

Shelby County Retired Teachers Association Newsletter



Shelby County Retired Teachers Association
June 2024
Volume 11, Issue 2

James Sparks, President
Nancy Wilhelm, Vice-President
Norma Walters, Secretary
Kim Sparks, Treasurer

A Note from the President

Hello SCRТА members

It appears that summer is trying to get started here in Shelby County as we have encountered a couple of days recently that exceeded 85° F. I'm sure like the rest of you, we have been outdoors trying to get a few jobs done while it's cooler. When it gets too hot it is too easy to just stay inside in the air conditioning.

I am looking forward to the June 5th SCRТА meeting at the lovely Army Corps of Engineers Lake Shelbyville Visitors Center starting at 9 am. We will be hearing from the teachers that were awarded our mini grants this past January. Some are forwarding reports and others plan to present to us in person at the meeting. We are expecting to hear from the president and the executive director of IRTA also. I really hope you will all come out and join us for the excitement.

I know that most of you have likely received a letter from Aetna announcing that as of July 1st they will be excluding HSHS from in-network coverage. I called both Aetna and HSHS regarding this notification and have been informed that negotiations between Aetna and HSHS are still ongoing and hopefully an agreement will be reached before July 2024. I will continue to monitor this situation and will have an update for our June 5th meeting.

An SCRТА executive meeting took place on May 7 seeking means to encourage membership not only for SCRТА but also IRTA. We've included a sheet to aid in recruitment at the end of this newsletter. IRTA is the only organization that has our back to protect our benefits. If you know of any teachers in Shelby County that are retiring please let an SCRТА officer know. The committee also briefly discussed some additional member activities that would be fun day events. We welcome your suggestions for any such activities you think would be enjoyable.

I wish you all the best and welcome any questions, concerns and suggestions you may have. We enjoy trying to keep you all informed and provide some of the camaraderie you enjoyed being part of an active faculty in school.

Best Regards,
Jim Sparks
(217) 259-2669
jsparks7914@gmail.com

June Meeting

Wednesday, June 5

Lake Shelbyville
Visitors Center

Social Time - 8:45 am
Program - 9:00 am
followed by
business meeting

Light snacks
will be provided



Shelby County News

Dates to Remember:

SCRTA Meetings: September 4 & November 6

Virtual Area 5 Conference: July 10 at 9:30 am

Possum Lodge Fundraiser will likely be the last Saturday in August.

(Details on the Area Conference and the fundraiser will be emailed this summer.)



April Meeting

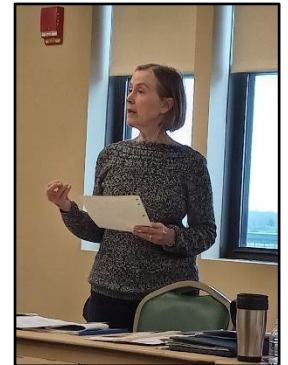
SCRTA met on April 3 at the Lake Shelbyville Visitors Center. The first part of the program featured Timi's Tours, a business located in Moweaqua. We were given folders with catalogs of upcoming trips as well as coupons to use on one.

Maude Hartman won the door prize – a gift card for Oliver Coffee Company.



Kathy Readnour and Kristen Chumbley spoke about the many programs offered through Shelby County Community Services.

Janice Varner, retired teacher from Central A&M, also attended the meeting. She replaces LaVonne Chaney as our new Region 13 Representative.



June Meeting

Our June 5th meeting should be a good one. For our program we have invited the teachers who received mini grants from SCRTA in January. They will be telling us about how they used the funds. Representing Shelby County's six districts are Kathy Doty – Okaw Valley, Jaclyn Golding – Cowden-Herrick, Jill Briggerman - Shelbyville, Monica Tomblin – Stewardson-Strasburg, Bailey Leasher - Windsor, and Courtney Hiler - Central A&M. Come out and support the teacher from your school district!

We will have two guests coming in June. Mike Schmidt is the President of IRTA and Jessica Hoselton is the new Executive Director, replacing Jim Bachman. It is truly an honor that they have chosen to travel to Shelby County to attend one of our meetings. Let's have a good turnout to welcome them!



Jessica Hoselton



Mike Schmidt



Stay informed by visiting state and local websites. The SCRTA website has information on our county meetings as well as IRTA, TRS, and current legislation.

<https://www.shelbycountyretiredteachers.com>
<https://www.irtaonline.org/>
<https://www.trsil.org/>

The Annual Area 5 Conference will again be a virtual conference. It will be held Wednesday, July 10 at 9:30.

Instructions on how to register will be posted on the IRTA website as well as the SCRTA website. We will send out an email with more details in June.

Possum Lodge Fundraiser

Possum Lodge has once again offered to do a fundraiser for our mini grant program. They will cook sandwiches on a Saturday morning on the VFW parking lot for drive-up sales. Our job is to wrap the sandwiches as they bring them off the grill. We will send out an email in early August asking for volunteers to help. Last year we made over \$1600!

If you aren't a member of the local organization, SCRTA, please consider joining. You can send your payment to Ginnie Hostetler, 1014 W. North Fourth Street, Shelbyville, IL 62565. Dues money is used for mailing out the newsletter as well as donations in memory of our deceased members.

\$5.00 Annual Membership
\$100.00 Lifetime Membership

Insurance News

Those of you with Aetna **TRAIL MAPD health insurance** were most likely surprised two weeks ago by news about HSHS hospitals and doctors. Since then, you have probably been receiving letters from both sides. We will have an update on the situation at our June meeting.

This is where we stand as of May 27 as this newsletter goes out:

Our state insurance plan AETNA is now in the process of negotiating an agreement with the HSHS Medical Group. Should an agreement with HSHS not be reached by July 1, 2024, AETNA will no longer support your visits with any HSHS group. This would include St. Mary's, St. Anthony, Good Shepherd, St. John's and Prairie Heart, etc., as well as any doctors in the system such as Dr. Oligschlaeger. IRTA Executive Director Jessica Hoselton spoke with Illinois Central Management who manages the insurance plans for the retirees. They indicated that this negotiation is a private negotiation between AETNA and HSHS Medical Group, and we can just hope they reach a settlement.

Benefit Choice Period for TRIP Health Insurance

The annual **Benefit Choice Period** for Teachers' Retirement Insurance Program (**TRIP**) participants will end **May 31, 2024**. Learn more at <https://mybenefits.illinois.gov>. This is the time to enroll yourself and eligible dependents as well as make changes in TRIP coverage. If you do not want to change your coverage, you do not have to do anything. Your current coverage will continue.

Remember: This is **TRIP** coverage for younger retirees who are **NOT eligible for medicare**. The enrollment period is in the fall for those enrolled in the Medicare Advantage Prescription Drug (MAPD) Plan-Total Retiree Advantage Illinois (**TRAIL**).



News from IRTA and TRS

Following is information you may find interesting. These are excerpts or summaries from the two websites: <https://www.irtaonline.org/> and <https://www.trsil.org/>. If you would like to read more, follow the links.

Excellence in Education Grants for Teachers

The Illinois Retired Teachers Association Foundation continues to work toward the future by offering \$42,000 in grant money to educators. This special grant will provide additional funds to public school educators (Pre-K through 12) so that their students will have the means to participate in special projects.

Applicants may download, complete, and submit the application online by [clicking here](#). All proposals must be **submitted by June 1, 2024**. A special committee will select the recipients of the grant money over the summer. Grant awards will be presented in the fall.

If you know current teachers who might want to apply for this grant, let them know that the deadline is fast approaching. Last year 14 educators in Area 5 received grants, including Jill Briggerman from Shelbyville and Okaw Valley educators Erin Barker and Hope Kirkwood.

2024 IRTA Educational Webinar Series (Click link to register)

June 26 (10:00 a.m. CST) All About Your Dental and Vision Plans

IRTA Dental and Vision plans through AMBA are the most popular benefits for IRTA members. Join us to find out how these plans work for you to give you excellent care and savings. We'll also compare to the other national plans. https://ambabenefits.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_W-OyyYCsS8qhTQKqZT6w1A

July 31 (10:00 a.m. CST) All About Long Term Care

Explore the myths and realities of what is covered when it comes to Long Term Care. Does Medicare cover anything? What about my major medical plan? Are there any options? Do I even need it? Join us to find out all the answers as we break down what Long Term Care is and how it impacts generations of your family. We'll look at many options you might not have considered. https://ambabenefits.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_VwYT6-WSSiZ87TvKXcHsQ

August 21 (10:00 a.m. CST) Protecting Your Nest Egg

You've worked hard all of your career and now you have a pension and a nest egg to protect. In this webinar, we'll explore what a nest egg is, what the top 5 threats are to your retirement nest egg, and some possible solutions to keep you resting easy when it comes to your financial future. https://ambabenefits.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_rsOOZx55SgW6kR5SpA3XxA

Learn more about how the IRTA Foundation helps future educators with scholarships, current educators with grants, and retired educators needing financial assistance at <https://www.irtaonline.org/foundation/>. You will also find information on how to contribute to this arm of IRTA.

And learn more about what the Political Action Committee does and how you can contribute at <https://www.irtaonline.org/pac/>.

If you would like to travel with fellow retired teachers, you can get information at <https://members.irtaonline.org/trip-and-activities/>. Upcoming trips include an Alaskan cruise in 2024, a Paris to Normandy cruise in 2025, and a Cub/Cardinal game in July at a party suite with upscale buffet and full-service bar. Act quickly. Space may be limited.

Legislative Update

The Illinois legislative session should be over when we meet on June 5. For the status of bills that affect educators, go to the Legislative Issues section of the IRTA website or the latest Good Dog News (A Look Under the Dome).

On the federal level, the Congress is again looking into **repealing the WEP/GPO**. (For more in depth information on WEP/GPO, see the IRTA website.) On Tuesday, April 16th, the U.S. House Ways and Means Social Security Subcommittee heard testimony from experts about the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and Government Pension Offset (GPO). The Social Security Fairness Act, H.R. 82, and S. 597, seeks a full repeal of WEP and GPO. These bills have overwhelming bipartisan support in both chambers. H.R. 82 has over 300 co-sponsors in the House, while S. 597 has 53 co-sponsors in the Senate.

At the hearing, witnesses provided examples of how the outdated formulas used to calculate the WEP and GPO create unfair outcomes for beneficiaries who are affected by one or both policies. Unfortunately, the committee hearing served as a subject-matter hearing only and did not result in a committee vote. It is understood that this is frustrating. It's important to remember that the lack of Congressional action means that continued engagement with elected officials in Congress remains a top priority.

On February 20, IRTA Executive Director Jessica Hoselton hosted a Zoom meeting with Congresswoman Nikki Budzinski about this legislation. In response to personal stories from IRTA members, **Congresswoman Budzinski offered specific steps that supporters seeking the repeal of WEP and GPO should remain focused on:**

- Continue to share personal stories with legislators. Sharing how you and your family are personally and negatively impacted by these federal policies is powerful.
- Stand in solidarity with other supporters and proponents, including but not limited to police officers, firefighters and other groups that represent public workers.
- Encourage other members of Congress to sign on as co-sponsors to H.R. 82.

In closing, Congresswoman Budzinski agreed that there is still more work to do but encouraged Illinois' retired educators not to give up on this issue and to continue sharing your support.

IRTA's member wide Call to Action resulted in over 4,000 messages in support of H.R. 82 being sent to members of Congress. As Congress continues to examine solutions, IRTA remains engaged in this issue and encourages members to remain vigilant in expressing support for a full repeal of WEP and GPO. Thank you for responding to our Call to Action and for your continued support of IRTA's advocacy efforts.

TRS News

TRS is one of the largest pension systems in the US, serving over 448,000 members and having assets of \$69.5 billion as of 2/29/24. Financial reports and information on the investment portfolio can be found at <https://www.trsil.org/>.

A meeting of the TRS Board of Trustees was held on April 18 & 19. Annuitant Trustee Douglas Strand submitted a summary of the meeting to IRTA. You can read it on the IRTA website. Go to "Members Only" to sign in, then to "Publications & Documents".

Several updates are being made to the TRS website to make it more accessible and user friendly. To aid member safety, the secure member area online will soon have enhanced security with multi-factor authentication.

TRS Board of Trustees member Larry Pfeiffer will speak at the SCRTA September 4 meeting.



The following was developed by IRTA Membership Chair Phyllis Cox for use in recruiting new retirees. The information could also work in reaching out to our peers who are not members as well as a good reminder of why we belong.

(Dues deducted directly from TRS paycheck are \$3.50/month. Dues paid annually are \$46. A lifetime membership is \$600.)

IRTA is the **only** state organization that is solely committed to protecting retired teachers' retirement benefits – pension and healthcare.

- IRTA reviews all legislation introduced by the Illinois General Assembly, identifying those that may impact benefits *earned* by retired teachers.
- IRTA members are alerted and educated about important legislation being debated by Illinois lawmakers.
- IRTA maintains a lobbying presence at the Illinois State Capitol and serves as **YOUR** voice on issues that impact retirement benefits.
- When necessary, IRTA takes legal action to fight egregious laws on behalf of IRTA members.

Legal Successes

- In 2013, Illinois lawmakers approved legislation (SB 1) that was signed into law by Governor Pat Quinn. The 2013 law sought to eliminate the 3% compounded annual raise that retired teachers were promised in their retirement agreement.
 - o IRTA took quick action and filed Heaton VS. Quinn, arguing the pension reform law approved by the Quinn administration was in violation of the pension protection clause included in the Illinois State constitution.
 - o In 2015, the Illinois Supreme Court agreed with IRTA and ruled unanimously that diminishing teacher retirements is unconstitutional.
- In 2023, the Department of Central Management Services (CMS) proposed budget slashes for funding to our healthcare programs of TRIP/TRAIL because the state was not paying the full appropriated amount that was due to the Teachers Health Insurance Security (THIS) Fund.
 - o This action would have resulted in retired teachers paying a larger portion of their premiums.
 - o Again, IRTA took swift action and sought legal action against TRS, CMS, and the Comptroller. IRTA reached a favorable settlement agreement and withdrew the lawsuit.
 - o On July 5, 2023, Comptroller Mendoza transferred all pending appropriations into the Teachers Health Insurance Security Fund. CMS intends to continue making the appropriated transfers of monies to the THIS Fund, CMS does not foresee a reduction in program benefits through 2028.

As a member of IRTA, you will receive all this protection
and more for just \$3.50 a month –join today!