

Connections



May 2016

Continuing the Commitment

VEA Board of Directors: Spring 2016

By Dennis Joseph Pfennig

The spring session of the VEA Board of Directors commenced at 9 a.m. on April 7th in the Richmond Marriott Hotel with VEA President Meg Gruber presiding. Much of the meeting was devoted to reports.

Highlights follow:

a. President Gruber provided general information about the VEA Convention, to follow later in the day, and the NEA Convention, which will meet in DC in early July.

b. Executive Director Philip Forgit, in his position as Acting Director of the Office of Human and Financial Resources, reported that as of February 29, 2016, the Association had taken in \$36,374 more in membership dues than budgeted and had spent \$362,601 less than anticipated.

c. Robley Jones, Director of the Office of Government

Relations, in his final appearance before the Board prior to retirement, reported that as a result of VEA efforts during the 2016 Virginia General Assembly, VRS will finally be actuarially funded.

Senate Bill 364, providing a statewide health insurance option for school boards and local governments, passed; Senate Bill 564, which preserves the confidentiality of teacher licensure and re-licensure applications, also passed. An attempt to amend the State Constitution, granting the State Board of Education authority to establish charter schools, failed.

Jones ended his report by thanking Roger Gray and Carol Donohue for their efforts during the General Assembly. The VEA Board gave Rob a standing ovation as he returned to his seat.

d. John O'Neil, Office of Communications, Marketing and Technology, reported that in January, VEA had partnered with GBA Strategies of Washington, DC, to conduct a poll of the Virginia public. It revealed that the public has highly positive views of the Commonwealth's public schools and understands the need for greater investment in them.

e. Melissa Warren of Bristol represented President Gruber at a recent Leadership Summit in Dallas, TX. She noted that one out of every 1,000 Americans is a member of NEA.

f. Carol Bauer, NEA Director, reported that the newly signed Federal *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), which replaces the *No Child Left Behind* law of unpleasant memory, will return decision-making for the nation's education back where it belongs - in the hands of local educators, parents and communities - while keeping the focus on students most in need. The new law focuses less on standardized tests so that there will be more time to teach and to learn.

g. Bauer, along with fellow NEA Directors James Fedderman and Joey Mathews, reported that the NEA has continued to work on institutional racism by focusing on a strategy of awareness, education and activism. They also warned not to be too content with the recent US Supreme Court inactivity on the *Friedrichs v. CTA* case. (The 4-4 tie for now upholds a lower court ruling favorable to organized labor, allowing Associations in certain states to collect dues from non-members.)

The issue will return when a justice to replace the deceased Antonin Scalia, if ever, is confirmed.

h. The president of SVEA thanked two VEA-Retired members who participated in the students' recent Outreach to Teach program.

i. Jaim Foster of Arlington reminded all of the need to get on board for the Princess Moss re-election campaign for NEA Secretary-Treasurer that will officially commence after the close of the 2016 NEA Convention.

ACTION ITEMS:

1. The Board confirmed appointments to both the Fitz Turner Commission and the PR&R Commission.
2. The Board adopted a set of "Fiscal Responsibilities for VEA Board Members" at NEA Conventions.
3. The Board voted approval of the 2016-2017 NEA UniServ Grant.
4. The Board voted unanimously to support Princess Moss's re-election to the position of NEA Secretary-Treasurer, if and when she announces.

The meeting concluded with President Gruber presenting

retiring Vice President Jeff Pennington with a gift from the Board. His wife has accepted a position in Laredo, Texas, and he will follow her to the land of steers and cowboys.



President's Column

By Eddie Fifer

Chapters, Chapters, Chapters... I keep harping on chapters in most of my columns. Why do I do that? It is because I believe that the growth and success of VEA-Retired depends on establishing more chapters. A couple of months ago, I attended an NEA-Retired conference for state presidents and membership chairs. Lola McDowell went as our membership chair. In talking with other state presidents, I learned that many states have both active and retired divisions in each of their locals. We don't have that. We have chapters. These chapters are spread across the state and most are very active. Many work with the VEA local associations and even have representation on the local association boards.

These chapters need to be commended, but they basically have their own agenda. There is no real connection with VEA-Retired. As a state association, we conduct regional and statewide events, but there is no real input or feedback as to what the individual chapters do. I don't know if anyone has all the answers on how to fix this, but I do know that I will try to do a better job reaching out to the chapters during my next two years as your president.

More chapters, more chapters, more chapters... As we work on a better connection with the chapters we have, we need to establish more chapters. In the next two years, I would like to concentrate on "CEED" (Chapter Established in Every District). I know this is a continuous goal which may never be reached, but we must try. A few chapters have been established in recent years, but the process is slow and we need to do more. As chapters continue to have their own agenda, I hope there will be a better connection with the state association. Let VEA-Retired know what you are doing by submitting articles to "Connections" so your ideas can be shared. I know

there are many retired members who wish to continue their active role in our association. If there is a VEA-R chapter near you, join. If there is not, get with your VEA-Retired friends and start one. There is grant money to establish new chapters and enhance existing ones. We all have to do our part to make sure we grow and are successful for many years. As I have always said, "Together, we can make a difference."

VEA Delegate Assembly Shines

VEA-R was well-represented at the Delegate Assembly held April 7-9 in Richmond.



Eighteen retired members attended and participated in votes and elections – as well as saw old friends and colleagues.

A highlight of the Assembly was the Awards banquet. Martha Wood, long-time member activist, was awarded VEA's highest honor, the Friend of Education award.



Katherine Hairston received the Distinguished Service Award from VEA-R.



VEA-Retired also honored Robley Jones, credited with restarting the retired group some 20 years ago. Robley is retiring this September.



Did You Vote?

By Pat Kennedy

Did you vote this past January in the VEA-Retired elections? If not, why not?

Could you answer these questions? When asked, some of the retirees at the VEA Delegate Assembly (both delegates and volunteers), said "No, I forgot." Some said, "I didn't know anybody on the ballot" or "I just wasn't interested." There was only one who answered, "I didn't even know there was an election."

In January of 2017, we will be electing our council secretary, council members representing the odd congressional districts (1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11 for two-year terms), and even number districts (6, 8, and 10 for a one-year term).

Well, here's hoping our next election in January of 2017 will draw some more interest. Look for more information in the September 2016 issue of the Connections.

What Were You Doing 23 Years Ago?

By Pat Kennedy

Rob Jones, then VEA President, and a group of retirees - Beth Nelson, Martha Wood, John Duncan,

Edith Good, Lucille Roane, Marcella Humphries and Delores Hampton - decided to get the retiree group up and running.

That small committee grew to a membership of over 4,700. Members are involved in state and national events, lobbying, training, working phone banks, and yes, having fun!

The Convention floor paused to help VEA-R honor Robley. Please join us in welcoming him this fall to VEA-R.



Working and Social Security

You can get Social Security retirement benefits and work at the same time. However, if you are younger than full SSA retirement age and make more than the yearly earnings limit, benefits are reduced. Starting with the month you reach full retirement age, SSA will not reduce your benefits no matter how much you earn.

If you are under full SSA retirement age for the entire year, \$1 is deducted from your benefit payments for every \$2 you earn above the

annual limit. For 2016 that limit is \$15,720.

In the year you reach full retirement age, \$1 is cut in benefits for every \$3 you earn above a different limit, but only counting earnings before the month you reach your full retirement age. If you will reach full retirement age in 2016, the limit on your earnings for the months before full retirement age is \$41,880.

Starting with the month you reach full retirement age, you can get your benefits with no limit on your earnings.

When SSA figures how much to deduct from your benefits, they count only the wages you make from your job or your net earnings if you're self-employed. Not counted are pensions, annuities, investment income, interest, veterans or other government or military retirement benefits.

Once and Always for Education

By Marjorie M. Clark

VEA-Retired delegates to the state convention are reliably dedicated to electing "Friends of Education" at all levels of government. Year after year, retirees show their dedication through VEA Fund contributions. A

majority of VEA-R delegates make contributions through ongoing EasyPay or credit card transactions. In addition, during conventions there are multiple opportunities to pitch in extra dollars, and VEA-R delegates as well as VEA-R volunteers are always extremely supportive. In fact, it has been said that if the VEA-R delegation competed against District delegations, they would usually be the winners.

This year all 16 VEA-R delegates contributed to PAC with a total contribution for the delegation of \$4,104, or \$256.50 per delegate! To show how significant this figure is, the next closest district contribution was \$173.20.

Being PAC representative for such a dedicated and generous group has been truly inspiring. The new PAC representative for VEA-R will be Denise Davis, and I feel sure she will experience the same, wonderful giving for education.

VEA R Council Meeting

The next VEA-Retired Council meeting is September 15-16. The location and more details will be posted on the VEA website.