



KEEPING ORTA MEMBERS APPRISED OF HAPPENINGS AND EVENTS

5|20

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FROM OUR PRESIDENT



2019-2020 ORTA President,
Kara Mendenhall

May greetings to all ORTA members!

What a strange spring this has been! We at ORTA are aware that many counties around the state have decided to cancel May and June chapter meetings out of an abundance of caution for our members. Because of the “on-hold” actions, there are not many items of news to share about our organization. The regions of ORTA have either postponed, or cancelled the yearly meetings we hold for the regional leadership. In other words, all levels of ORTA have been on pause.

I hope that anyone who is aware of friends who might not have regular contact with family has been calling to make sure those folks are well. It seems that being home most of the time can help focus attention on our aches and pains and frustrations with what we can't get done. Reaching out to friends often helps to keep our issues in balance and is an effective way to cheer us as well as the people we call.

The ORTA Executive Committee has continued to meet via Zoom and are working to improve how we serve the membership. Please be assured that we are hoping to be back in touch with everyone as soon, and as safely as possible. In the meantime, we encourage you to be safe and well.

All my best to you,
Kara Mendenhall



Dr. Robin Rayfield, ORTA
Executive Director

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Hello ORTA Members!

News for ORTA Members

As things in Ohio ‘open up’ we all face a new normal. As we all adjust to what this new normal will be, ORTA has developed a set of suggested guidelines to assist local chapters with moving forward. Those guidelines are included in a separate section of this month’s ORTA Newsletter.

STRS News

The STRS Board met on May 20, and May 21, 2020. STRS is not allowing people to attend the monthly meeting in person due to social distancing regulations. STRS has provided a link for people that wish to observe the Board of Trustee meeting until we are allowed to attend.

Several ORTA members have requested that access to STRS meetings be placed in a podcast, allowing any interested people to ‘watch/listen’ to any meeting of the STRS Board at their leisure. Several ORTA members have responsibilities that prevent them from being available for a live broadcast of the meeting and are unable to attend or observe in real time. Creating an opportunity to watch or listen to the meeting at a convenient time would be of great benefit. ORTA is requesting that a link to the meeting be created that would allow interested people the opportunity to observe the meeting at a time and date of their choosing. I was able to listen to the STRS meeting. Reports on the investments and returns indicated that, although the recent market downturn reduced our investment portfolio, the downturn has not devastated our pension system. At the time of the meeting our funding was at approximately \$75 billion down from a high of \$81 billion before the COVID crisis. As the markets gain strength our funding will increase. All things considered; I am confident that STRS funding remains solid. Lynn Hoover from STRS presented a first draft of the STRS budget. Notable in the budget was a 1.9% increase in compensation for STRS employees. This topic prompted some discussion as to the wisdom of presenting a budget with employee raises during a time when the investments are down, and the governor’s budget included cuts to the education budget. When coupled with the fact that STRS retirees have not received what we were promised, I concur that an increase in compensation for employees raises serious concerns. The incentive compensation component of the budget also included a projection that reflects a \$1.9 million decrease in incentive compensation for the investment staff.

ORTA Zoom

ORTA has the capability to conference with local chapters via Zoom. This is a video conference format that allows groups to ‘meet’ electronically. Participants may meet via computer, tablet, or by phone. Contact ORTA if your chapter would like to hold a Zoom meeting and we will assist.

Some Thoughts on STRS Management

Recently, there have been criticisms of the way our pension system has been managed. I think it is important for ORTA to ‘weigh in’ on some of these criticisms. Here are my thoughts, please remember these are my thoughts. I have developed these thoughts and ideas after speaking with hundreds of ORTA members.

· The matter of the loss of COLA and how to correct this issue. Please remember, that your pension was calculated at the time of your retirement. Your calculations included a simple COLA of 3% each year. So, any decrease in your pension goes against what you were promised. I have always been vocal that ‘we are reasonable people’ and recognize that there may need to be some ‘adjustment’ in our pension benefits.

However, a loss of COLA for what is going for 5 years is not what I would call an adjustment. Coupled with a reduced COLA for 3 years we have lost 18%. This is an outright cut in what we were promised.

· As you may know, some of the other public pension systems, Police and Fire, OPERS, and State Troopers, have their COLA approved by the state legislature each year. STRS benefits are controlled at the pension system board level. One might think that having our pension system controlled at the board level would be a positive situation. Unfortunately, our pension board has not been tuned in to retiree benefit issues. In fact, the board spends very little time in discussions surrounding COLA. There is legislation being drafted that would put STRS benefits (including our COLA) back into the hands of the legislators. This legislation would require that STRS retirees receive some form of COLA. I tend to support this legislation. Why? Well, I have to say that our current situation is unacceptable. Our STRS Board has suspended our COLA; indefinitely. When pressed by retirees for when we might expect a return to a COLA, STRS simply says when we get to 100% funding (now the benchmark is 85%). Keep in mind that STRS has only been at an 85% funded level a handful of times in its 100-year history. It has NEVER been fully funded (100%)! Meanwhile, even though our sister public pension systems have been funded at a lower level, they have provided COLAs to their retirees. I guess I like our chances with the elected officials better than I like our chances with a pension board that has not entertained a COLA for our retirees despite tremendous gains in the investment funds.

· ORTA has supported and advocated for changes in the funding mechanisms for STRS. ORTA has advocated for an increase in funding to STRS from employers. As we all know active members received a 40% increase in contribution rates. The employer rate remained unchanged. So, active educators work 5 years longer to be eligible for benefits, pay in 40% more towards retirement, and receive less. Obviously, the STRS pension system is not meeting its obligations to retirees. I am shocked that the STRS staff and trustees have not taken any action to increase the contributions from employers. ORTA has also suggested alternatives to traditional COLAs. Unfortunately, STRS has not held any discussion on alternatives that have been suggested. Finally, I see a problem in the laws that govern STRS and the way our unfunded liabilities are calculated (ORC 3307.512). You may understand that STRS must, by law, demonstrate that STRS can pay off its unfunded liabilities within a 30-year period. That 30-year funding period was established at a time when educators earned full retirement benefits after a 30-year career. New requirements for earning full retirement are not tied to 30 years of service. Active teachers must work longer as the requirements now include years of service and age requirements. People do not retire after 30 years. The funding period should be based on a more accurate picture of how long it takes to earn unreduced retirement benefits. A more realistic funding period would be 35 years.

Final Thoughts

I am hopeful that the worst of the pandemic is behind us. As we move forward and emerge from the 'stay at home' conditions, please remember, ORTA members are in a vulnerable demographic. For the most part, ORTA members are more vulnerable to the virus than our younger citizens. Protect yourself and those that you love by following the guidelines established by Governor DeWine and his staff!

Safest Regards,

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. 05/20/20, new due date is 05/20/21). if you pay your ORTA dues to your local chapter, your payment is applied upon receipt to our office.**

Thank you!



ORTA COVID-19 REOPENING GUIDELINES:

ORTA is committed to the safety of all of our members. With safety being our priority, ORTA offers the following guidelines moving forward as Ohio emerges from the COVID 19 Pandemic.

1. ORTA's first guiding principle is that all ORTA activities should adhere to Ohio's Governor's rules and guidelines regarding COVID 19. The state of Ohio's Health Department has provided a strong list of rules and guidelines for its citizens. ORTA strongly supports these rules and guidelines.
2. As Ohio emerges from the 'stay home' orders and people begin to resume their daily lives, please remember that all ORTA members are in the category of 'high risk' individuals. Since our membership is comprised of high-risk individuals, ORTA activities should be curtailed until Ohio's Health Department leaders indicate that it is safe to resume meetings.
3. Currently, activities that involve close contact (less than 6' social distancing) remain prohibited. Large groups (more than 10 people) also remain prohibited.
4. Because ORTA local chapters typically meet in groups of people larger than 10, it is not suggested that local chapters resume meetings at this time.
5. A few local chapters have indicated that they plan to meet with their respective Executive Committees to conduct chapter business. ORTA suggests that these meetings be conducted via conference call or some other remote mechanism. ORTA will assist in this endeavor as it may be new to many members. Call the ORTA office for assistance with this issue.
6. It is possible for a smaller group (less than 10 people) to meet (in person) if such a meeting is necessary. Please remember, social distancing (at least 6') remains necessary for any such meetings. People that are especially at risk (those with underlying conditions that place them at increased risk) should not participate in any face to face meetings. The use of a public park where meeting participants could bring their own chair is a possibility for maintaining social distancing. Face coverings, and hand sanitizer would be required for such meetings.
7. We are in the beginning of the recovery phase. Our health leaders are working feverishly on a vaccine. If we can hold on a little longer the end is in sight.
8. Please feel free to lean on ORTA for assistance in keeping your local chapter active during the time of this pandemic.

A “NOBLE” CO. CAUSE

Some good news! ORTA members are impacting their communities in so many ways. While this has been an unusual year for all of us, a “stay-at-home” order is hard to obey, so one must stay busy. **Deloris Ullmann**, a retired SES teacher, who is known for always being busy anyway, decided to make masks to donate to others. The total number of masks made and donated has reached nearly 500, 65 of which were made with the help of her husband, **Don Ullmann**, former SHS principal, for the Senior Class of 2020 at Shenandoah High School. Many people have donated to the cause. The SHS seniors will have a keepsake to remind them of a senior year like no other. Don and Deloris are members of the **Noble County** chapter.



Pictured Above: Don and Deloris Ullmann share the masks they have created for SHS 2020 Seniors



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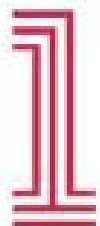
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IN MEMORIAM

Logan Co.

Violetta J. Brown, February 2020
ORTA and LCRTA Member

Jean Louise Walborn-Gantz, February 2020
ORTA and LCRTA Member

Lake Co.

Victor W. McIntire, March 2020
LCRTA and ORTA Member

John Goetz, February 2020
LCRTA and ORTA Member

Tom Huston, May 2020
ORTA and LCRTA Member

Muskingum Co. (2019-2020)

Rose F. Isch, March 2019
MCRTA and ORTA Member

Ann Deckerd, July 2019
MCRTA and ORTA Member

Tom Brown, October 2019
MCRTA and ORTA Member

Cathrine Rogers, January 2020
MCRTA and ORTA Member

Portage Co.

Esther Lucille Burton, April 2020
PCRTA and ORTA Member

Shirley Arlene Dubetz, April 2020
PCRTA and ORTA Member

Virginia May Mills (105), March 2020
PCRTA and ORTA Member

Stark Co.

Beverly J. Cain, April 2020
SCRTA and ORTA Member

Trumbull Co.

Doris T. Bunkley, April 2020
TRTA and ORTA Member

Lois J. Brown, May 2020
TRTA and ORTA Life Member

Tuscarawas Co.

Neva "Gerry" Clendening, April 2020
TCRTA 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

