

- Update from Executive Director
- ORTA at STRS
- Chapters are meeting!



Kara Mendenhall,
ORTA 2021 President

FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Greetings ORTA members in the dog days of August!

As we process the bounty of our summer gardens and look forward to cooler days ahead, it is my hope that you are well and still being cautious about mingling with large groups of folks. The recent announcement of the Pfizer vaccine being fully approved by the FDA may encourage some hesitant people to take the shot.

I was among those who were present last week for the STRS Board meeting. There was a robust showing of retirees who were fired up about the seeming inconsistencies of the STRS policy and practices. I was impressed with those retirees who spoke. They asked pertinent questions and made logical appeals for the return of the COLA to STRS members. My husband(not an STRS member)

questioned why the board seems to be so unresponsive to the people who are the reason they exist. We need to take that to heart.

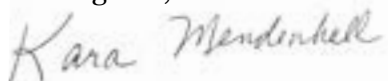
The pandemic has shown some glaring flaws in systems in this country and in our relationships with other countries around the world. In some ways, the pause it has caused is one in which people have been able to make choices for their own best interest. It has also brought about the highlighting of inequities between groups of workers in our country and hopefully started conversations to remedy some of those inequities. It seems that we have lost the idea of helping each other to benefit all that was so prevalent during and after WWII. I grew up with that idea being put forth to me as the standard pattern of behavior. Our shared sacrifice will result in the overall benefit for the whole. I keep waiting to see this put into action, but only see it in the medical field, and even there, cynicism is taking hold.

It is my hope that logic or fear or sense of duty will take hold and those who are not yet vaccinated will get to it.

Fall is often seen as a time of beginnings--especially for teachers. I wish you a fall of renewed hope and cooler heads prevailing.

Onward to better times!

Best Regards,



Kara Mendenhall, ORTA 2021 President



Dr. Robin Rayfield, ORTA
Executive Director

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

STRS News

The STRS board met on August 19, 2021. The meeting began at 8:00 and lasted until about 5:00 PM. There was an abundance of retirees in attendance. Due to COVID 19 social distance measures the people in attendance were split into the board room area and an overflow room 4 floors below the board room. The crowd was present to observe and, many to voice concerns about the situation at STRS. All 15 public participant spots were filled with people that wanted to voice concerns with the leadership at STRS. Of course, many of the comments voiced concern over the reduction in benefits retirees have experienced over the last 5 years. Some asked the question, 'Since the system has met the 85% threshold for COLA reconsideration, when can we expect our COLA?' The board acted in a predictable and expected manner throughout the day.

Biggest takeaways:

- 1.** The board responded to the Edward Siedle Forensic Audit As expected, STRS disagrees with everything in the report. As Mr. Siedle commented, people that have been allowed to behave in a manner that rewards themselves for poor performance for decades will not stop that behavior just because someone objects. Consider that STRS has spent millions hiring companies that only say nice things about STRS. When STRS pays companies like Callen, CEM, Cliffwater, and ACA the amounts they pay, of course those companies say positive things. Remember the story about the emperor and his clothes? ORTA will offer a response to the STRS report soon.
- 2.** The board also awarded bonus payments of nearly \$7,000,000 to its investment staff. These payments were approved even though the report from the group charged with evaluating whether the benchmarks were met has not been completed. The crowd was very unhappy with the decision to pay bonuses to the staff.
- 3.** The board also selected Rita Walters to serve 1 year of the term Bob Stein was elected to in May of 2021. You may recall that Bob Stein ran for re-election and resigned shortly after winning his seat.
- 4.** One thing that was reinforced was that the board does not provide any level of oversight to the STRS staff. Outside of Wade Steen none of the STRS board members question the actions of the staff. The OEA backed members of the STRS board simply approve any measure proposed by the STRS staff. If you get the chance check out the ORTA YouTube channel recording of the first part of the meeting. Of specific interest to retirees, you will notice that board member Wade Steen asked several questions with the remainder of the board asking very few questions.
- 5.** Something else that was obvious to all who attended is the fact that the active members of the STRS board vote for any proposal that the STRS staff present. They ask few questions, only questions that strengthen the proposal. Consider Mr. Rhodes (active OEA member) who informed everyone that STRS does not pay bonuses to its investment staff. Mr. Rhodes let everyone know that the investment staff are paid what they have earned, it is not a bonus. Unfortunately, for Mr. Rhodes Executive Director Neville made a comment about the bonuses. He said that 'No bonuses would be paid until the ACA report had been completed and submitted'. Then he apologized to Mr. Rhodes for using the term bonus. Even the Executive Director understands that receiving extra pay for a job that some consider exemplary is a 'bonus'. Webster's defines bonus this way: money or an equivalent given in addition to an employee's usual compensation.

Forensic Audit

Now that the preliminary report of the forensic audit has been released and the STRS board of trustees have responded, some folks have asked ‘What happens now?’ The answer is that ORTA will continue to advocate for retirees seeking changes at STRS that will restore the benefits to the level promised.

The fact that STRS did not accept the report is not surprising? When you consider that STRS staff have mismanaged and poorly performed for decades and the STRS trustees have paid bonuses for that poor performance each year for decades, it is not strange that they would disagree with Mr. Siedle’s assessment. If you consider that STRS brought in the best witnesses money can buy to support their response to Mr. Siedle’s report, it is somewhat surprising that the response was not sharper. After all, STRS has 20 plus managers bragging about their own performance, along with the highly paid consultants at Callen, CEM, Cliffwater, and ACA who are paid a great deal to say nice things about STRS. Millions are paid so that everyone involved can get paid again, and again. Everyone associated with this get paid a great deal, except for the people that paid into the system. Actives pay in 14% for a 10.5% benefit. Retirees have had benefits reduced from promised levels. STRS fails to meet benchmarks, but still receive bonus pay. Where are the trustees? Where are the unions? ORTA will be in this fight to the bitter end. Mr. Siedle is not done.

We have two legal actions seeking records that STRS refuses to provide. Last week, again the STRS board was asked to provide simple information:

- How much is invested in each of the 135 alternative investment external accounts?
- What are the total costs (fees, expenses, and other costs) associated with those investments?
- What are those investments worth today?

We are optimistic that the courts will require STRS to provide investment information to the investors (the STRS members, active and retired). As I mentioned in my comments at the meeting, if STRS will simply provide the information related to our investments and the costs of making those investments, much of the controversy will be settled and some level of trust between STRS members and the STRS pension system can be reestablished. If STRS continues to hide information, members will continue to ask, ‘What are they hiding?’

STRS Appoints Rita Walters to STRS Seat.

The STRS board voted to fill the vacancy left when Bob Stein resigned his seat after winning reelection this spring. Ms. Walters is a strong supporter of STRS staff and opposes all measures or proposals suggested by board member Wade Steen. ORTA intends to identify and support candidates for retiree seats beginning with the election to be held next year.

Best,



Dr. Robin Rayfield, ORTA Executive Director

SUPPORT FROM OHIO SENATOR TERESA FEDOR

Senator Fedor from Toledo stepped forward with an announcement that should make all educators, active and retired, happy (see below). ‘ORTA has been looking for a legislative champion, and it seems like Senator Fedor is our hero.

“...When I spoke with her about the Ted Siedle forensic audit report, she was very interested and engaged. Her statement calling for changes at STRS is evidence she means what she says”, commented ORTA Executive Director, Robin Rayfield.

FOM THE OFFICE OF SEN. TERESA FEDOR;
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 20, 2021

Fedor Calls for Cost of Living Adjustment for Retired Teachers

Columbus -- Today, state Senator Teresa Fedor (D-Toledo) released the following statement after virtually attending the August 19 State Teachers Retirement System (STRS) of Ohio board meeting. The STRS Board that over sees the \$90 Billion Pension has 11 members, assisted by over 500 individual staff members, who are tasked with serving the more than 500,000 active, inactive and retired educators in the system.

“Just like an elected official, the members of the STRS Board work for the people they represent – in this case, the retired teachers of Ohio. These educators were promised that when they retired, they would receive a cost of living adjustment (COLA) each year. For many, that promise was the only reason they chose to retire in the first place. That promise has been broken, and the situation for many retired teachers is becoming dire.

“Even though one has been scheduled for the coming months, years have gone by without a required independent audit taking place. I was shocked that the Board blamed the Covid-19 pandemic, even though an audit should have taken place in 2016. In the meantime, retirees have seen their COLA disappear while STRS staff and those managing the funds have received bonuses on top of their salaries. Retirees want real answers to their important questions. These former teachers deserve transparency and to have their voices heard.

“I urge the Board to reinstate the COLA immediately, and make cuts to salaries and bonuses if that is what it takes.”

ORTA GOES TO STRS



ORTA was there for all the action at STRS on August 19th. With over **100+** retirees hearing and watching at the meeting itself, to the over **5K viewers** on our Facebook Livestream event, we let STRS know we're not going away anytime soon.

We need all voices to be heard! If you know a colleague or retired friend who may not know about ORTA, we want them to be a part of what makes us stronger.

If you haven't had a chance, [click here](#) to view the recorded Livestream on our YouTube channel, and don't forget to subscribe!



LATEST IN LOGAN CO.

Logan County Retired Teachers met on June 24th at the Masonic Center in Bellefontaine, Ohio at 6 PM. The meeting was very full with President Emerson Brown presenting six teachers with Lucy Brown Classroom grants for \$250 each for the upcoming school year. They are **Ryan Kerns, Sarah Beres, Mandy Defibaugh, Brianne Hughes, Sherrie Yoder, Kellea Wilkinson and Andrea Watts.**

Madison Taylor was presented to the group by the scholarship committee, Carol and Bill Davis. Madison was awarded this year's \$1,000 scholarship. She is a graduate of Bellefontaine High School and will attend Ohio Northern University majoring in music education.

Dr. Robin Rayfield, executive director of Ohio Retired Teachers Association was the main speaker. He informed the local group about the results of the forensic accounting that ORTA paid for of STRS, state teacher's retirement system. ORTA is still pursuing STRS to give the cost of living to the members as promised.

B. J. Woodruff was also present at the meeting. B. J. Woodruff is the regional representative to ORTA for this group.



Pictured Above (Top): Bill and Carol Davis present this year's scholarship winner, Madison Taylor.

Pictured Below: Emerson Brown and Dr Robin Rayfield talk with the group;

Below (Left): Wes Hall, a 2020 winner of the Lucy Brown Classroom Grant, shows the group his computer project.



NEW NEWS IN NOBLE CO.

The **Noble County Retired Teachers** met on August 12, at Wolf Run State Park and held a delicious potluck along with a regular meeting.

Members donated school supplies to be shared between both Noble County elementary schools. They also took part in an annual Book Exchange - bring a book, take one home!

Noble County local, Ken Perkins of McVay-Perkins Funeral Home in Caldwell was the guest speaker.

The main focus of his message was to thank Noble County teachers for providing building blocks that carry through to other grades and eventually prepare students to go out into the world. He told of personal experiences that he and his son had with great Noble County teachers who influenced the successful lives they have today.

Committee reports were given and we received a handout with the latest ORTA update from Dr. Robin Rayfield.

President **Don Ullmann** has challenged his members to get out there and try to recruit new members for our local chapter. He is offering a local restaurant gift certificate to each of five members who can bring in a new member before the end of this year.

NCRTA's next meeting will be held October 14, during which our third annual Memorial Ceremony will take place.



Pictured Above (Top): Ken Perkins of McVay-Perkins Funeral Home in Caldwell

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.

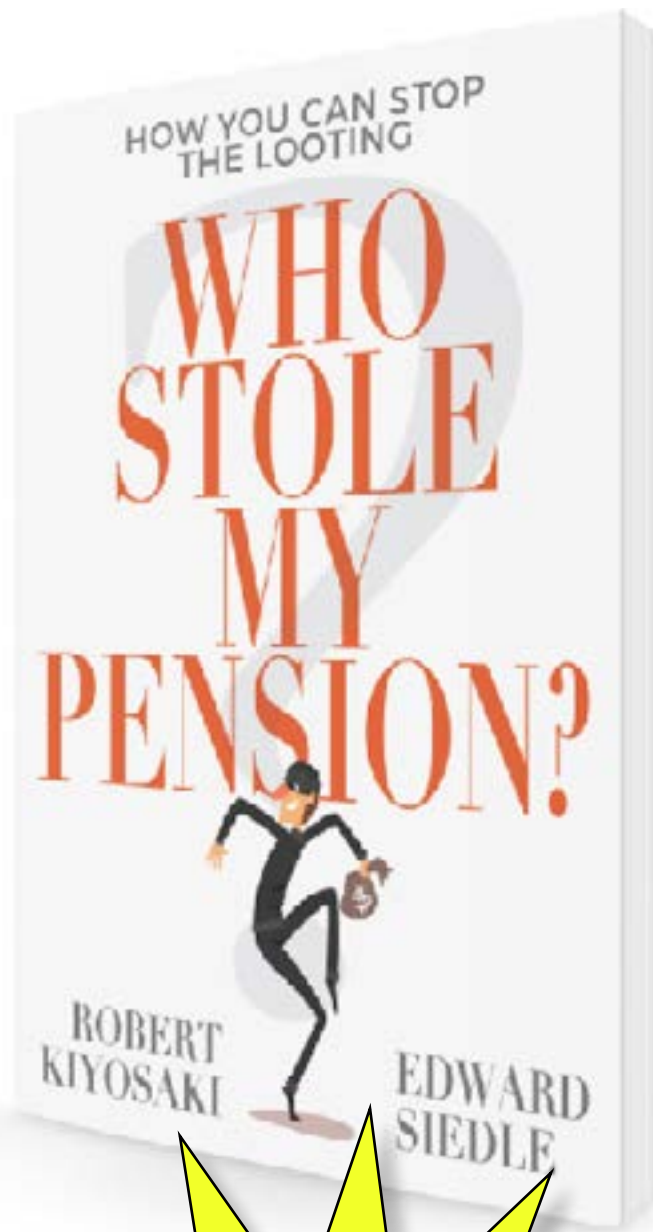
This book will help us understand the results of the audit upon completion, and will be a resource for questions you may have about the audit process.

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?”



BELMONT CO. BRINGS SCHOLARSHIPS

The **Belmont County Retired Teachers Association** recently honored area high school students who were awarded scholarships.

Each recipient is planning a career in education. Due to the pandemic, the 2020 recipients were honored this year as well as the 2021 recipient. The 2020 recipients were **Hannah Elerick** and **Madison Dagan**, both graduated from Saint Clairsville High School.

The 2021 recipient was **Jayden Lowe**, a Bellaire High School graduate.



Pictured from left to right: Rose Durant, Scholarship Committee co-chairperson, Jayden Lowe, Hannah Elerick, Madison Dagan, and Patricia Murphy, Scholarship Committee co-chairperson.

HIGHLAND CO. HIGHLIGHTS SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

Madison Miller and **Sarah Free** have each been awarded \$500 **Highland County Retired Teachers Association Scholarships**.

Madison is the daughter of Jeremy and Deanne Miller and is a 2021 graduate of Fairfield Local High School. She is attending Northern Kentucky University, majoring in Elementary Education.



Sarah Free is the daughter of Craig and Stephanie Miley. Sarah is in her sophomore year at Wilmington College, majoring in Early Childhood Education with a Minor in Special Education.

Ciara Colwell has been awarded a \$500 Harold W. Spargur Memorial Scholarship from the HCRTA. She is the daughter of Anthony and April Colwell. Ciara is in her sophomore year at Ohio University, majoring in Music Education.

Anyone wishing to apply for the 2022-23 school year scholarships or to make a donation, may contact **Mary Black**, HCRTA Scholarship Chair, at **937-402-7643**.



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

OHIO RETIRED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION



TIME TO RENEW?

Full Name: _____

Current Address: _____

Street/Apt./Suite #

City State Zip

\$30 Annual Renewal Enclosed

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**



****Remember, the date we process your payment is your new due date for the following year (i.e. 05/30/21, new due date is 05/30/22). If you pay your ORTA dues to your local chapter, your payment is applied upon receipt to our office.**

Thank you!



IN MEMORIAM

Muskingum Co. (Member passings 2020-20)

Dean A. Sarbaugh, ORTA & MCRTA Member
Doyle Wilbur Harple, ORTA & MCRTA Member
Betty Wiechert, ORTA & MCRTA Member
Leroy A. Cranz, ORTA & MCRTA Member
Sara Sowers, ORTA & MCRTA Member
James E Swinehart, ORTA & MCRTA Member (2020)
Mary Pollock, ORTA & MCRTA Member (2020)

Portage Co.

Gaye Bricker, Portage Co. Life Member
and ORTA Lifetime Member
Raymond E. Aeschliman, Portage Co. Life Member
and ORTA Lifetime Member

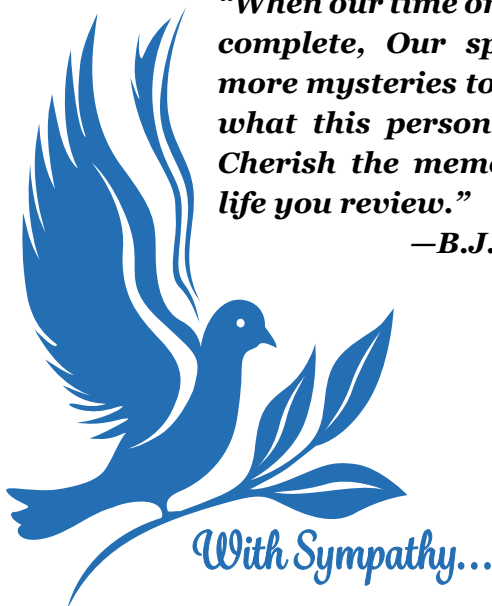
Stark Co.

Carol A. Hedrick, SCRTA Life Member
and ORTA Lifetime Member
Jean Parker Mears, SCRTA Life Member
and ORTA Lifetime 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
(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



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.





HAPPY LABOR DAY!

—SEPTEMBER 5TH—

OUR OFFICE WILL BE CLOSED MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 5TH,
AND RESUME NORMAL BUSINESS HOURS TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 6TH

TUNE IN!



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

AVAILABLE ON THESE PLATFORMS:



12 >>>

WE'RE LIVE!
FIND US ON YOUTUBE!



We're on YouTube! Watch for live recording of Zoom meetings, monthly executive meetings and other ORTA announcements and messages.

Search "*Ohio Retired Teachers Association*" and subscribe TODAY!