

# Connections



*Continuing the Commitment August, 2015*

## Candidates for VEA Offices

During the Virginia Delegate Caucus at NEA RA 2015, several members announced their intent to run for VEA offices.

Elections for VEA President, Vice President and NEA Director will be conducted at the 2016 VEA RA in Richmond. Here are the candidates to date:



President  
Jim Livingston



President  
Joey Mathews



Vice President  
Sarah Patton



Vice President  
Dr. James Fedderman



Vice President  
Donald Wilms



NEA Director  
Carol Bajer

## Ready, Set, Register!

*Excitement is in the air about VEA-R's Statewide Meeting, October 12-13, in Williamsburg.*

There will be informative sessions ranging from elder law to healthy living; dignitaries will present their views on K-12 in Virginia; you'll get updates on retired activities in the state; and enjoy a dinner and lively conversation with your fellow retirees.

A registration form is included in this newsletter. **It's due back by September 25.**

Make your hotel reservation on your own at the Doubletree in Williamsburg (757-220-2500). Mention you are with VEA-Retired. Questions? Contact Carol Donohue, VEA-R's liaison, at 800-552-9554 X 325 or [cdonohue@veanea.org](mailto:cdonohue@veanea.org).

## REA – Retired Rocks!

By Lola McDowell

The Richmond Education Association-Retired is gearing up for an exciting year! Lola McDowell and Vashti Mallory have been elected co-chairs of the group and have big plans for the future of their Association. Knowing that membership is very important for the success of the Association, they have applied for an NEA-R Grant in their effort to recruit and retain members. They want to have a group of actively involved retired members

supporting and advocating for Richmond Public Schools. Some of REA-R goals for 2015-16 are:

1. To identify retired Richmond Public School employees who have retired within the last three years.
2. To engage at least 3% of recent Richmond Public Schools retirees in organizing projects.
3. To engage community leaders in Richmond Education Association-Retired projects. i.e. police officers, firefighters, political leaders.
4. To spark an interest in Richmond Education Association-Retired and have 25 new Richmond Public Schools retirees join REA-R within the first year.

Meeting these goals will not only ensure activism for REA-R but also for VEA-R and NEA-R. Lola and Vashti are proud to co-chair the Richmond Education Association-Retired group.

## NEA® Online Savings Account<sup>5</sup> ProgramCode:

It's time to make your money work harder. Open an NEA® Online Savings Account through Discover Bank, and you can earn more than 5X the National Savings Average.\* In addition, this NEA member benefit offers you:

- Exclusive \$20 bonus for

each new account type you open each year (excludes IRAs)\*\*

- Opening account balance as low as \$500
- No minimum monthly balance to maintain
- No monthly maintenance fees
- Online and mobile access to your account
- Free online money transfers and mobile check deposit.

### **NEA Representative Assembly July 1 – 6, 2015**



by **Ralph Booher**

The NEA RA was held in Orlando, Florida, following the NEA-R Annual Meeting. Virginia was well-represented by our official delegates, who included R. Edward Fifer, Dr. Dennis Joseph Pfennig, John F. Duncan, Ernest M. Holley, and Ralph G. Booher, Jr. In addition, Debbie Jessee and Pat Kennedy served as mike monitors, and Martha Wood worked on the NEA-Retired fundraiser. NEA Secretary-Treasurer

Princess Moss was most visible and her elected role allowed the Virginia delegates to be seated at the front.

The theme of the 153rd Annual Convention was "Unite, Inspire, Lead." There were 6,897 official delegates and 3,620 non-delegates. There were 122 New Business Items (NBIs) and the cost of the passed NBIs was \$1,413,422, with a possible additional \$182,226 for NBIs referred to the appropriate committees. Virginia's retired delegates attended all sessions and were present to vote. On several occasions Dr. Pfennig was a very effective speaker on the RA floor. VEA-R President Fifer was successful in a bylaw change at the VEA Board meeting. Additionally, President Fifer called attention to the NEA-R Blanket Sale during morning caucus meetings.



opening the NEA-R Annual Meeting and later opening the NEA RA with a musical tribute to the victims at Emmanuel African Episcopal Church in South Carolina. He was also part of the NEA Fourth of July celebration as

Ernest Holley used his singing ability by

a member of the NEA Chorus and led the VEA Chorus in two morning caucus meetings. Our early morning caucuses were improved with the NEA Directors spirited reporting and encouraging VEA delegates to donate to the fund, and yes, we met our goal. In addition, President Fifer served on the Issues Committee, which reviewed the NBIs and made recommendations. He loved getting up for their 6 AM meetings. Kudos to the Issue Committee, chaired by VEA Vice President Jeff Pennington. One high-profile NBI supported the recommendations of the NEA Task Force on Accountability for their report "A New Vision for Student Success." This was directed to achieving a better Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Delegates supported the NBI by sending many emails to their Senators. The Senate later passed a much improved act. RA delegates also approved another significant NBI that addressed issues of institutional racism. This measure called for a coalition of partners to work together to eradicate policies that perpetuate institutional

racism in education. In addition, it expanded educator-led professional development in areas of cultural competence, diversity, and social justice.



Delegates were treated to a number of speeches by our officers and award winners. Here are highlights of some of these speeches:

- ESP of the Year – Janet Eberhardt of San Francisco, California, noted that all educators must work together for effective advocacy.
- Teacher of the Year – Shanna Peeples of Amarillo, Texas, said that her colleagues should do a better job relating stories and by being the voice and champions of their students. “We need to advocate for our students and our profession when we are brave enough to tell our stories,” she said.
- Friend of Education – Paula Kergier was

recognized for her work with PBS. Her message was that we (PBS) take our mission very seriously by using our on-air content to get children ready for success in school.

- NEA President Lily Eskelsen-Garcia gave her keynote address on July 3rd and was electrifying as usual. She addressed several topics; one that stood out was on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) or “No Child Left Untested. A generation of students has already suffered 13 years of tests and punishment. We have the opportunity to end the federal nightmare of toxic testing,” she said. She challenged the delegates by asking, “Will we take the power in our hands and fight for the future? Go, fight, win.”

Our NEA RA experience is over and I congratulate our Virginia delegates for being great delegates. We worked together and were united in our wish to represent our VEA-Retired members. It was a pleasure to be a part of a congenial, hardworking

delegation. Sometimes one is fortunate to serve with such a distinguished group of retired professionals. Thank you for that opportunity.

### **Planning for the Future?**

*Consider Naming Someone to Interact With VRS for You*

You have taken all the steps you can think of to protect your future, your finances, and your family.

There’s one more thing – protect your peace of mind by determining who you want to interact with VRS on your behalf.

Use the Authorization to Discuss VRS Account Information form (VRS-900) to name one or more individuals to speak to VRS on your behalf about your benefits and account information. The VRS-900 does not allow individuals to take actions on your behalf, and the authorization expires two years from the date of the notary signature on the form.

Also, there may come a time when it’s easier on you if someone else files your taxes, updates your beneficiary, changes your direct deposit information and keeps up with the news from VRS. The VRS Durable Power of Attorney (VRS-901) allows you to name a person as your agent to take actions on your behalf. Your agent can (among other things):

- Name or update your beneficiary.
- Request information about your benefits.
- Take other actions, such as setting up direct deposit,

For more information see the VRS website:  
<http://www.varetire.org/pdf/publications/retiree-news-summer-2015.pdf>

## VEA Endorsed Candidates

By Marjorie Clark

VEA's Legislative Committee has endorsed a number of candidates for the state General Assembly in this upcoming election. You can get information on those races VEA is most interested in at [www.veanea.org](http://www.veanea.org).

What can you do? Most importantly VOTE. Know the issues and endorsed candidates. Virginia's children need your support. Election Day is November 3<sup>rd</sup>.



## Things to Do in Williamsburg

Williamsburg, site of VEA-R's statewide meeting on October 12-13, is a history lovers' dream.

Take a journey of historic proportions at Jamestown Settlement and the Yorktown Victory Center – two living-history museums that explore the story of America's beginnings, from the founding of America's first permanent English colony in 1607 to the Revolution and the establishment of a new nation almost two centuries later. Discover artifact-filled exhibition galleries and take part in activities in outdoor living-history areas to learn about life in the 17th and 18th centuries.

A Colonial Williamsburg experience is a truly unique one. Guests will enjoy exploring the Revolutionary City and meeting residents living in this tumultuous period of our nation's history. World-class museums offer intriguing exhibits, lively lectures, and hands-on activities.

Give your legs a rest and enjoy a leisurely tour of the Revolutionary City by horse-drawn carriage. Surround yourself with the sights and sounds of the city, far removed from the bustle of modern-day streets. With a colonial citizen as your guide, it's truly the most authentic way to take it all in—or sit back, relax, and let it all go.

For more information on these attractions, and others, check out the options:

[http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attractions-g58313-Activities-Williamsburg\\_Virginia.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attractions-g58313-Activities-Williamsburg_Virginia.html)

## TIME FOR VEA-RETIRED ELECTIONS, AGAIN

By Pat Kennedy

IT'S TIME FOR ELECTIONS AGAIN. Every year the VEA-Retired has an election and this is the year for election of our state officers. We will be electing our VEA-Retired president, vice-president, At-Large VEA Board of Directors seat, and even-numbered district council members. These individuals will serve two year terms from September 2016 to August 2018. At the same time, we will be electing our delegates to the VEA General Assembly (Richmond April 7-9) and to the NEA Retired Meeting and the Representative Assembly (Washington, D.C. June 30-July 7). Delegates are elected for one year and will serve in 2016.

All VEA-Retired members are eligible to run for office and as a delegate. The officers are chosen in a statewide election to represent all VEA-Retired members. Council members are elected to serve members within their district. Districts are determined by the Congressional District in which they live or worked. Congressional districts elected this year are 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10. If you would like to serve your district, then please consider running.

Petitions for these positions are available from Barbara Rackley at the VEA office (116 S. 3rd Street, Richmond, VA 23219 or on the VEA website - <http://www.veanea.org/>.)

Fifty signatures are needed for the three general officers and 10 for the district council. Delegate seats are self-nominated and require no signatures. Only VEA-Retired members may sign petitions.

Since we hold our elections in January, we need petitions back by December 16, 2015. Information on the actual election in January will be in the December issue of *Connections*.

## **NEA-Retired Conference**

*By Dennis Joseph Pfennig*

The annual meeting of NEA-Retired took place June 28-29, 2015, at the Orlando, Florida, Hyatt Regency Hotel. VEA-R was represented by its President Eddie Fifer, Vice President Debbie Jessee and eight others: Ralph Booher, John Duncan, Katherine Hairston, Ernest Holley, Ann Johnson, Pat Kennedy, Dennis Pfennig and Martha Wood.

The first session opened with a beautiful signing of the Star Spangled Banner by Ernie Holley.

The highlight of the first day was a panel discussion by NEA President Lily Eskelsen Garcia, NEA Vice President Becky Pringle and Virginia's

own NEA Secretary-Treasurer Princess Moss on Vision of the Future of NEA-R. The session was moderated by NEA-R President Tom Curran. Lily spoke about how important retirees were to NEA in the area of lobbying local, state and federal officials and how they act as role models and guides for younger teachers and ESPs. Princess echoed this theme by noting how important Martha Wood was to her when first a NEA member. (Another day, at the VEA Caucus, July 1, she repeated this and added how Dennis Pfennig helped keep her within the rules in those early days.) The full NEA Executive Committee visited the next day and again praised us seasoned folk for all we do for NEA.

After the panel discussion, Mary Kusler, NEA Government Relations Director, highlighted NEA's political activities since last year. She stressed NEA's efforts to get a revision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind) passed. This revision would decouple high stake testing and accountability and empower qualified educators to again lead their classrooms. NEA also is pressuring Congress to produce a budget that will not cut Medicare by \$431 billion, not attempt to repeal Obamacare, and to prevent Congress from raising Social Security retirement to age 67 and reduce annual COLAs.

Finally, Kusler noted that NEA had filed an amicus brief with the High Court in support of gay marriage.

Much of day two was spent in voting for candidates for office and NEA's Resolutions Committee, reports, awards and fundraising (over \$33,000 was raised for PAC and \$6,398 for NEA-R's scholarship program). One report informed attendees that NEA-R's membership rose this past year to 306,777, and another that Virginia received a grant of from NEA in 2014-2015 to help offset the cost of its advertising campaigns.

After speeches and reports, the body took up new business items. Among other items, the following were passed: NEA-R support for

1. Defined benefit pensions over defined contribution schemes.
2. The use of more electronic resources to contact members.
4. Support of efforts to educate America about climate change.
5. Greater visibility for NEA in vital retirement issues (Could this mean endorsement of NEA sponsoring annually a Health & Retirements Benefits Conference as it had in the not-to-distant past?)

The group, however, referred to the NEA-R Executive Committee a motion to require those who

belong to retired locals to also belong to retired state and national Associations. It also killed a motion to ban guns from hands of unstable folk as no one could agree on who/what was "unstable."

With all the business finished, at the end of the day attendees were most pleased with the planning and execution of this year's NEA-Retired annual meeting. Next year the meeting will convene in Washington, D.C.

### VEA Board Meeting

*By Dennis Joseph Pfennig*

The final meeting of the VEA Board of Directors for the academic year 2014-2015 took place July 1, 2015 at the Hyatt Regency Grand Cyprus Hotel, Orlando. The meeting commenced at 12:38pm.

The session opened with an apology from Rand Goodman, Director Sales and Marketing, Marriott Hotel Richmond, for the mistreatment of several VEA members, who were denied service during the spring Richmond Rally at the hotel restaurant for wearing Put Kids First T-shirts. He noted how sorry the Marriott organization was for action taken by a few young, misinformed employees. Marriott, he said correctly, had already published an apology letter and will make further amends by funding lunch for

the Board at the spring 2016 VEA Convention.

Election to the VEA Executive Committee followed. In the end, elected were Sam Eure, Trenace Riggs, Joey Mathews, Kimberly Adams, Sarah Patton and Don Wilms.

Other business items dealt with concerned:

#### **(a)The VEA Budget:**

1. VEA received \$347,000 this past year from NEA to offset advertising cost.
2. Dues revenue is a bit behind. VEA hoped for \$7,633,575 but received only \$7,553,851.
3. VEA negotiations with the professional staff (VPSA) cost \$99,370.
4. There has been some slowdown in membership loss but not what is wanted.
5. The Put Kids First rally cost VEA about \$220,000, but part of that was covered by the NEA and other organizations.
6. VEA's total assets as of May 31, 2015 stood at \$10,865,082.

**(b)The Board voted to approve a revised Financial and Operations Standards Guidelines.** The VEA already complies with the vast majority of the codes included in the document.

**(c) The VEA is continuing to appeal a judge's ruling that it cannot act as an interested party in the**

**lawsuit filed by a Loudoun resident to have full access to student SOL test scores and the names of teachers of those tested.**

**(d) A new VPSA contract was unanimously approved by the Board.** It provides for a step increase the first year of the contract and a 1.25% increase the following two years. The Board will have to have a conference call later in the year to vote on a VEA Budget---it was not voted on at the spring state convention as the cost of the new VPSA contract was at that time unknown. Hopefully, this will be done at the latest during the 3rd week of August.

**(e) The Board elected a new Legislative Committee:** Jim Blackburn, Carol Medawar, Jim Livingston and Charlotte Hayer.

**(f) The changes requested by the VEA-R Council to its Bylaws were approved by the VEA Board with the understanding that needed additional changes will be ready for VEA Board consideration at its October meeting.**

**(g) A new VEA Elections Committee was elected:** Dave Kinsella, Steve Whitten, Ethel Williams, Allison Batty and Mitch Cunningham.

**(h) The VEA Board voted unanimously to**

**disapprove a NEA Constitutional amendment that would permit states merged with AFT to substantially increase their delegate strength at NEA's RAs.**

**(i) Finally, the VEA president awarded plaques to those Board members retiring this year:** Rebecca Jasman, Malia Huddle, Allison MacArthur, Sabrina Hayes and Rhonda Bell.

The gavel fell at 4:43 pm.



**President's Column  
By Eddie Fifer**

As I start the second year of my term as President, I look back on what we were able to accomplish last year while looking ahead to what we need to do in the years to come. We continued to make our presence known and gained membership. We were able to establish local chapters, lobby our legislators, and start to revise our bylaws. As usual, you were well represented on the VEA Board of Directors and at the VEA, NEA, and NEA-R Conventions.

Looking ahead, we need to finish revising our bylaws and continue to establish

local VEA-Retired chapters. We also need to generate more interest in serving on our VEA-R Council. In our last election cycle, three seats on our Council were not filled until the Council made temporary appointments.

I am happy to invite you to our VEA-Retired Annual meeting in Williamsburg this year. Details on how to attend are in this *Connections*. Please encourage other retirees to attend. Many thanks go to Martha Wood and her committee for putting together a fantastic program for us this year.

I encourage every member to be more involved in our Association. If you are interested in running for office, Council seat, or Convention delegate, please contact me or call VEA headquarters for more information. If you are not already a member of a local chapter, join one or start a new one. There is grant money available to help. Continue to lobby our legislators and make our presence known wherever we go, because together, we can make a difference.

**Hold lawmakers accountable!**

When you sign up to be a VEA cyberlobbyist, you'll receive occasional e-mails from our Government

Relations team on critical education legislation. (No, we won't bombard you with daily messages.) Some of the messages will include links you can click on to easily e-mail the Governor or your representatives in the General Assembly. When we ask you to send a message, we provide talking points you can quickly personalize to get your point across. It's that easy. Get started by signing up on VEA's website- <http://www.veanea.org/home/521.htm>.



**Be a Part of the NEA-Retired Rapid Response Team!**

Join with over 3,000 other NEA Retired Members that live within a 50 mile radius of downtown Washington, DC. Your expertise and years of experience are crucial during this critical turning point in NEA history.

We'd love to have you partner with us! We want you for:

- Attending congressional hearings on public education and retirement security issues.

- Mentoring opportunities with younger NEA members.
- Participating in social activities with other NEA-Retired activists.
- Strengthening your bond with your state and local Association.

To join the NEA Retired Rapid Response Team, visit the NEA-Retired Rapid Response Team sign up page or contact Todd Crenshaw at: TCrenshaw@nea.org.

### **Check out what Social Security is doing to celebrate!**

August 14, 2015 marks the 80th year that the Social Security program has supported our nation's most vulnerable citizens by giving them a financial safety net and, in some cases, the opportunity to regain the ability to provide for themselves – and they are celebrating! Join the 80th anniversary excitement, and learn about past and upcoming events here:

<http://ssa.gov/80thanniversary/events.html>



### **Medicare and Medicaid: keeping Americans healthy for 50 years**

Did you know Medicare and Medicaid turn 50 this year? The landscape of health care in America changed forever on July 30, 1965, when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the landmark amendment to the Social Security Act, giving life to the Medicare and Medicaid programs. Medicare and Medicaid save lives. They help people live longer and provide the peace of mind that comes with affordable health care that's there when you need it.

It's easy to forget that before 1966, roughly half of all seniors were uninsured and many disabled people, families with children, pregnant women and low-income working Americans were unable to afford the medical care they needed to stay healthy and productive.

Today, Medicare and Medicaid cover nearly 1 out

of every 3 Americans—that's well over 100 million people. It's highly likely that you, someone in your family or someone you know has Medicare, Medicaid or both.

More than 55 million Americans depend on Medicare to cover hospital stays, lab tests and critical supplies like wheelchairs, as well as prescription drugs. Medicare also covers 23 types of preventive services, including flu shots and diabetes screenings. Some of these services are free, and for others you only have a small copayment or pay the deductible. Medicaid provides comprehensive coverage to more than 70 million eligible children, pregnant women, low-income adults and people living with disabilities. It covers essential services like annual check-ups, care for new and expecting mothers, and dental care for kids from low-income families.

How has Medicare or Medicaid (or both) helped your life or the life of someone you care about? Whether you've just enrolled or have been covered for decades, you can share your Medicare or Medicaid story through Medicare.gov website, or connect with us on Twitter or the newly-launched Facebook page.

*Register for VEA-Retired's statewide meeting! Form enclosed.*

