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Shelby County Retired Teachers Newsletter

Shelby County Retired
Teachers Association
September 2024
Volume 11, Issue 3

Jim Sparks, President
Nancy Wilhelm, Vice-Pres.
Norma Walters, Secretary
Kim Sparks, Treasurer

September Meeting

Date: Wednesday, September 4

Place: Lake Shelbyville Visitor Center

**Program: Larry Pfeiffer, TRS Trustee
& Brenda Elder, Director of Shelby
County Economic Development**

8:45 – Snacks / Visiting

9:00 – Program

A short business meeting will follow, along with packaging school supplies

Happy almost fall everyone!

I have been so excited to get some cooler weather lately to be able to accomplish so many projects outdoors before even colder weather comes.

I'm also glad that the Aetna worries have passed for the time being and things are running smoother. I have another home health visit coming up. It is a noninvasive quick visit that checks for some common ailments. Underlying health concerns may be revealed as a result. The information is shared not only with my health insurance provider but also my doctor. And I'll receive a \$50 gift card for allowing this to be done!

I'm sure like many of you, I cannot believe it's been over ten years since I officially retired. It does seem that the help of retired teachers is still highly sought after. I know that many of you substitute and possibly are still working part time. Illinois now allows retired teachers to teach 120 paid days or 600 paid hours a year without impact to their retirement benefits. While substitute teaching was not on my agenda, I was pulled back full time into the classroom in Arthur for a semester to help guide a student teacher. I also love working with kids in 4-H and visiting Main Street School to do some STEM activities with 3rd graders. Just to make me feel old, I have recently attended retirement parties for some of my former students that went into teaching!

Kim and I recently attended some of the Shelbyville schools open houses that highlighted some of the inadequacies of the current facilities as they ponder the idea of a school referendum. Main Street School is over 100 years old and loved by all of us, but I hope to see plans for something new and more functional in the future. The district has done a good job to maintain the structures we have, but all of them have some shortcomings that were highlighted during the open houses.

Finally, as we approach November 2024 another presidential election looms on the horizon. I must admit that initially I was quite disappointed we were facing the same two choices we had in 2020. I have witnessed along with the rest of America that the initial candidates have publicly demonstrated cognitive problems most likely due to age. I was relieved to see President Biden step aside so Vice President Kamala Harris could have a chance

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A Message
from the
President



School Supplies Needed

Each year SCRTA collects school supplies at our September meeting for the elementary special education students in Shelby County. We give these to Windsor, Stew-Stras, Cowden-Herrick, Shelbyville, Central A&M in Moweaqua, and Okaw Valley Middle School in Findlay. If you would like to donate, bring the supplies to the meeting on the 4th. If you are unable to attend the meeting and want to donate supplies, you can give them to any officer or to LaVonne Chaney.

Please donate these supplies: (starred items are most requested)

- *Three-ring Binders
- *Pencil Pouches that fit in three-ring binders
- *Hand-held Erasers
- *Expo Markers (skinny)
- *Sharpies
- *#2 Pencils
- *#2 Mechanical Pencils
- *Crayons
- *Fat Crayons
- Rulers
- Ink Pens
- Glue Sticks
- Scissors
- Sticky Notes
- Folders with pockets
- Notebook paper (wide-ruled)

We have several things planned for our September 4th meeting. Bring along your beverage and join us in person at the Visitor Center or join us on Zoom.

Our first speaker will be Larry Pfeiffer.

He will give us an overview of TRS covering pension funding and investment returns, legislation affecting retirees, and our benefits such as health insurance.



Former Shelby County resident **Larry Pfeiffer** is a member of the TRS Board of Trustees, one of two trustees elected by TRS annuitants on the 15-member board. Larry retired nine years ago, becoming president of the Macoupin County RTA three months later. Among his many positions were ag teacher in Carlinville, Principal of ROE#40 Regional Safe School, Regional Superintendent of ROE#40 for 13 years (serving 11 of those as the Legislative Chair of the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents), and Adjunct Professor, Blackburn College Education Department.



We will also hear from **Brenda Elder**, the director of Shelby County Economic Development which promotes the growth and retention of Shelby County businesses and industry.



She is also the person behind the Facebook page "Shelby County, IL" which I highly recommend. On it she highlights businesses as well as fundraisers and festivals throughout the county. In the last few days I have learned about fundraisers in Findlay, Strasburg, Stewardson, and Cowden in addition to free movies, home builders, MMA fights, ax throwing, cryotherapy, and several businesses. She will be talking to us about what's going on in the county.

**Our last meeting of 2024
will be November 6**

Keep up on SCRTA news -

<http://www.shelbycountyretiredteachers.com>

and IRTA news - <http://www.irtaonline.org>

Everyone is welcome at SCRTA meetings, whether or not you are a member.

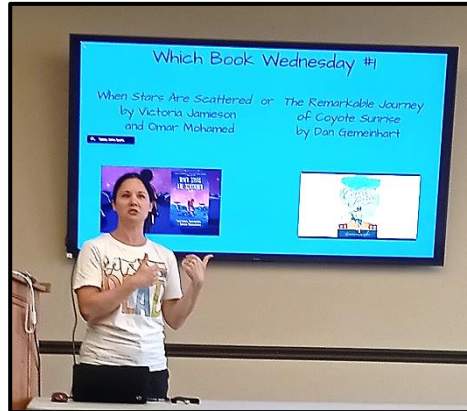
June Meeting

Jessica Hoselton, Executive Director of IRTA, spoke about the IRTA Political Action Committee and the IRTA Foundation which helps retirees as well as future teachers. She also gave a legislative update.



Mike Schmidt, President of IRTA, spoke on the history of TRS and IRTA and how they improve benefits for teachers and retirees.

The 2nd half of our June program was devoted to our 2024-25 mini grant recipients. Monica Tomblin from Stewardson-Strasburg gave a presentation on how she used the funds for her “Reading Revolution” in her classroom. Presentations on other county programs included “K-5 Art Show Dynamic Display”, “Kitchen Lab Utensils Update”, “Orff Hand Chimes & Yarn Mallets”, “Children’s Book Focused Little Library” and “Wobble Stools”.



SCRTA Mini Grants

Our SCRTA mini grant project was started in the fall of 2022 to help students and teachers in Shelby County. We gave six \$100 mini grants to educators, one in each of our county districts. Last year, thanks to the fundraisers sponsored by Possum Lodge and by Mark Shanks at Monicals, we were able to double the grant money. Teachers submitted proposals in November and the mini grant recipients were selected and notified by the grant committee in December. During the first week of January, as teachers returned to the classroom, President James Sparks presented the six \$200 mini grants.

There are two ways you can help with this program. Encourage current teachers to apply for the grants. Join the Mini Grant Committee that will meet in September to develop the application form and in November to vote on the applications. Let Jim Sparks know if you would be willing to help.

Thank you to the Shelbyville Possum Lodge for sponsoring a sandwich sale fundraiser in June. We raised \$1700 for our mini grant program. (Pictured are SCRTA sandwich wrappers.)





More from SCRTA

Zoom -


If you want to join the September meeting through Zoom, Jim will email the link closer to the 4th. You can also find it on our website.

Membership -

Welcome to new member
Heidi Bunton

- Many IRTA members are not members of SCRTA. If you would like to join or if you are unsure if you have paid 2024 local dues, please contact Ginnie Hostetler at gh1610@yahoo.com. Members may pay \$5 for one year or pay \$100 for a lifetime SCRTA membership.

- If you are getting this newsletter through USPS mail delivery and would be willing to switch to email delivery, contact Nancy Wilhelm (njwilhelm@yahoo.com)



In Memoriam

Leona Morrell, age 94, passed away February 3, 2024. She began her teaching career in 1950 in Moweaqua and taught for 34 years.

A donation will be made to the IRTA Foundation in her honor.

TRAIL Insurance Open Enrollment Period

(The following insurance information is based on past practice. Check with CMS for accurate information for the 2025 plan year.)



CMS hasn't released information on its TRAIL Open Enrollment Period yet, but sometime in September you will most likely receive your Decision Guide. The Open Enrollment Period usually runs from mid-October through mid-November for the following calendar year. Visit the Total Retiree Advantage Illinois (TRAIL) Program page on the MyBenefits website at MyBenefits.illinois.gov for updated information.

Political Action Committee to Endorse Candidates

With the general election approaching when all Illinois House members and approximately one-third of the Senate will be on the ballot, it's a good time to look at how the IRTA Political Action Committee works for you.

(The following contains excerpts from the Summer 2024 IRTA Action newsletter.)



The IRTAPAC exists to elect, educate, and build rapport with legislators who understand the importance of preserving pensions and healthcare benefits. **The first step in electing and educating legislators who are supportive of IRTA member issues is finding the right candidates to support.** These candidates are identified through IRTAPAC's comprehensive General Election Candidate Endorsement process.

During each General Election campaign season, the IRTAPAC Committee creates a **candidate questionnaire** that is sent to every single candidate – Republican, Democrat and third-party candidate who will be on the November 5, 2024, General Election ballot. A returned and completed questionnaire is required to be considered for IRTA's endorsement. **The goal of this process is to put every candidate on record stating their support for protecting pensions and healthcare benefits**

that you earned. 178 candidates seeking election to the Illinois House of Representatives and 38 candidates seeking election to the Illinois State Senate received the 2024 Candidate Endorsement Questionnaire. Throughout the summer months, IRTAPAC Committee members will meticulously examine the answers provided on the returned questionnaires, will solicit feedback from Local Units, consider voting records, and will seek advice from IRTA's committed Government Affairs team. The IRTAPAC Committee's recommended **endorsements will center exclusively on candidates who stand with us on our two primary concerns: pensions and healthcare. The IRTAPAC Committee will not consider candidates' positions on other issues such as public education, environmental issues, or taxes.**

The IRTAPAC Candidate Endorsement process provides IRTA the opportunity to **identify and establish relationships with candidates who will make pension and healthcare funding a priority in our state's fiscal policies.**

IRTA members help shape public policies that affect our well-being and future IRTA members' well-being. By continuing to work together, and speaking with one collective voice, the **40,000 plus members of the IRTA will continue to maintain our presence as a powerful advocate on behalf of the retired educator community.**

We are at the mercy of our state lawmakers when it comes to legislation that protects our benefits. If you believe in the importance of the IRTAPAC, you can help fund it by having **\$1 deducted from your pension payment each month.** The IRTAPAC donation form is found on the IRTA website at www.irtaonline.org. Member dues money is never used for PAC purposes.

Legislative Update

After adjourning in May, the Illinois General Assembly will reconvene for the Fall Veto Session on November 12th. The FY 2025 budget passed in June provides the full certified amounts for TRS and TRIP/TRAIL, representing a victory for retired teachers and a continuation of Governor Pritzker's commitment to pension funding.

HB4959 was passed in June, providing help to retired teachers. It includes an extension of the "subject shortage area return to work" statute to June 30, 2027. Under the law, retired teachers who go back to approved subject shortage areas are not limited to post-retirement work restrictions of 120 days or 600 hours imposed on other retirees. The regional superintendent must designate the employment to be in a subject shortage area and TRS must give final approval in order for a retiree to be able to return to work without limitation.

HB 4959 also includes enhancements to the TRIP/TRAIL benefits by providing vision and dental benefits consistent with other retiree healthcare benefits offered by the Department of Central Management Services (CMS). This legislative change is the first step in obtaining low-cost dental and vision benefits from the State. IRTA members should be advised that it will take at least a year before these benefits will be made available through the State. You should not make any changes to your current dental or vision benefits until more details on this new benefit become available.

HB4959 also allows the Comptroller to prepay TRS ahead of the month when the payment is owed. While this legislation will not have a huge impact, it could moderately improve the funding ratio of TRS over time.

IRTA 2024 Virtual Events

Save the Dates! We invite all our valued members to actively join and participate in these upcoming virtual events. Click on (or cut and paste) the links below to register.

2024 IRTA Educational Webinar Series

September 18 (10:00 a.m. CST) Life 101

Have an old life insurance policy laying around and wonder if you still need it or how it works? We'll explore the 3 main types of life insurance and what living benefits some of them may offer.

https://ambabenefits.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_0ex8NUe6TsackWNAbOmYmw

October 16 (10:00 a.m. CST) The Basics of Medicare

How do I make sense of this Medicare Alphabet Soup? What does A&B have to do with F, D, H, G, and N? When do I sign up and what is covered? You might be surprised at what's not covered with Medicare. Join us to get a good, basic overview of Medicare so that you can make the informed decisions whether you are already on Medicare or soon will be.

https://ambabenefits.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_jur2vwJBQuCPuFzxbupP3g

November 13 (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_WS1lwFWeTISfSdAZrPrUTA

December 4 (10:00 a.m. CST) Holiday Discounts for IRTA Members

The Holidays are here and whether you're shopping, dining out, or planning travel to a warm weather location, IRTA has a way for you to save money. Join us for the latest discounts that are free as part of your IRTA membership. https://ambabenefits.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_IRHF6AA1TC-EBvUEC7FRBA

The Monthly Brief – Updates & More with Executive Director Jessica Hoselton

September 26 The Monthly Brief – Executive Director Jessica Hoselton & the IL Attorney General's Office of Community Outreach – 11:00 AM

November 14 The Monthly Brief – Executive Director Jessica Hoselton & the Illinois Department of Natural Resources – 9:30 AM

December 10 The Monthly Brief – Executive Director Jessica Hoselton & Illinois House Speaker Emanuel "Chris" Welch – 11:00 AM

Join other retired educators on IRTA sponsored travel

After watching the Paris Olympics this summer, you may have developed an interest in traveling to France. You can see Paris as well as surrounding areas (including the D-Day beaches in Normandy) on a Viking cruise on the Seine River. A \$25 deposit is all it takes to reserve your spot. 2025 dates are August 28 - September 4 and October 8-15. Contact the IRTA for details.

