

Connections



September 2016

Continuing the Commitment

NEA-Retired Annual Meeting – A First Timer’s Perspective

By Barbara Wilson

This year’s NEA-Retired Annual Meeting took place at the Renaissance Hotel near the D.C. Convention Center. For this first time delegate, I was struck by how different it was from the traditional NEA Representative Assembly (RA). If you’ve ever been to the RA, you realize how streamlined is, from the seating to the use of Robert’s Rules. While the Retired delegates observed Robert’s Rules as in all other meetings, the seating was quite different. Upon registration, delegates received in their packet a strip of bright orange cardstock which enabled them to vote on the floor. This was absolutely necessary as the delegates and non-delegates were seated together. Many state delegations had their seat covers and were seated together, as we from Virginia managed to do, but next year, we need to get our seat covers out and be seen!

Highlights of the gathering included: our Retired President, Eddie Fifer, who brought greetings to the group and in my estimation did a magnificent job; visits from all the NEA officers, including Virginia’s own Princess Moss; Communication awards, among them a beautiful plaque earned by our own Dr. Dennis Pfennig and the Fairfax Retired Teachers Association; a legal update from Alice O’Brien, NEA General Counsel; an update from Mary Kusler, Director of Government Relations, in regard to ESSA (*Every Student Succeeds Act*); and the Distinguished Service Award, given to Ulysses Floyd of Florida. But the most taxing job of the whole event was watching Virginia Education Association – Retired’s Martha Wood as she zipped around on her rented scooter running the numerous elections and their run-offs! She and her staff had it going on!

I enjoyed this meeting immensely and I was saddened to learn from Tom Curran, NEA-Retired President, that although the NEA-Retired has grown by 16,000 this last year, not one penny of additional funding has been designated to NEA-Retired. Yet each speaker from NEA sang the praises of the Retired and at

the RA the NEA-Retired quilt giveaway raised over \$24,000 for PAC through the kiosk at the Retired booth. Retirees are an active bunch!

Some of the time at the Retired Assembly was spent on live PAC auctions, and the Donald Trump piñata raised quite a bit of money! I learned more about the importance of this Presidential election and its importance to the life of the Supreme Court. But overall, I learned that issues are the same nationwide and in Virginia we are very blessed to have our current Governor and to have a good working relationship with his office. Overall, 10 days is a long time to be away from home, but the comradery of like-minded people and the friendships and hospitality I have received from people during my tenure with VEA and NEA make it all worthwhile.

The Final Meeting of the VEA Board of Directors, Academic 2015-2016

By Dennis Joseph Pfennig

The final business meeting of the VEA Board of Directors began at the Washington Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, July 2. President Meg Gruber notified Board members that

their annual training session will be held September 17-18 in Richmond and the next Board meeting will be again in that city October 21-22.

VEA Executive Director Philip Forgit reported that he is working on filling staff vacancies, and that Maggie L. Walker Governor's School for Government and International Studies, a public magnet high school, which is no longer under the authority of Richmond's Board of Education, has requested to become a local in its own right but still under the auspices of VEA District M. This request is being examined and report on its feasibility will be forthcoming.

VEA's new Human and Financial Resources Director, Kevin Shaver, asked that a motion be made to change the name of a reserve item long in the annual budget termed "Local Association Crisis Fund," established when locals could strike legally in Virginia (no idea how far back that was), with presently \$25,169 in it, be changed to "Board Designated Cash Reserve." Motion made and passed. Shaver further asked the Board to receive the VEA's federal 2014-2015 tax form 990. Motion made and passed.

He ended by pointing out that for the nine months ending May 31, 2016, the Association, which had anticipated revenue of \$8,696,556, had actually received \$8,817,270 while having spent only \$8,234,499, which is \$462,057 less than was budgeted. The VEA is fiscally sound! As of now the VEA has 9.4 months of reserve operating funds. It is working on 12.

Robley Jones, Director of the Office of Government Relations and Research, came next. He received a standing ovation, as this was the last time before retirement that he would appear before the Board while it was gathered for an annual NEA Convention. He urged all to work for the election of Hillary Clinton. Virginia was critical, he stressed, as the last time a Republican won the White House without support of the Commonwealth's electoral votes was 1924 (Calvin Coolidge).

President Gruber next asked the Board to consider a new business item passed at the spring 2016 VEA Convention. It directed the VEA Board to "always include" in its agenda a discussion of the status of education employee salary

and compensation. Gruber argued that the agenda of the Board was the prerogative of the President and the Board itself and urged the Board to refuse the motion's implementation. A motion to do so was made and passed unanimously.

Carol Bauer, NEA Director, urged Board members to speak to members back home about the importance of professional educators taking a leading role in the implementation of the newly-signed federal education bill (*Every Student Succeeds Act / ESSA*), which replaced *No Child Left Behind*. They should talk to school boards about the formulation of ESSA regulations.

Kimberly Adams, VEA Executive Committee and President of the Fairfax Education Association, addressed the group about the dissatisfaction both evaluators and employees have with her local's present evaluation program. To change it, work must begin on the state level. She asked the Board to establish an ad hoc committee to work to get Virginia's Board of Education and state lawmakers to enact policies that would then enable local school boards to improve evaluation procedures. The motion to establish such an ad hoc

committee was made and passed.

Election to the 2016-2017 VEA Board Executive Committee: Elected--- Christina Bohringer, Sam Eure, Charlotte Hayer, Kevin Hickerson, Steve Lavery, and Ethel Williams.

Election to the 2016-2017 VEA Legislative Committee: Elected-- James Blackburn, David Kinsella, Joy Kirk, and Carol Medawar.

Election to the 2016-2017 VEA Elections and Campaign Practices Committee: Elected-- Allison Batty, Gwen Edwards, Allison MacArthur, Sarah Patton, and Barbara Powell.

The meeting concluded with grateful recognition of those leaving the Board of Directors as of July 31, 2016: Kimberly Adams, Mitch Cunningham, Jaim Foster, Joey Mathews, Jeff Pennington, Trenace Riggs, Sandy Sullivan, Steve Whitten, and Don Wilms. Vice President Pennington concluded this ceremonial portion of the meeting by presenting President Gruber with a gift and hug thanking her on behalf of himself and the Board for her many years of service to the VEA.

It's That Time Again!

By Pat Kennedy

It's almost time for VEA-Retired elections. This year we elect the Secretary/Treasurer, District Council Seats, and the retired delegates to the VEA Representative Assembly and NEA Delegate Assembly. Petitions to run for any of these positions are now available from the VEA.

The VEA-Retired Secretary/Treasurer is a two-year position running from September 2017 through August 2019 and requires 50 signatures of retired members on the petition. Petitions are available from Barbara Rackley, brackley@veanea.org.

District Council Seats require 10 signatures of retired members. Congressional Districts 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11 are two-year seats for 2017-2019. Congressional Council seats 6, 8 and 10 are one-year seats for 2017-2018. You must live in the Federal Congressional District you represent. The redistricting of Congressional District 3 has affected districts 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7. Please check your Congressional Districts at: <https://vote.elections.virginia.gov/VoterInformation>, to verify your district.

All petitions are due back to VEA by December 16, 2016. Elections are January 25, 26 and 27, 2017. Voting instructions for paper and electronic ballots will be in the December issue of the VEA-Retired *Connections*.



President's Column

By Eddie Fifer

When we are a teenager or young adult, we think we know everything. When we are middle-age and older, we realize that we don't know everything. We figured out that in order to accomplish anything, we must rely on the knowledge and expertise of others. No one knows all the answers nor should they think they are always the smartest one in the room.

As children, we are encouraged to speak out and say what we believe. As we got older, we learned to think before we speak. We also learned that when we are speaking for others, we must consider their opinions and viewpoints.

All of this leads to the fact that this year's Presidential race is between two very different candidates. In my

opinion, Donald Trump seems to think he has all of the answers and speaks out without regard to whom he might offend. Hillary Clinton, on the other hand, learns through collaboration with others and always thinks before she speaks. She has been an advocate for children her entire adult life and knows the future of our country depends on their education. Tim Kaine, her Vice Presidential running mate, is our U.S. Senator and former Governor. He too, is a champion of public education and will serve us well if elected.

Through our lengthy process at the state and national levels, using questionnaires and interviews, the VEA and NEA recommend Hillary Clinton for President of the United States. This is only a recommendation. We, as the voting public, should vote our conscience. I hope you will do as I did and look at the candidates and decide who would be best for our children, public education, racial equality, and civil liberties. Whether you decide to help on a campaign, work the polls, or just talk with friends and neighbors, don't forget to vote. This is our right and duty as American citizens.



Elections Matter!

By Robley Jones

As I transition from being VEA's Director of Government Relations and Research to being a member-activist in VEA-R, my sights are on a particular election.

Former VEA Vice President Dom Melito would frequently remind us, "In Virginia we only have elections in years that end in a number." But, too many of our members, active and retired, only vote in the Presidential elections. America's voter turnout is backwards. If you are a public education advocate, the most important elections are local. The second most important are state, and the third most important are federal. Why do I say this? Follow the money: 7% of the

funding for our schools comes from the federal government, 41% from state sources, and 52% from local sources. But when Virginians vote, 72% vote in Presidential elections, but only 43% vote in gubernatorial elections. Though the data is not readily available, I suspect that participation in local elections is even lower.

We have got to hook folks on the habit of voting in every election!

So what election is in my focus? It is absolutely imperative that we all turn out this November 8th, but November 2017's gubernatorial election will be crucial to the future of Virginia, and it will shape the next decade. Why? Redistricting.

There is a possibility that could damage successful efforts to reform the redistricting process, or a possible court intervention (a case is pending), but I think it much more likely that fair redistricting will be the outcome of a divided government which will require compromise between the two parties.

As we have seen in this election cycle, Virginia is an increasingly "Blue" state in

Presidential elections when turnout is high, but we are still a toss-up state when the turnout is lower in “off-year” elections. The lower off-year turnout and gerrymandered district maps have made it so that our evenly-divided state elects a solidly Republican House and a slightly Republican Senate.

The last time we did the redistricting that follows each decennial census, the Republican party held the House and the mansion while the Democrats held the Senate. The House was in a position to draw a very partisan map. And in this evenly-divided state, our House maps are drawn to favor Republicans in two-thirds of the districts. It is likely that the Republicans will hold both chambers of the legislature when the next maps are drawn, but the Democrats have a chance to keep the mansion. If they do so, a Democratic governor will be able to veto any proposed redistricting bills that favor one party over the other. If the governor and the legislature cannot agree on House and Senate maps, the courts will intervene. In either case, if a Democrat is elected governor we will have much less partisan House and Senate maps, something that, in the long run, will benefit both parties and the Commonwealth.

You can bet that I will continue working to ensure the election of Hillary Clinton and our recommended Congressional candidates in 2016, but I will be guilty of looking ahead to 2017, an election sure to shape the following decade in Virginia politics.



Life After Work!

from VRS Summer 2016 Newsletter

Want more direction in your financial future? Take a workshop on living in retirement. This Fall, VRS is offering a new workshop that focuses on life after retirement and what retirement means to your financial, physical and mental health.

This full-day session, Finish Line–Living in Retirement, shows the importance of post-retirement planning and provides insight on factors to consider throughout your retirement. Industry professionals will cover a broad range of topics, including maintaining retirement security, estate planning and health care. Go to: <http://www.varetire.org/retires/education/index.asp>, to find details.

Richmond Retired Group Scores Big!

By Lola McDowell

Richmond Education Association–Retired (REA-R) was very excited when it was awarded the 2015 – 2016 NEA-R grant last year. With the help of that grant we were able to accomplish many of our objectives.

We identified 600 Richmond Public Schools employees who had retired within the last three years and contacted each of them to invite them to attend REA-R meetings. As a result of these efforts, the attendance at the REA-R meetings doubled and membership increased. REA-R members participated in Read Across America, Lobby Day, and NEA President Lily Garcia’s teleconference on ESSA. Additionally, they adopted a kindergarten class at Carver Elementary School. Through this effort the children received clothing and books, and REA-R read stories to them.

The retirees also participated in writing postcards for the State General Assembly Election to support VEA endorsed candidates!

In order to continue membership recruitment,

create retired activists, develop retired leaders and community partnerships, and strengthen existing partnerships, Lola McDowell and Vashti Mallory, Co-chairs of REA-R have submitted another grant application for 2016-2017. NEA will notify retiree groups in October if they receive a grant.



REA-R End of the Year Retirement Reception

By Lola McDowell

This June, Richmond Education Association (REA) and REA-Retired hosted new retirees at a reception at the Embassy Suites. The retirees received certificates and pins and were saluted for the work they had done for the schools and for their students. The pins and certificates were presented by REA President Charlotte Hayer, REA-Retired Co-chairs Lola V. McDowell and Vashti Mallory, and Jeffrey Bourne, Chairman of Richmond Public School Board.

Mr. Bourne spoke about what their service has meant to Richmond Public Schools, to the students and to Richmond City. He commended them for their dedication and commitment and thanked them for remaining with RPS for as long as they had.

Comedian Michael “Bam-Bamm” White was also on hand to congratulate them for the excellent jobs they had done. As a former teacher, “Bam-Bamm” said he knew all too well the many sacrifices they had made to make sure that their students always received the best education possible.



Lola McDowell, Ethel Bryson, Janice Ryles, and Vashti Mallory. A drawing was held for those who joined at the reception and Ethel and Janice were the lucky winners of a \$100 VISA gift card. Both agreed belonging to the Association, whether active or retired, is always the best decision to make!

Become a VEA Cyberlobbyist

VEA needs you to 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 through the VEA website:

<http://www.veanea.org/home/521.htm>.

