopeful this year. There are vaccines coming available to us for the COVID virus, our fundraiser for the Forensic Audit is nearly at its goal, and in general, a new year promises a new beginning for each of us.

I come to you as ORTA President for a second year in a row. This is due to my succeeding the late Gale Adkins in the position in 2019. Who knows if I will actually get to visit with local folks in Ohio this year! Many chapters have not met at all since March of 2020 and have been in limbo with regard to their communication,

scholarships, community volunteer opportunities, and fellowship. Other chapters have met in distanced meetings or online, or kept in touch through newsletters. I know that many folks in my local chapter have taken the time to be in contact with each other via phone calls and mail, but some have felt alone in the months we have been separated.

It is ORTA's hope to be involved in as many local connections--virtual and in person, if possible--this year. We need local leaders to help make these connections a reality. To further that end, I encourage the following actions by our local chapter officers:

- Be in contact with the other officers in your chapter either by phone or by email to make sure they know that you are looking forward to meeting again.
- With your officers, make a plan on how and when you will begin to meet again and how that will be accomplished.
- It may again be necessary to keep the same officers as were in place when the virus stopped our in-person meetings.
- Take stock of your officers and members as there may be changes due to the virus. In other words, your chapter may be impacted by loss due to COVID, and it may be necessary to call upon some folks to step up and help fill gaps in the list of officers.

(con'd on next page)

ORTA BOARD MEMBERS

Kara Mendenhall
2020-21 President

Bee Lehner
Past-President
2018-2019

Chris DeMarco
President-Elect
2021-2022

ORTA OFFICE STAFF

Robin Rayfield
ORTA Executive
Director

Alissa Burton
ORTA Publications and
Communications

Mia McLean
ORTA Administrative
Assistant &
Membership
Coordinator

IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE:

• Messages from our
Executive Director
and all ORTA
Executive Board
Members

• ORTA Advocacy and
the Forensic Audit
Fundraiser

• Chapters celebrating
Anniversaries in
2021



- Be in contact with your meeting place to make sure of its timeline for opening and any restrictions it may have for meetings.

- Try a zoom meeting with your group. There is help available from the state ORTA office if you need it. Members just need a smart phone to participate.

As we move forward, please use the ORTA resources available to you if you need them. I look forward to a healthier 2021 and a renewed effort to support our retired teachers as we face the New Year.

Warm Regards,



Kara Mendenhall, ORTA President 2020-2021

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dr. Robin Rayfield, ORTA
Executive Director

Dear Members,

Well, if you had told me that we would be facing a situation that prevented ORTA from meeting in any face-to-face meetings for over a year, I would not have believed it. In 2019 I was able to visit about 50 local chapters, 4 regional gatherings of Local Chapter Leaders, 10 Executive Committee Meetings, and 2 meetings of the ORTA Board. In 2020 I attended 2 local chapter meetings, and 2 executive committee meetings. Let's hope that 2021 will allow a few opportunities to meet with each other, in person.

We have been able to meet in a virtual setting (through Zoom) with a few chapters. The ORTA Board met a few times in a virtual setting, and the Executive Committee held most of its meetings through Zoom, as well. I am grateful that we can connect via technology, however, meeting via a computer screen is not the same as meeting in person.

With the roll-out of vaccines, I am optimistic that life will begin to return to 'normal' although I am unsure of what normal will be going forward. I am happy that ORTA has weathered the COVID 19 pandemic as well as we have. My worry was that people will lose interest in our organization. Fortunately, that does not seem to be the case. Since your local chapters have not met, many of you may feel like you do not know what is going on. I can assure you that ORTA remains engaged in the fight to protect and improve our pension system.

ORTA is working on your behalf in a few important ways:

- ORTA is working to raise \$75,000 to engage Edward Siedle to conduct a forensic audit of the STRS pension system. Currently we have over \$70,000 in donations with additional funds pledged to this cause. We hope to have Mr. Siedle begin his work early this spring.

- ORTA has been in contact with several legislators, providing information regarding the broken promises made to our retirees. All legislators have received information (via email) on the loss of our promised benefits, and we have had meetings with several individual legislators regarding the plight of STRS retirees.

ORTA remains a viable, powerful organization. Our mission of advocacy stands as a vanguard protecting the benefits of STRS members. Although our primary focus is on retirees and their benefits, we all recognize that all STRS members will become retirees. If you are interested in helping ORTA in its advocacy for STRS members, ORTA needs leaders. Currently, ORTA has a need for Liaisons to serve and support in several regions in Ohio. Please consider if you would be willing to serve ORTA in a leadership role. The open positions at ORTA are:

- Central Ohio Liaison
- Southeast Ohio Liaison
- Southwest Ohio Liaison

ORTA and the Forensic Audit of STRS

What is this ‘forensic audit’ and why is ORTA raising money to pay for a forensic audit? The effort to hire Edward Siedle to conduct a forensic audit of STRS emerged over the course of 2020. Several factors led the ORTA Board to become involved with this effort. A brief review of these factors:

- Retirees of the STRS system were promised an annual COLA. This was in the Ohio Revised Code and in all materials shared with retirees. STRS broke that promise when they reduced the COLA from 3% to 2% then reduced the COLA to 0%. This broken promise has created a lack of trust in the STRS pension system.
- Additionally, active members witnessed an increase in STRS contributions of 40%. Coupled with a requirement to work at least 5 years longer and no COLA in sight, our active brethren are paying more and getting less!
- Meanwhile, the employees at STRS have received base pay increases and ‘performance incentive pay’ while the people that paid into the system and those still paying into the system are seeing reductions in their benefits. With the stock market at an all time high it does not make sense that active members and retirees are getting shafted while STRS employees receive monstrous bonuses and base pay increases.

So, ORTA agreed to serve as a collection point for raising \$75,000 to hire Mr. Siedle to take a closer look at what is going on at STRS. It has recently come to light that the people that are paid huge sums of money to ‘audit’ STRS do not really audit anything. The paid auditors simply ‘report’ on what information STRS employees provide. The relationship between the paid auditors, actuaries, consultants, and STRS appears to be much too familiar. Each of the paid consultants’ report ‘all is well’ at STRS. Why then, is STRS unable to pay its obligations to retirees? We hope that Mr. Siedle can shed light on some of the questions we have.

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>

I will close with a few facts on the forensic audit effort:

- We have to date \$72,212 collected (as of 1/20/21) with additional funds pledged.
- 230 ‘new’ ORTA members joined because of the forensic audit.
- 21 local chapters have contributed with Hamilton Co. RTA donating \$15,000!
- OFT (Ohio Federation of Teachers) donated \$10,000 to this effort!
- Over 850 individuals have donated to the forensic audit.

(con’d on next page)

You can still join ORTA's effort to conduct a forensic audit and donate. You can call the office at **614-431-7002** and we will accept a donation over the phone. Or you can send in your check to:

ORTA Forensic Audit
250 E. Wilson Bridge Rd Suite 150
Worthington, OH. 43085

STRS Elections

Elections for the two retiree seats on the STRS Board will be held this spring. ORTA has reached out to all candidates that wanted to share their message with ORTA members. So far, three retiree candidates have done so. Each of these candidates are required to collect 500 signatures from STRS retirees to be placed on the ballot. ORTA will reach out to all candidates with a short questionnaire so that our members can choose candidates wisely. If you would like to contact any of the three candidates and sign their petitions to be placed on the STRS ballot you may do so:

Elizabeth Jones – President of the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers Retired ljon48@hotmail.com

Rudy Fichtenbaum – former President of the Ohio and National American Association University Professors rfichtenbaum@gmail.com

Ron Donatone – STRS retiree from Northeast Ohio rdonatone@hotmail.com

Best,



Dr. Robin Rayfield, ORTA Executive Director

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, 2021 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 2021 Member ID.



FROM OUR PAST-PRESIDENT



Bee Lehner,
2018-2019 ORTA President

New Years Greetings ORTA Members!

In May of 2019, our Sunday School class was preparing to take a break for summer vacation. As a way of staying connected and in tune with one another, we chose to accept the challenge of choosing **JUST ONE WORD**, which we could focus on during the summer months until returning in September. We would share that word before leaving in May, then share again how our lives had been changed over the summer.

This challenge was to help us focus on what truly matters and what could make a difference in our lives, as well as the lives of those we cared about.

Some suggested words were Love, Joy, Trust, Kindness, Purpose, Faith, Hope, Listen, Simplify, etc. My chosen word for the summer of 2019 was “**Timing!**” When I chose this word, Coronavirus and COVID-19 had **NOT** become part of our culture here in the USA. During the summer of 2019, ORTA chapters were planning their programs, meeting sites, and menus for the 2019-2020 year. Little did chapter members know that the **TIMING** of COVID-19 would disrupt those plans, as it has for nearly a year now!

Once again, “**Timing is everything**”. Over two years ago, Dr. Robin Rayfield felt the **TIME** was right to speak out on COLA and other matters of importance to our members. He also encouraged ORTA members to engage in this effort in several ways. So take heed...

1. **TIMING** is right for ORTA members to encourage other retirees to join ORTA. Our voice is only as strong as our membership!
2. **TIMING** is right for ORTA members to contribute to the STRS Forensic Audit Donation. STRS is a public pension plan, and everyone contributes to public education, so this affects everyone!
3. **TIMING** is right for ORTA members to stay connected to these issues through social media. If you don't have technology at your fingertips, I'll bet you know someone who does! It's **TIME** to ask them for help!

ORTA members are resilient and patient folks— but it's 2021 now! It's **TIME** to take **ACTION!**

Yours,
Bee Lehner,
ORTA Past-President 2018-2019



FORENSIC AUDIT FUNDRAISING TRACKER



GOAL: \$75,000

DONATIONS TO DATE: 884

**TOTAL AS OF
1/20/2021 AT
12:00PM EST:**

\$72,212.01



FORENSIC AUDIT DONATION FORM

Full Name: _____

Current Address: _____
Street/Apt./Suite #

City State Zip

Current E-Mail: _____

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:

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

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

Donation ***ONLY*** Enclosed

Thank you!

FROM OUR PRESIDENT-ELECT



Chris DeMarco, 2021-2022
ORTA President-Elect

Greetings, as we welcome in this new year of 2021.

The past year, 2020 presented many challenges in almost every aspect of our lives, and I am looking, with optimism, to what 2021 will bring. To be sure there will be more challenges, as there are in each new year, but there is reason for hope on the horizon.

As the ORTA President-Elect, I am pleased that our organization has been able to maintain its financial stability, continued to meet virtually to carry on the business of ORTA, and initiate a major fundraising campaign in the interests of Ohio's retired teachers' benefits.

As a current Chapter President (Portage County), I am very proud of the dedicated and hardworking PCRTA Executive Board for their efforts to keep our Chapter viable and vital. They have met virtually, on Zoom, and continued their support of county students and active teachers through scholarships and grants. I would like to commend all of our Chapters who have carried on during these difficult times, and encourage all to find a way to continue to discover new and innovative ways to advance our mission of Friendship, Advocacy, and Service.

With that in mind, we (PCRTA) are planning to initiate virtual membership meetings, with programs of informational and entertainment value to stay in touch with our members and add value to their membership.

While I realize we cannot reach everyone through technology, I know the contact will be meaningful to those whom we can access. I have also spoken with our Community Service Chair in regard to finding ways to continue our support of our local community service organizations and I urge other Chapters to do likewise, as their needs continue, greater than ever.

Of course, we do all of this with the anticipation that hopefully by year's end we may be able to safely gather together to once again enjoy fellowship in person. Please stay safe and healthy and always "try to do what you can, with what you have, where you are."

Best Regards,
Chris Demarco,
ORTA President Elect 2021-2022



Thank you to all of our chapters for being an important part of ORTA and all of our successes!

We wish you the best year yet with your chapters!

70th Anniversary

Tuscarawas County

55th Anniversary

Athens County
Monroe County
Coshocton County
Morrow County
Crawford County
Portage County

Geauga County
Vinton County
Hancock County
Washington County
Lake County
Lawrence County

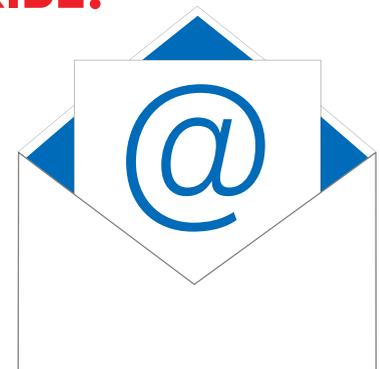
50th Anniversary

Highland County
Warren County

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 today and start getting the latest ORTA news.

If you want to share chapter news, please email your stories and photos to: **Alissa Burton**, ORTA Publications and Communications Coordinator at publications@orta.org.





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- Medicare Supplement Policy
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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 2020 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 02/02/2020, new due is date 02/02/2021)**

Thank you!





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Address 1
Address 2
City, State ZIP

2021 ORTA OFFICE CALENDAR (1ST QUARTER)

ORTA 2021 Spring and Fall Board Statewide meeting dates are TBA. These meetings may be held virtually.

February 10th-ORTA Virtual Monthly Executive Committee Meeting*

March 17th-ORTA Virtual Monthly Executive Committee Meeting* and St. Patrick's Day 

April 2nd-Good Friday, ORTA Office Closed 

April 14th-ORTA Virtual Monthly Executive Committee Meeting*

May 12th-ORTA Virtual Monthly Executive Committee Meeting*

May 31st-Memorial Day, ORTA Office Closed 

June 16th-ORTA Virtual 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

STRS (State Teachers Retirement System of Ohio)

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

