

# Connections



**November 2015**

*Continuing the Commitment*

## **Tenth Anniversary of the Fairfax Education Association-Retired**

By Dennis Joseph Pfennig



In 2004, during the last full year of her Fairfax Education Association (FEA) presidency, Barbara Allen appointed an ad hoc committee of retirees to lay the foundation for a local division of VEA-Retired. Within one year, under the leadership of Mimi Dash, herself a former FEA president and one-time NEA Director, the committee completed a constitution and by-laws, which were then approved by the new organization's parent organization, the FEA.

In addition to writing governing documents, the organizing committee got FEA to agree that membership in FEA-R would be automatic when one joined as a life-member of NEA-Retired/VEA-Retired. In other words, there would

be no additional cost to be a member of FEA-R nor would there be any dues. Its expenses would be handled by FEA itself.

In 2005, FEA leadership appointed a nine-member FEA-R Council, four of whose members were given one-year terms and five were given two-year terms. Thus, elections in the future would never replace an entire Council. This Council then elected its first president, Dennis Pfennig, who, like his successors, was granted a full-voting seat on the FEA Board of Directors. This was done so the FEA-R president could provide the FEA Board institutional memory and guidance when younger Board members faced problems similar to or in some instances the same as in the past.

Ten years have passed since that first Council was convened. Today, it continues to advise and caution FEA leaders. It does not mandate; it does not insist; it suggests. However, as the Council today consists of four former FEA presidents (Barbara Allen, Mimi Dash, Kathy Davis, and Walt Mika) and one former VEA president (Walt Mika), its advice is carefully considered. The FEA president makes it a habit of attending each of the every-other-month Council meetings.

In January of every year, FEA-Retired, along with an independent organization, Fairfax County Retired Educators, provides a bus to take its joint Government Relations Team and supporters to lobby the Richmond state legislature. Every year in May, the Council hosts an all-member luncheon meeting. In past years, that meeting has been addressed by public officials such as Governor Terry McAuliffe, State Education Secretary Anne Holton, State Senator Richard Saslaw, and 11th Congressional District House Member Jerry Connolly; leaders in the field of public education; Fairfax County Public School Superintendent Karen Garza; and an expert in the area of retirement, FCPS retirement system Executive Director Jeanne Carr.

Today, FEA-Retired works diligently to ensure that FCPS upholds its end of early bargaining agreements. These past months, its Government Relations Team, led by Barbara Allen, with the assistance FEA-R vice president Mimi Dash and several others, has interviewed and lobbied nearly every candidate for the School Board and Board of Supervisors as well as those seeking election to the state legislature. In addition, the FEA-R Council has met with Karen Garza and members of her staff several times. Once again serving

as FEA-R president, I have met one-on-one with FCPS Superintendent Garza and her Office of Benefit Services Director Dee Hawley Brown; and recently, along with Mimi Dash and Walt Mika and other retired leaders, I met with FCPS's new Chief Operating Officer, Susan Quinn. We retirees know the importance of personal contact and are willing to work to provide the best benefits possible to both active and retired members of the FCPS family.

Retired we may be, but active we certainly are. Ten years have passed since FEA-Retired first appeared. It remains alive and well today.

Have information from your local or regional retired group? Send it on for inclusion in the next Connections. [Cdonohue@veanea.org](mailto:Cdonohue@veanea.org)

**!!!VOTE!!!**  
**Save the date**  
**January 20-22, 2016**



By Pat Kennedy

It will soon be time to vote for your VEA-Retired officers, council seats, and delegates to the NEA Representative Assembly and the VEA Delegate Assembly.

You are being asked to vote for the VEA-Retired President; VEA-Retired Vice-President; VEA-Retired Member-At-Large 2<sup>nd</sup> Seat on the VEA Board of Directors; and Congressional council seats in Districts 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10. Congressional candidates will serve from 2016 to 2018. A special election for Congressional council seats in Districts 5, 7, and 9 is also being held and these three seats are for only one year term.

There are two methods to vote, either by paper ballot or electronically.

**Paper Ballot** – No later than January 6, 2016, write, call, or e-mail Barbara Rackley at the VEA. Her mailing address is B. Rackley at Virginia Education Association, 116 South Third St., Richmond, VA 23219-3704; by telephone 1-800-552-9554 and ask for Barbara; by fax 1-804-775-8379 ATTN: B. Rackley; and by e-mail at [brackley@veanea.org](mailto:brackley@veanea.org).

Paper ballots will be mailed on January 8<sup>th</sup>. Mail your completed ballot back to the VEA. All paper ballots must be postmarked or hand-delivered to the VEA office by the close of business on January 19, 2016. Ballots received after this date will not be valid. Please note if you request a paper ballot,

you will not be eligible for electronic voting.

**Electronically** – The electronic voting site opens at **12:00 noon on Wednesday, 01/20/16 and closes at 12:00 noon on Friday, 01/22/16**. To access the voting link, please go to the [veanea.org](http://veanea.org) website under *Member Center* and look for the link for “Election Central.” Click on this link and follow the directions. You will need your VEA/NEA membership ID number that begins with three zeroes followed by seven other numerals. Your VEA/NEA number can be found on your membership card, a VEA or NEA publication (in the mailing address area), or by calling the VEA.

Enter your name exactly as requested, and then click “Enter.” Biographical information on each candidate may be accessed by clicking on the candidate’s name on the electronic ballot.

After voting for your choices, you must select “Submit” or “Vote” at the end of the electronic ballot in order for your vote to be cast.

Votes will be counted **January 25th** and candidates notified of results by January 29, 2016.

Please remember to vote!



## President's Column

By Eddie Fifer

I know what I want from my association. What do you want? Do you want to stay active and informed? Do you want to run for a state office or delegate seat? Do you want to lobby legislators? Do you want to be a part of a local VEA-Retired chapter or just be a member taking advantage of our NEA Member Benefits Program? For whatever reason you joined VEA-R, I want to thank you for being a member. It is up to you as to what part VEA-R plays in your life.

However involved you wish to be, we all need to be connected. This newsletter has an appropriate title, "Connections." It keeps members informed as to what is happening on the state level, but very few articles come from local chapters. We need more. If your local chapter is involved in a special activity or if you just want to inform the rest of us on your status or goals for the year, submit an article. Local chapters need to know what other chapters are doing.

As I have said before, it is my hope that one day soon, there will be a local chapter in every VEA district. The more local chapters we have, the better connected we are. If there is not a local VEA-R chapter near you, there is grant money to help start one.

To be better connected, there is one major thing we need to do. We need to have information on all the local chapters. Please contact me or Carol Donohue at VEA headquarters with information on your local chapter: name, location, and contact person. By being connected and working together, we can and will make a difference.

### October 2015 Meeting of the VEA Board of Directors

By Dennis Joseph Pfenning

The first meeting of the VEA Board of Directors this academic year opened October 16 in Richmond at 8 PM. President Gruber began by introducing two members of the **Virginia Women's Monument Commission**, which is chaired by the Governor. The Commission hopes by 2017 to erect in Capitol Square statues of 12 women who were leaders in the Commonwealth's 400-year history. These will include a Native American chief, a

Jamestown settler, a First Lady, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century physician, and a 20<sup>th</sup>-century suffragette, among others. There will be a **Wall of Honor** on which additional names will be inscribed. The public is invited to submit names of outstanding women to be placed on that wall.

This introductory presentation completed, President Gruber reminded Board members that to be in the room is both an honor and a responsibility and means hard work as the Board must set policy, plan for the future, and monitor and evaluate association finances and actions.

Executive Director Philip Forgit next took the floor. He noted that he has obtained two grants from NEA--one for organizing and membership recruitment and another to assist in encouraging community associations to work with the VEA to "Put Kids First." He also noted he hopes to have reinstated the Association's *Emerging Leaders Program* and recommends the introduction of a statewide rep training program. The meeting then suspended for the night at 9:35 PM.

The VEA Board went back into session at 9 AM, October 17. Much of the day was centered on committee

reports. The highlights of some of these are as follows:

a. Government Relations Office: Rob Jones and Roger Gray stressed the need for Board members to urge members back home to contribute to *Easy Pay*. This is the way VEA raises money that legally can be contributed to political campaigns. VEA-Retired today has 69 members on *Easy Pay*. No local in the state has as many. Actually, only 12 locals have over 10 members contributing.

b. Virginia's NEA Directors: All three voted to endorse Hillary Clinton's candidacy in the coming primary season. They defended this by noting her position on public education, endorsement by 12 state governors, 36 US Senators, 160 members of the House of Representatives and 440 super delegates to the 2016 Democratic National Convention. The vote on the NEA Board was 75% in favor. Ms. Clinton has pledged to come to DC to address the 2016 NEA National Convention. The VEA Executive Committee asked the Board to endorse the decision of the NEA Board. This passed with three negative votes.

c. VEA 2016 Convention: This will be held in Richmond, April 7-9.

d. Education Support Professional Committee: Nominations for ESP of the Year are due by January 15, 2016.

e. Minority and Women's Concerns Committee: Of the 569 who attended the VEA 2015 Convention, 193 (34%) were ethnic minority. Of the 150 who attended the NEA 2015 Convention, 76 or 51% were ethnic minority.

f. Fitz Turner Commission: The deadline for nominations for awards from this group is January 29, 2016.

g. Executive Director Philip Forgit: He noted that while VEA expected to receive dues over the 12-month period ending August 31, 2015 of \$10,178,100, due to membership loss it only received \$10,036,291, a drop of \$141,808. Due to savings in several departments (e.g. Legal spent only \$621,578 rather than the \$750,000 allotted in the budget), the Association is fiscally sound. He did, however, note that several locals are remiss in paying their NEA dues (\$467,118), dues which the VEA has forwarded in their name to the NEA. Thus these locals owe the VEA. Philip Forgit announced with sadness that VEA's Director of Human and Financial resources, Beth McNamee, resigned as of October 14,

2015. Her position is now being advertised.

h. Office of Legal Counsel: As the number of dismissal cases is down since last year, so are legal expenses.

i. Women's Monument Commission: The Board moved to donate \$1,000 to the Commission.

j. VEA-Retired By-Law Revision: With minor edits, the revisions submitted by the Retired Council were accepted. No longer will VEA-R have to go to the VEA Board for approval of changes to its By-Laws (These, of course, must in all cases be in accord with both NEA and VEA Governing documents).

k. Staff Retirement Committee: The committee recommended \$800,000 be set aside in the 2016-2017 VEA budget for the retirement fund. Motion passed.

l. Princess Moss Re-election Committee: Princess will announce her campaign for re-election to the position of NEA Secretary-Treasurer at the end of the 2016 NEA Convention.

There being no further business to consider, the gavel fell at 3:15 PM.

## Williamsburg Conference

By Dennis Joseph Pfennig



VEA-Retired held its second biennial all-member conference in Williamsburg on October 12-13. For over a year, Martha Wood, former VEA-Retired president, and a committee of seven (Maureen Abramson, Rita Cooper, Pat Kennedy, Barbara Mann, Marlene Parker, Lola McDowell and Marilyn Riddle) assisted by VEA-Retired Staff Liaison Carol Donohue, worked to seek a location, develop a program and promote attendance. Their hard work paid off when VEA-Retired President Eddie Fifer welcomed 43 attendees at 11:30 AM on Columbus Day. He was followed by welcoming comments from VEA's Executive Director Philip Forgit.

The two-day meeting was divided into breakout and general sessions. The first day, the former sessions centered on *Protecting Your Assets* presented by Michael Gavin, NEA Member benefits, and *Managing Stress* presented by Levetta Nesbitt, VEA Uniserv

Director. That day's General Session was hosted by NEA's Secretary-Treasurer, and Virginia's own, Princess Moss. She explained the logic behind the NEA's Board of Directors' decision to endorse Hillary Clinton's presidential aspirations during the coming primary season. She stressed that once both political parties chose their candidates for the presidency; it will be the task of the 2016 NEA Convention to select the candidate behind whom the organization will throw its full support. Moss noted that while not all NEA members agree with the Board of Directors' decision, it was the right one for public education. Disagreement with the decision, she stressed, is welcome, but it must be within the bounds of civility.

The evening of October 12, attendees dined on a nicely-varied buffet and afterwards were entertained by student singers from the Choral Department of Jamestown High School of Williamsburg-James City County. Under the able direction of teacher Laurel Christensen, the all-female entertainers delighted retirees, so much so that at a 50/50 raffle the next day, the group raised \$90 to donate to the girls' desire to attend a competition this spring in Nashville, Tennessee.

The second day saw breakout sessions on *Elder Abuse* led by Pat Kennedy and Laurie Padgett, Aging Division, Virginia Social Services, and *How to Choose a Senior Living Site*, led by John Nguyen and Randy Fortune of the Brookdale Senior Living complex. The General Session saw Dennis Pfennig speak on the VEA's legislative agenda, Pat Kennedy speak on VEA-Retired election procedures, and Martha Wood introduce several candidates for VEA-Retired and VEA office in the coming election cycle. Each was given two minutes to present reasons for their candidacy. A raffle and door prizes followed.

The day ended with all in agreement that Martha Wood and her staff had done a very fine job. The conference was a success in all ways.



## Organizing Retired Chapters in Southwest

By Denise Davis

The VEA-Retired received a VEA TOPS grant for the purpose of establishing VEA-Retired chapters in Southwest Virginia. Organizing meetings were held in Abingdon and Wytheville in the spring and attendance at both meetings indicated that there was interest to initiate chapters. The Abingdon group has had two more meetings and the Wytheville group has another meeting scheduled in the near future.

If you know retired members in Wythe, Grayson, Galax, Carroll, Pulaski, Bland, or Tazewell counties, have them contact Denise Davis ([dlsd228@yahoo.com](mailto:dlsd228@yahoo.com)) for more information. Have retired members in Washington, Smyth, Bristol, and Russell counties contact Eddie Fifer for more information about a retired chapter near them.

We hope to get our retired members in southwest more involved in VEA activities and keep them informed of ways they can help move the VEA legislative agenda as well as other VEA initiatives.

## Richmond Education Association-Retired October Meeting

By Lola McDowell

The Richmond Education Association-Retired had a very successful first meeting of the 2015-16 year in October. Over 50 retirees attended the meeting. The retirees were welcomed by Dr. Michelle Boyd, Executive Director of Exceptional Education & Student Services, as well as the School Board Chairman, Mr. Donald Coleman, who encouraged members to volunteer and/or mentor RPS students. The members adopted the 2015-16 objectives and completed a survey of interest.

Members were elated to learn that Richmond Education Association-Retired has been awarded a \$3,000 NEA-R grant that will allow it to recruit and retain members and accomplish its goals for this year of (1) engaging at least 30% of recent Richmond Public Schools retirees in organizing projects and (2) recruiting at least 25 new Richmond Public Schools retirees to join not only the REA-R but also the VEA-R and NEA-R.

Richmond Education Association-Retired members are on the move!

## Perrie Johnson Elected to Fluvanna County School Board

By Barbara Wilson

November brought change in Fluvanna County when Perrie Johnson was elected to the School Board for the Fork Union District. A 25-year VEA member, Perrie is excited to represent.

Perrie Coulter Johnson grew up in a military family, but settled in Fluvanna as a young adult and has lived here ever since. She has two children, a son serving in the USCG and a daughter working and living in Mali, West Africa.

Perrie taught in Fluvanna schools (K-3) for 25 years and recently retired. In addition to her teaching certification, she has a Bachelor's Degree in Finance from ODU. She has been a member of the Fluvanna Education Association since her first year in education. Perrie served as president two separate times, the most recent ending in June of this year. She was very active, attending school board meetings, maintaining the FEA Facebook page, and emailing weekly updates to FEA members, administrators, and school board members.

Perrie very much enjoyed teaching for many years, describing it as a hopeful job, and felt called to the profession. However, in more recent years, teachers in her district were removed from so much of the decision-making process that she felt her best efforts were not permitted in the classroom and so she retired, discouraged. Perrie ran for school board on the platform to include those on the front lines in decisions of all manner of issues that affect students and staff.

### **Richmond City and Henrico Score Big Bucks!**

Richmond City and Henrico retirees are gearing up for a membership push for retirees. To help with their efforts, Lola McDowell and Vashti Mallory in Richmond and Cherral Moore and Levetta Nesbitt, Uniserv Director in Henrico submitted and were awarded a National Education Association grant. Grants must be used for membership recruitment, organizing new retired locals, retired organizing projects, creating retired activists, developing retired leaders, and developing and strengthening community partnerships.

Interested in looking into it? <http://www.nea.org/grants/57206.htm>.

## **VEA-Retired Distinguished Service Award**

By Martha Wood



VEA-Retired has developed a list of criteria for awarding its members for distinguished service to the profession and the association of VEA-Retired. Two awards have been made so far and a third will be given in April at the VEA Awards Dinner. The VEA-Retired Council believes that there are many among our membership who deserve recognition and invite our members to make nominations for future award recipients. You can find the award criteria on the VEA-Retired page at [veanea.org](http://veanea.org). Submissions should be received no later than June 1, 2016 for the next award.

Look around and think about that retired member who has given so much to your local association. You can use this award as a way to recognize that person. Help VEA-Retired honor its distinguished servers.

### **VRS Direct Deposit Information**

VRS makes direct deposits on the first business day of

each month. If the first day of the month falls on a holiday or a weekend, VRS makes direct deposits on the last business day of the preceding month.

Here's the 2016 schedule.

<b>Payment for the month of</b>	<b>Deposited on</b>
December	12/31/2015
January	02/01/2016
February	03/01/2016
March	04/01/2016
April	04/29/2016
May	06/01/2016
June	07/01/2016
July	08/01/2016
August	09/01/2016
September	09/30/2016
October	11/01/2016
November	12/01/2016
December	12/30/2016

In order to change a bank or account number, download the Authorization of Direct Deposit of Month Benefit from the VRS website ([www.varetire.org](http://www.varetire.org)), complete the form, attach a deposit slip with your new account information and return it to VRS. You can call VRS toll free at 1-888-827-3847 (1-888-VARETIR), also to request a new direct deposit form. VRS continues to send your retirement payment to your old account until the change is processed. VRS will send you a confirmation notice, giving you the date when direct deposit into the new account will begin.

Source: VRS  
(<http://www.varetire.org/>)

## How do I get a replacement Medicare card?

Your Medicare card is proof of your Medicare insurance. If your Medicare card was lost, stolen, or destroyed, you can get a replacement using your online Social Security account. If you don't already have an account, you can create one online. Once you are logged in to your account, select the "Replacement Documents" tab. Then select "Mail my replacement Medicare Card."

Your Medicare card will arrive in the mail in about 30 days. If you can't or prefer not to use the online service:

- *Call 1-800-772-1213 (TTY 1-800-325-0778), Monday through Friday, from 7 AM to 7 PM; or*
- *Call your local Social Security office.*

Source: U.S Social Security Administration (<https://faq.ssa.gov/>)

## Why get the flu when you don't have to?

As the weather gets colder, flu season is right around the corner. Protect yourself and your loved ones this season by getting your free flu shot.

Get your flu shot early and stay healthy! Flu viruses change from year to year, so it's important to get a flu shot each flu season. It's free for

people with Medicare, once per flu season, when it's given by doctors or other health care providers (like senior centers and pharmacies) that take Medicare.

**Schedule your flu shot today!**

Source: Medicare Blog (<http://blog.medicare.gov/>)

## VEA and Teachers Need Supportive Politicians!

The Virginia Education Association Fund for Children and Public Education was formed in 1971 by teachers in Virginia who felt the time had come to get involved in the political arena. The VEA Fund is an independent arm of the VEA, with the purpose of helping to support VEA legislative goals through the election of pro-education politicians. That takes money.

Why contribute to the Fund? Because every decision that affects public education is also a political decision, and we need legislators at all levels who support public schools. With more support from our elected leaders, would Virginia teachers still lag more than \$6,000 behind the national average? And would public education advocates face proposals for tuition tax credits or vouchers each and every legislative session?

Making a contribution to the VEA Fund is as easy as contacting your local Association president or UniServ office. Payment options include cash, check, credit card, or auto-debiting of your bank account through "Easy Pay."



## Save the Dates!

The next VEA-Retired Council Meeting will be held March 17-18 at the Four Points Sheraton (9901 Midlothian Turnpike, Richmond, VA 23235). The meeting starts at 1:00 on the 17<sup>th</sup> and ends around 2:00 on the 18<sup>th</sup>. All retired members are welcome to attend and observe.

VEA Retired Lobby Day is January 28<sup>th</sup>. As in past years, a bus will leave from Northern Va. to take retirees to meet with their legislators. A briefing will be held in the Capitol to inform on the VEA's legislative agenda. See the enclosed flyer or check the VEA website or Virginia Education Association-Retired Facebook page for details.



# **VEA-Retired Lobby Day**

**Thursday, January 28, 2016**

**Lobby your legislators on issues impacting retirees, VRS, and public education. Make your plans now!  
Briefing at 8:30 on Jan. 28 in the Capitol House Room 3**

***Coming from Northern Virginia?  
Ride the bus.***

There is no charge to take the bus trip to lobby General Assembly members in Richmond. It gives you a chance to hear the latest information first-hand and it is fun!! Here are the bus stops:

- 1. Fair Oaks Mall-Fairfax**  
Departing at 6 am  
1170 Fair Oaks Mall (near the Marriott)  
22033
- 2. Little River United Church of Christ – Annandale**  
Departing at 6:30 am  
8410 Little River Trpk.  
22003
- 3. Cracker Barrel –Dumfries**  
Departing at 6:45 am  
17115 Dumfries Rd.  
22026

Contact Barbara Allen ([barbarawallaceallen@yahoo.com](mailto:barbarawallaceallen@yahoo.com)) or 703-978-0470 by **Tuesday, January 27** to reserve a space on the bus.