

- Update from Executive Director
- ORTA Honors a Passed Faithful Leader
- ORTA Obituaries

FROM OUR PRESIDENT



Kara Mendenhall, ORTA
Executive Director

My fellow ORTA Members,

As fall comes into full color around us, I hope that you are well and finding new ways to be active. It seems that this has been an extremely long year, and yet, we are nearly two-thirds done with it already. The time I have spent at home has not been all that different from other years. I have tried to keep the weeds from overtaking my garden, but those deer and raccoon that visit at night and ravage my vegetables are not what I want to confront! I found a kitten on the side of the road which has made being at home a bit more adventurous! She is my companion, albeit, a sharp-clawed one! It is nice having another being around the house.

I had the opportunity to record for the ORTA podcast this week. It was an interesting experience. I was asked questions by our Executive Director and tried to remember everything I was supposed to answer in the pauses between him recording the questions aimed at me, and my mic being turned on so I could answer those questions. There is more than just talking going on in making a podcast! That is another way ORTA is trying to communicate with folks. Please, if you have questions you feel we need to discuss so you can hear our opinions, or you just need answers you can't find anywhere else, call, email or contact us and let us know. Stand by on the second installment of the podcast. If you haven't heard the first one, listening to it may help you understand some of the situations we are facing as a group this next year.

We find ourselves in an unsettling time. The pandemic is surging and waning all over the world and scientists are working to figure out its peculiar qualities. The election of 2020 will certainly be memorable if only for the huge number of folks excited to vote. We are distanced by concern for the health of each other and it seems that in the midst of this tornado of stuff, we are able to suddenly see the lack of equality in so many facets of our society. As educators, we were expected to lead in our classrooms. We had the ability to flow with the changes thrown at us throughout the school year. I encourage you to draw on those impulses of calm that were a part of your teaching years. Find the humor in your daily routine and allow yourself a laugh. Look for the beauty in your surroundings and take a moment to enjoy it. Know that you are not alone, though separated from others.

Finally, I encourage everyone who is able to become involved in the election this fall. From voting to working the polls and everything in between, it is important for us to be a part of the process. Make a plan to vote. If you need help along the way, ask for it. You are an important part of your community and your voice matters. Make it heard--VOTE!

Warm Regards,
Kara Mendenhall, ORTA 20-21 President



Dr. Robin Rayfield, ORTA
Executive Director

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ORTA Meeting News

Things appear to be moving in the right direction with regards to the pandemic. Of course, we are in the 'danger zone' as far as our age and or health concerns. Please remain safe and do not take chances. With that said, ORTA is getting somewhat adept at meeting virtually. We have a Zoom account and we will assist any chapter wanting to meet with its membership via virtual means. Call us or email and we will assist!

STRS News

I recently listened to the STRS Board as they met in a virtual setting again in September. The news is not good. Although the stock market has rebounded from most of the COVID losses, our funding level has not improved. Remember, STRS has in place a policy that states there will be no benefit increases until the system is funded at 85%. We are currently in the mid 70% range. Some positive news, however, is one STRS board member did ask directly, what is going on with the COLA issue. It seems like a very long time ago that the board took away our guaranteed benefit increase (2017). For many STRS retirees, they have not received any increase since 2014. For all retirees, we have experienced a loss of what was promised for 5, soon to be 6 years! Wade Steen asked the 'experts' of offering advice to the investors at STRS several pointed questions. In one exchange Mr. Steen asked if the benchmark that the alternative investment group had established was unrealistic or is that group of investors under performing? Although the advisor would not say that the group was under performing the advisor did say the benchmark was a realistic and appropriate benchmark. Mr. Steen is currently my favorite STRS board member. I sense that he recognizes that retirees cannot live forever without any benefit increase. At one time he pointed out that, under the current projections provided by the STRS staff, the pension system does not reach the 85% level required for COLA consideration before **2037**. That is right, the chart used during the discussion went out to 2037 and the funding level remained below **80%**. Mr. Steen said something to the effect that 'we need answers and suggestions as to how the system can reach the level to provide increases to retirees'.

ORTA remains engaged in the fight to 'get more of what we were promised' after a career of serving the children of our state. We are currently investigating what more we can do to shed light on what is happening with our retirement. It seems like every time I listen to a presentation by STRS, I hear that STRS is in the top quartile of pension systems in the country. The highly paid 'external advisors' also inform us that our system is very highly rated. What troubles me is that the highly paid external advisors do not really 'audit' STRS. Instead, they report what STRS provides them in the way of performance and offers praise. I am all for recognition of excellence, however, if a pension system cannot provide the promised benefits to its members, how great can it be? One thing ORTA might do is seek an 'outside and independent' review or audit of the STRS system. We are currently investigating what such an audit would look like and what we might learn.

ORTA Podcast

ORTA launched its first podcast in August. We are working on another to release by the 1st of October. This is another way to get information from ORTA. All you need is a smart phone, tablet, or computer. I have received several compliments from members who have listened. Although we are not 'radio people' the podcast was easy to listen to and informative.

Best,
Dr. Robin Rayfield, ORTA Executive Director



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Thank you!



ORTA REMEMBERS A “BRIGHT” LEADER



Dr. Don Bright, Wood County Chapter President (current), and ORTA Past-President (2007-2008)

On August 28th, 2020 (just after the publishing of the August Newsletter), **Dr. Don Bright** of Bowling Green, (Wood County) passed away at age 90.

For over many years, Don was a proud ORTA member, President and voice for our organization. And up to his passing, was the leader for the **Wood County Retired Teachers Association** chapter.

Don had a long background in education that began when he taught at Arcanum High School, in Arcanum Ohio, before moving to Cincinnati, Ohio where he taught Business Education at the University of Cincinnati, while completing his Doctorate of Business Education.

From there, he ended up in Bowling Green in 1968, where he was Professor Emeritus of Vocational Business Education at BGSU. He was active in many Educational Business Associations serving as Director of Northwest Vocational Education Center and as President for OBTA, OVA, AVA, and of course, ORTA.

Among his passion for education, he enjoyed time at our Ohio state parks, and going fishing with family. He also enjoyed judging food and doing cooking demonstrations at both the Wood County and Darke County Fairs, and the Ohio State Fair.

We will miss seeing Don at luncheons and meetings, and hearing his wonderful stories he would share. Our thoughts are with his Wood County chapter family and friends, and the Bright family during this time.

LAKE CO. IS ZOOMING!

The **Lake County Retired Teachers Association** was originally scheduled to meet on September 14th at The Kirtlander Party Center for the Candidates Forum focusing on ballot issues and to meet local candidates, but the COVID-19 changed all that. Like the rest of the world, the retired teacher organization (LCRTA), adapted to pandemic changes and moved its in-person meeting to a Virtual meeting on ZOOM. Dr. John Grabowski was invited to be the guest speaker. Co-Presidents Terri Herbert & David Morse called the meeting to order, welcomed new members (Joe Kerata & Lynne Armington), and guests (**Dr. John Grabowski**, guest speaker, and **Cheryl Sekura** (from the **Geauga County Retired Teachers Association**), and the General Membership meeting began with a Meditation by Greta Pate. Pate, a social person herself, shared with the group that she prefers sitting at the Welcome Table in person for luncheons, over virtual ZOOM meetings on her iPad. Pate then listed three areas of chaos: Political chaos, Racial Chaos with emphasis on the third, Pandemic Chaos. Pate is still determined to focus on the positives. She has learned that there are things that are beyond her control, has learned to abide by advice from medical experts and is learning new ways to communicate with family and friends, such as FaceTime, Facebook and now ZOOM.

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Terri Herbert & Dave Morse gave an update on the pulse of LCRTA, “Where We Are.” Although things shut down soon after the February luncheon meeting, Herbert reported that the Board continued to meet regularly via ZOOM. Technology Advisor, Sherry Niederkorn has served as Host for the ZOOM meetings, setting them up and giving training sessions to those who are new to the platform. The organization has continued to function during the pandemic with the



Scholarship Committee (under the direction of Chairman Tim Niederkorn), awarding scholarships to three deserving high school seniors who plan to major in education. Niederkorn also announced that even though the usual “Donation Jar” is not available, donations can be submitted to Treasurer Pat Humphrey. Members may also want to consider LCRTA in their estate planning. The Teacher Grants, that were awarded last year (under the guidance of Chair Karen Sawitke), were extended, to allow the active teacher recipients time to actually get to use their grant money, since schools were closed in late March 2020.



During the summer, the Nominating Committee obtained a slate of officers, the Elections of Officers were held, and the Budget Committee is scheduled to meet next week. Morse suggested that members utilize websites that are available to retirees such as LCRTA, ORTA and STRS websites. He also informed the group of an STRS Facebook page with over 10,000 retirees participating. Guest speaker Dr. John Grabowski, who holds a joint appointment with the Department of History at Case Western Reserve University and the Western Reserve Historical Society, began the Program

portion of the meeting. Grabowski’s topic for the meeting was “Our Last Pandemic: Similarities between COVID-19 and The Spanish Flu.” He shared information with the group that states this is not Cleveland’s first pandemic, although it is the first one in a long time. The Spanish Flu dates back to 1918-1919 when 50 million people worldwide (including 675,000 from the United States, with 4,400 of those from Cleveland) died from the disease. Both pandemics were spread from person to person via transportation, but today’s modern transportation helps spread the disease more quickly than in the previous pandemic. The major difference of the two, being that the Spanish Flu occurred during the end of World War I. Grabowski showed a PowerPoint presentation with photos and slides that painted a picture of what it was like for those living 100 years ago, before he had to race off to teach his class to CWRU students.

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Following the program, Committee Chairs gave their reports to the membership. Sue McCarter reported that LCRTA is looking for a new venue for the luncheon meetings; Louise Bennet encouraged members to continue their generous donations to organizations who find themselves in even more dire straits, than before the pandemic; Tom Moscovic encouraged members to be sure to vote in the upcoming election; Membership dues

will be collected by Karen Sawitke in November; several cards & well-wishes have been sent by Pat Newyear; Historian Virginia Keller (also the current President-Elect) keeps busy adding memorabilia to the Scrapbook; Public Relations Team of Niederkorn & Pate keeps the public informed in the press; Bonnie Lillibridge asked members to indicate any changes that need to be made when membership is renewed; Karen Sawitke coordinates all the LCRTA news for the Bellingringer; while Sherry Niederkorn constantly updates the LCRTA website at <https://lakecountyrta.weebly.com/>. Sherry Barbieri reported that, unfortunately, the Social / Travel Committee had to cancel five of their planned trips due to COVID-19, but still has hopes for the trip to Biltmore and the Smokies at Christmas, Tulip Festival in Holland Michigan, the Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta in 2021, along with future trips of interest to the membership. Voting for the 2021-2022 Elections of Officers was done by Postcard Ballot this year, instead of the usual “show of hands” voting done in the past.

Congratulations to the newly elected officers:

- Cathy Trepal** (President-Elect) —**Debbie Deal** (Secretary)
- Pat Humphrey** (Treasurer)
- Connie Irvin, Karen Sawitke, Terri Herbert, Dave Morse** (Directors)

Announcements “For the Good of the Order” were made.

In place of the usual “Free Lunch” drawing, Barb Temple won a \$25 Giant Eagle gift card.

Dates of the upcoming meetings were given:

- Monday, October 5, 2020 – LCRTA Board Meeting on ZOOM
- Tuesday, November 10, 2020 – LCRTA General Membership Meeting via ZOOM.

There were over 40 LCRTA members using their laptops, iPads, or telephones to participate in the September 14th General Membership ZOOM meeting. Members agreed, it was so nice to “see” each other again, after the long hiatus!

SCHOLARSHIPS IN STARK CO.

During this novel corona virus pandemic, the **Stark County Retired Teachers Association** continues to support education. Since 1990, they have granted scholarships to education majors. Last year, they began plans to initiate a grant program for Stark County teachers. The 2020 recipients of a \$2,500 scholarship are highly qualified, receiving superior recommendations from their professors. The three recipients are **Julianne Agnone, Michael Biclawski, and Madison Kieffer.**



Julianne is a junior at Kent State University Stark, majoring in Middle Childhood Education with a Language Arts/Mathematics concentration. A graduate of Louisville High School, she is the daughter of Tom and Teena Agnone. Julianne is the president of KSU Student Education Assn. and a middle and high school cheer-leading coach. She was selected by the Middle Childhood faculty to be the “Student of the Year” because of her leadership, dedication, and collaborative efforts. Julianne states, “As a teacher, I believe it’s important to be a student advocate and empower students. When individuals are confident in themselves, they have a greater chance of reaching their highest potential.” Her professor wrote, “She will be the kind of teacher that students will love and colleagues will respect.”



Michael is a fifth-year student at Northern Michigan University, majoring in Elementary Education, with a minor in Integrated Science and Mathematics. A graduate of Jackson High School, he is the son of Michael and Lisa Biclawski. Michael is the captain of NMU’s Swim and Dive Team and a volunteer for the schools and the NMU community. Michael states, “I want to pass on the knowledge of different subjects, and convey social integrity to future students in an effort to remain a constant role model in many lives.” His professor wrote, “... I observed Michael as a leader in his commitments of becoming an educator... He is calm, thoughtful, and a leader as an advocate for the well-being of children.”



Madison is a junior at Kent State University, majoring in Early Childhood Education. A graduate of GlenOak High School, she is the daughter of Brian and Lisa Kieffer and the granddaughter of SCRTA members Paul and Jeanne Kieffer. Madison sings with VOX Audio, a premier a cappella singing group of Sing Stark! In addition to her studies and part-time jobs, she is a young entrepreneur who established “MK’s Quality Cleaning,” a house cleaning business with sixty clients and three part-time workers. Madison states, “In elementary school, I had excellent female teachers that I really admired. I would like to be able to be the same kind of role model to children as they were to me.” Her professor wrote this about her first field experience, “She listened to and valued the children’s interests and ideas, offering comfort to those needing emotional support and guidance to those with more challenging behaviors.”

Members of the **Stark County Retired Teachers Association** regret not being able to meet these worthy future teachers and their families to present the scholarships in person. We wish them continued success in their future educational endeavors. They will be valuable assets to the teaching profession.



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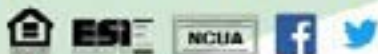
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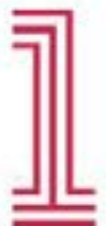


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IN MEMORIAM

Delaware Co.

Pat Staley
Rosella Ault
Virginia Helwig

Fairfield Co.

Gary Culp, FCRTA and ORTA Member

Lake Co.

Elaine Markey, September 12, 2020, LCRTA and ORTA Member

Lillie M. Wilson, September 13, 2020 LCRTA and ORTA Member

Portage Co.

Margaret P. Daugherty, March 16, 2020 PCRTA and ORTA Member

Judith Kay Ward, July 6, 2020 PCRTA and ORTA Member

Richard Dick Worthing, July 1, 2020 PCRTA and ORTA Member

Wood Co.

Dr. Don E. Bright, August 28, 2020, WCRTA President, ORTA Past-President and Life 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

STRS (State Teachers Retirement System of Ohio)

275 E. Broad Street | Columbus, OH 43215
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