

- Update from Executive Director
- Chapter Updates
- ORTA Makes Headlines!



Kara Mendenhall, ORTA
Executive Director

FROM OUR PRESIDENT

A sunny hello to my fellow ORTA members!

March has begun as we trudge our way (hopefully) out of pandemic life of the past year. My March opened in astonishing fashion with the birth of our first grandchild. He arrived a week early, but has not shown any sign of being anything but perfect! The cheerful days that followed have been a welcome backdrop for his anxious parents who are trying hard to follow the “parent path” they have been recommended. As anyone who has been in their shoes knows, there are always obstacles that come up which were never expected or explained.

Thanks to all those who were able to contribute, our Forensic Audit has begun and we look forward to better understanding of how STRS is working with our pension funds. We are also able to establish an ORTA foundation which will be explained in further detail as we work through the requirements of the law surrounding it. Through the fundraising effort, we were able to garner a host of new ORTA members and we hope that through showing them the benefits of being a part of this organization, they will want to maintain that membership status. Please respond to the reminder cards that are in the mail. If you have questions, our staff in the central office is there to help.

Although this is the time of year when most local chapters do not meet, we have been hearing from many chapters who are hopeful they can get their members together in the near future. I know Robin has been on several zoom meetings with chapters this year. We on the executive committee are ready for some REAL face time. We have heard from several locals who have thought of creative ways to be in touch with members. We appreciate your efforts.

This is the time of year for new beginnings--fuzzy calves in the field, eggs in the nest, squirming newborns in a bassinet. We have reason to be hopeful this year that as spring comes closer, we will have some relief from the stressful constraints of our pandemic lifestyle. Please help each other by getting the vaccine and encouraging those around you to do so as well. Our collective well-being depends on this. We need to be the leaders in moving forward in getting protected. Thank you for all your support during this time. We hope our work proves fruitful.

Happy Spring!



Kara Mendenhall, ORTA 2021 President



Dr. Robin Rayfield, ORTA
Executive Director

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Hello, ORTA Members!

STRS News

The STRS trustees met in February. On Wednesday, the 17th the investment committee met to review what is taking place with the numerous asset classes or areas in which STRS invests our money. The discussions were routine with many questions from trustees on the real estate investments and the alternative investments. There was some degree of controversy near the end of this lengthy committee meeting. Board member Wade Steen revisited the ‘performance incentive’ (bonus) topic. He made a motion that each trustee would receive the information on the bonuses paid to our investment staff 50 days prior to any vote on these payments. Mr. Mayerfeld 2nd the motion. The discussion included the fact that the benchmarks are not well defined, and Mr. Steen felt that he wanted to be able to better understand if the benchmarks for earning a bonus were met. 50 days would allow him to ask questions and seek clarification. Mr. Mayerfeld and Mr. Steen voted to recommend this 50-day provision to the entire board. Ms. Walters, Ms. Herrington, and Mr. Scott did not support this effort at transparency. They were more concerned that the bonuses be paid in a timely manner than they were as to whether the bonuses were earned.

The following day the STRS board met. Takeaways from the meeting were:

- STRS is experiencing a good year with nearly 16% earnings in the 1st half of the fiscal year.
- Mr. Morrow, chief investment officer will retire in April of 2021. STRS manager of alternative investments and fixed income, Mr. Worley, will replace Mr. Morrow. STRS will hire two people to replace Mr. Worley.
- Mr. Bill Neville, Executive Director of STRS, advised the board that STRS Assumed Rate of Return (ARR) is higher than most pension systems across America. It appears that STRS staff is preparing the STRS board for a recommendation that the ARR be lowered. This is of great significance as it is the ARR that determines the funding ratio of our pension system. Lowering the ARR by just ¼ of 1% from 7.45% to 7.20% would increase our liabilities pushing our funding ratio lower. With no serious consideration of COLA prior to an 85% funding ratio lowering this assumed rate of return will push any discussion of COLA out by as much as a decade. Remember, STRS does not predict reaching the 85% threshold before 2038 with the current assumed rate of return.
- Mr. Russell (Deputy Director of STRS) presented information comparing STRS to other public pensions across the U.S. What I found interesting is that STRS has the highest individual contribution rate and the lowest employer contribution rate.
- Mr. Treneff presented the results of the STRS annual membership satisfaction survey results. According to the 300 people surveyed, STRS rates high in member satisfaction.

Forensic Audit

Mr. Siedle has begun his work on the forensic audit of STRS. His public records request can be seen here <https://www.orta.org/advocacy> His work is expected to take about 4 months to complete. Check ORTA’s website for any updates.

STRS Elections

Three seats will be elected to the STRS board of trustees in May of 2021. ORTA has not 'endorsed' any candidates since 2005 and has no plans to do so for this election. This is a topic that will be discussed at upcoming ORTA board meetings. It may be that ORTA will become more engaged in the selection of candidates for our pension system.

Four candidates have met the requirements to be placed on the ballot for the two retiree seats.

[Bob Stein](#) is a current STRS trustee.

[Rita Walters](#) is a current STRS trustee.

[Rudy Fichtenbaum](#) is a candidate for STRS trustee.

[Liz Jones](#) is a candidate for STRS trustee.

ORTA sent a brief questionnaire to each candidate. I have attached their responses (click names to see survey response)*.

Best,



Dr. Robin Rayfield, ORTA Executive Director

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ORTA'S IN THE NEWS!

Have you seen the various news articles that feature ORTA and the forensic audit? From newspapers to blogs, we're getting coverage.

Click the links below to read and learn more*!

[Dayton Daily News](#)

[Big If True Blog](#)

[The Fremont News Messenger](#)

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FOLLOW ALONG WITH THE STRS FORENSIC AUDIT

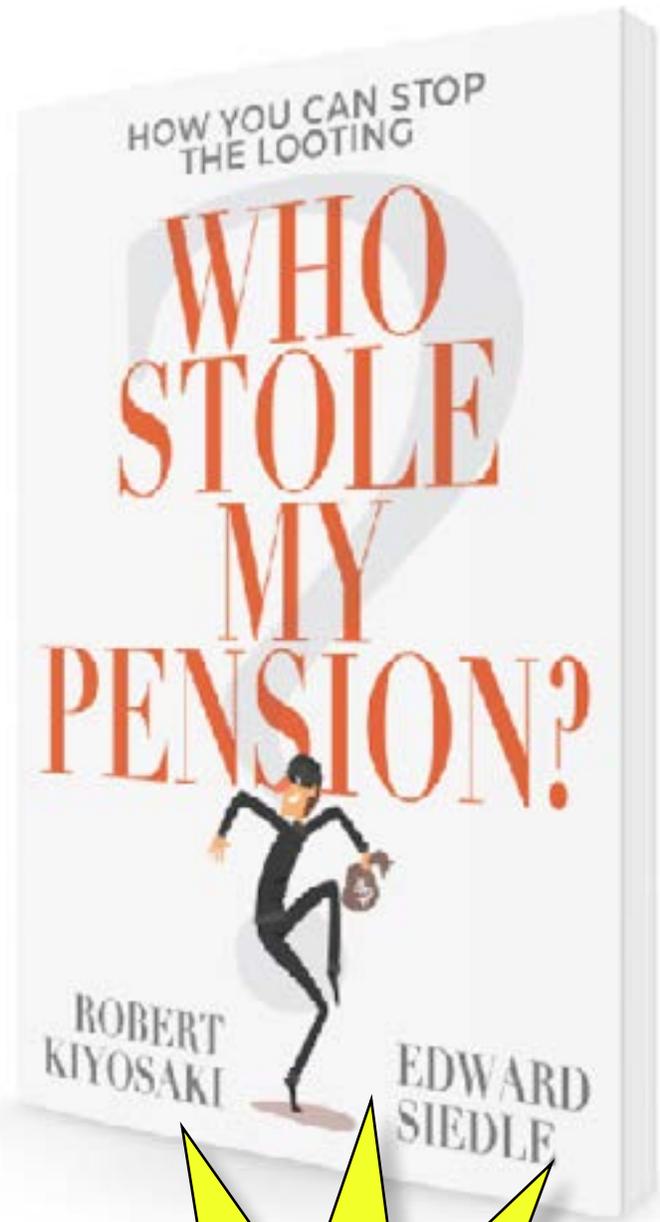
Edward “Ted” Siedle’s work is underway! Mr. Siedle has written an award winning book on how these investigations work, and explains step-by-step the procedure and process of the investigations.

Mr. Siedle has graciously provided copies of his book to the ORTA office, and we want our members to read alongside while the work is being done.

This book will help us understand the results of the audit upon completion, and will be a resource for questions you may have about the audit process.

Call our office today to find out more details on getting a copy TODAY!

614.431.7002



Above: Edward “Ted” Siedle, author of “Who Stole My Pension?”





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OHIO RETIRED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION



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****Remember, the date we process your payment is your new due date for the following year (i.e. 03/30/21, new due date is 03/30/22). If you pay your ORTA dues to your local chapter, your payment is applied upon receipt to our office.**

Thank you!



CELEBRATING 100 WONDERFUL YEARS

Irene Was of **Trumbull County RTA** recently celebrated her 100th birthday.

She is a life member of ORTA and is a distinguished artist. Her interest in art began when she had to teach art in her classroom at a school with no art teacher.

At age 80 she added an art degree to her credits. She loves to paint flowers and received 100 roses for her birthday.



PORTAGE COUNTY ANNOUNCES 2021 TEACHER GRANTS RECIPIENTS

Portage County Retired Teachers Association announced the 2021 recipients of teacher grants. The Association supports innovative educational projects and activities that would otherwise not be possible. Projects from **Matthew Wunderle** at Ravenna High School and **Tammy Anfang** and **Kim Marfy** at Crestwood Middle School were selected from 13 applications.

Matthew Wunderle's American Government students will combine an interest in politics and elections and marry it with Gen Z's love of technology. Students will create virtual reality campaign advertisements using an Oculus Quest 2 and a Google Tilt Brush application. Wunderle's goal for the project "is not only to allow students to think strategically about campaigns, but to inspire participation in the political process and stimulate interest in political career paths."

Tammy Anfang and Kim Marfy from Crestwood Middle School will use their grant funds "to show how strong writing skills produce results and change in real world applications." All 8th graders will research local non-profit organizations and volunteer opportunities. They will write grant proposals and deliver persuasive presentations. The winning groups will receive grant funds for their proposals. This is a grant request to fund student grants to non-profit organizations.

The pandemic curtailed school activities for the winners of last year's 2020 grants which are now being completed. **Gretchen Sivinski** from Ravenna High School is using a vinyl cutting machine to make inspirational wall decals throughout the building. **Nicole Wallack-Giammo** and **Vanessa Shafer** from James A. Garfield Middle School are using their grant to purchase materials to increase interest in STEM careers.



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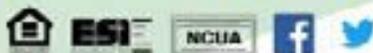
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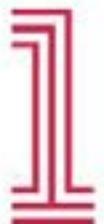


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Greater Cleveland Chapter

Janice Ware Ilerio, Ahmed A. Fellague, James Hayes, Emily G. Johnson, Florence Laux, JoAn Male, Van Niforos, Elizabeth J. Ptak, Richard G. Reusch, La Blanche J. Trail, Linda Valot-Jenkins, Martha J. Wegert, Robert A. Wendt, Ellen K. Weston and Ella M. Wright (members passed in '19, '20 and '21)

Hamilton Co.

James Bruckmann, ORTA and HCRTA Life Member

Jefferson Co.

Mary Divitch, ORTA and JCRTA Member
George Tiabi, ORTA and JCRTA Member

Muskingum Co.

Leroy Cranz, ORTA and MCRTA Life Member

Ottawa and Sandusky Co.

Jann Phelps, Member of both SCRTA and OCRTA

Portage Co.

Rudy Bachna, ORTA and PCRTA Member
Maria Mastromatteo, ORTA and PCRTA Life Member
Maryalice Weller Seaholts, ORTA and PCRTA Life Member
Eileen Errickson, ORTA and PCRTA Life Member

Shelby Co.

Wayne Gagermeier, SCRTA and ORTA Life Member

Stark Co.

Lois Swanson, SCRTA and ORTA Member
Betty J. Byelene, SCRTA and ORTA Life Member

Trumbull Co.

Joyce H. Thomas, TCRTA and ORTA 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

Happy St. Patrick's Day

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.



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

