

Connections

A Publication of VEA-Retired



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Welcome 2017-18 VEA-Retired Council



Bruce Smith and Marlene Parker
Photo: Tom Allen

August 1st marked the first official day in office for the 2017-18 VEA-Retired Council, and with two new members! Malia Huddle, new-elected secretary-treasurer, and former VEA President Meg Gruber, representing the 7th congressional district, are first-time members of the Council. Previous members Kathy Davis (8th congressional district) and Bruce Smith (11th congressional district) returned to the

Council after short breaks. They join returning President Eddie Fifer, Vice President Pat Kennedy, and Retired-at-Large VEA Board member Dennis Pfennig as well as congressional district representatives Lola McDowell (1st), Rita Cooper (2nd), LaNette Desler (4th), Sylvia Hutto (5th), Sharon Helbert (6th), Denise Davis (9th), and Marlene Parker (10th). The seat for the 3rd congressional district is currently vacant. Many thanks to the new and returning Council members for their commitment as well as to outgoing secretary-treasurer Barbara Wilson and congressional district representatives Maureen Abrahamson and Barbara Mann for their many years of hard work and dedication. Mid-September found the Council members meeting back in Richmond to discuss the year ahead, including the upcoming legislative and budget seasons, VEA-Retired elections, and planning for next year's 25th anniversary celebration.

Nominations and Elections Information

By Pat Kennedy

Thanks to all who participated in the elections in January. And remember, as our membership grows, so does our need for delegates and Council members. In January 2018, we will be electing a new president, vice president, 2nd at-large board member, and representatives from the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 6th, 7th, 8th, and 10th congressional districts. Petitions for those offices and self-nomination forms for retired delegates to the VEA and NEA Conventions are now available upon request from Barbara Rackley at brackley@veanea.org or (800) 552-9554. All petitions and self-nomination forms are due back to VEA by COB on December 15, 2017. Elections will be held January 24-26, 2018 with results announced on February 2, 2018.

President's Column



VEA-Retired Council
President Eddie Fifer

"A small act can lead to big results. As an education association, we can accomplish a great deal through small acts of our members."

We are all familiar with Neil Armstrong's first words as he stepped onto the moon, "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." I believe this saying can be used in many walks of life. A small act can lead to big results. As an education association, we can accomplish a great deal through small acts of our members.

A great many VEA-Retired members have remained active, and for that, I applaud and thank you. You have volunteered in schools, worked on political campaigns, and joined or even started local chapters. You have been convention delegates and have served on the VEA-Retired Council.

We all change our priorities when we retire; we spend more time with our family, we travel, and we do the things we postponed while we were working. We can still do all that *and* find the time to support public education and our association. It should come as no surprise to hear that teachers in the classroom today are struggling. They're burning out quickly and aren't sticking with the profession. As retired educators, we are in a unique position to offer support, mentoring, and perspective. This is what active members are telling us they want, and need, from our association. If we support today's active members, they may be more inclined to help the next generation, and so on. And the good news is, you don't have to go at it alone. Just take a small step. Look for a VEA-Retired event in your area, and go to a meeting. If there's not an active chapter in your area, consider starting one! As you will read on page 5, the newly-formed Loudoun EA-Retired group is finding great ways to stay active and support teachers in their community. Maybe we can each find small ways to organize and support our schools. Again, it is the combination of all our small acts that keeps us strong.

VEA-Retired to Celebrate 25 Years

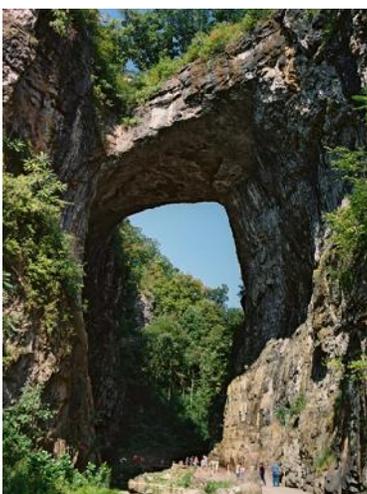
By Martha Wood

Save the dates! On October 8-10, 2018, VEA-Retired will convene a statewide conference in Virginia's newest state park, Natural Bridge State Park. The recently restored and renovated Natural Bridge Hotel will be a lovely setting for celebrating VEA-Retired's 25th anniversary.

Just down a little hill is the Natural Bridge State Park entrance with café and gift shop. There are walking and biking trails, and shuttle busses to the bridge. Nearby are the charming little town of Buena Vista and the history-filled city of Lexington.

This part of Virginia is beautiful in the fall and everyone is certain to find a special place to enjoy as part of the conference.

Stay tuned for more details as the planning committee begins its work to design an informative and meaningful experience for members across the state.



Natural Bridge
Photo: www.virginia.org

VEA-Retired Distinguished Service Award

Congratulations to Edith Good, this year's recipient of the VEA-Retired Distinguished Service Award! Edith retired in 1991 from Rockingham County Public Schools after 35 years, 33 of which were spent in elementary schools. As an active member, Edith served in various positions in the Rockingham County Education Association, including building representative, secretary, and two terms as RCEA president. Soon after retiring, Edith went to work forming a retired group and was instrumental in starting the Valley Association of Retired Educators (VARE), which has grown to more than 80 active members today. Edith has worked on various VEA committees in retirement and continues to be a delegate to the VEA Convention, and earlier, to the NEA Representative Assembly.

The VEA-Retired Distinguished Service Award has now been awarded to four member-leaders in the last 16 years. The VEA-Retired Council has moved to make this award every year and it is important that the Council receive nominations for this special award from VEA-Retired chapters, UniServ councils, district councils and individuals. This is the perfect way to recognize those retired members who have continued to serve their local, state, and national associations and the children in our public schools. Nomination forms are available on the VEA website or by emailing vearetired@veanea.org. The deadline for nominations for the 2018 award is December 15, 2017.



Edith Good with VEA President Jim Livingston
Photo: Lisa Sale

VEA Fund Launches New Website

Check out the recently-launched VEA Fund website at www.veafund.org. The new website provides information on the VEA Fund's recommended candidates for political office, explains why political advocacy is so important and allows users to make donations. It's quick, clean, and mobile-friendly!

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.

Why contribute to the Fund? Every decision that affects public education is also a political decision, and we need legislators at all levels who support public schools.

VEA The VEA FUND
FOR CHILDREN AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

The Political Action Committee of the Virginia Education Association

"Every decision that affects public education is also a political decision, and we need legislators at all levels who support public schools."



Mary Futrell, Cheri James, and
NEA Secretary-Treasurer
Princess Moss
Photo: Reilly Bradshaw

VTA Historical Marker Unveiled in Lynchburg

A new historical marker was unveiled in Lynchburg on August 13th to commemorate the birthplace of the Virginia Teachers Association. The Virginia Teachers' Reading Circle was organized by African-American educators at the Jackson Street Methodist Church on August 13, 1887. According to the marker, "the Reading Circle provided professional development for teachers of black students in Virginia's public schools." The group later became the Virginia Teachers Association before merging with the Virginia Education Association in January of 1967. Several VEA-Retired members were on hand for the unveiling, along with active members and VEA staff members.

The Department of Historic Resources manages Virginia's Historical Highway Marker program, the oldest such program in the nation with more than 2,500 markers erected across the commonwealth to commemorate people, places, or events of regional, statewide, or national significance.

NEA-Retired Annual Meeting

By Dennis Pfennig with Linda Myers and Sue Overdorf, PSEA-Retired

NEA-Retired is 316,265 strong and growing, with 3,806 new members this past year alone! This year's Annual Meeting, held June 27-28 in Boston, had more delegates in attendance than ever before, including five from Virginia: Eddie Fifer, Ernest Holley, Debbie Jessee, Pat Kennedy, and Dennis Pfennig.

Delegates were treated to opening remarks by NEA President Lily Eskelsen Garcia. Her address focused on the proposed federal budget and the dangers it poses to students, public education, and seniors. Over the course of the meeting, NEA Vice President Becky Pringle, NEA Secretary-Treasurer Princess Moss, outgoing NEA-Retired President Tom Curran, and Director of the NEA Center for Advocacy Mary Kusler also presented remarks. Some other highlights of the meeting included:

- The Jack Kinnaman Memorial Scholarship fund has grown, and now can award three \$2,500 scholarships to qualified NEA student members. Jack was a former vice president of NEA-Retired and the original NEA *Cat in the Hat*. Two of the three recipients were in attendance and delivered heart-felt remarks thanking retirees for their support and inspiration.
- The NEA-Retired Distinguished Service Award was presented to Barbara Matteson, a former president of Arizona Education Association-Retired.
- Elections were exciting, with Virginia's Martha Wood at the helm. Sarah Borgman of Indiana was elected NEA-Retired president. Julie Horwin of Arizona and Jon-Paul Roden of Connecticut were re-elected to the NEA-Retired Executive Council, and Bob Hoffman of South Dakota and JoAnn Smith-Mashburn of Tennessee were re-elected to the NEA Board of Directors for Retired. Bobbie Margo of Minnesota was elected to finish Sarah Borgman's term on the NEA-Retired Executive Council.
- Of the eight new business items, five were defeated, two were referred to the NEA-Retired Executive Council for action, and one was brought forward to the entire NEA Representative Assembly later in the week. That item requested draft templates of legislation to be used to address current issues.

Chapter News and Upcoming Events

Chesterfield

By Barbara Mann

A few Chesterfield retirees recently had the opportunity to participate in a round table discussion of public education with former Virginia First Ladies Lynda Robb and Anne Holton, current First Lady Dorothy McAuliffe, and Pam Northam, wife of candidate Ralph Northam. At the time, some of us were feeling overwhelmed and discouraged and frankly, wanted to cut back on our various volunteer responsibilities. But after seeing and hearing these amazing women, joined by newly-elected president of the State Board of Education Dan Gecker, we felt re-energized and determined. We may be retired, but we dedicated our lives to public education and we can't give up now! Now more than ever, we all must remember how vital our elections are. While candidates may be perfectly nice people, their political views are all over the spectrum and it is imperative that we understand the potential consequences of each candidate's proposals. All other issues aside, this year's governor's race has given us a stark choice for public education. We must do everything we can to advocate for our schools, for our kids, and for our fellow teachers who are still in the classroom. Our group is small, our schedule is sporadic, and attendance can be spotty, but if you'd like to join us, we'd love to have you. Email us at vearetired@veanea.org.

Fairfax

By Marlene Parker

The FEA-R Government Relations Contact Team meets monthly to work on legislative issues and meet with delegates. All retired members are invited to join. Some of the activities include a reception for delegates, including those newly-elected, and planning for VEA-R lobby day, January 25, 2018 in Richmond.

As a way of keeping our retired members involved and informed and to recruit new members, the retiree council is planning to offer a series of mini seminars for 2017-18. Some of the topics will include finance, health and wellness, technology, and advocacy.

Loudoun

By Claire Scholz

The Loudoun Education Association-Retired is starting our second year and going strong! We meet several times a year and support the LEA while keeping ourselves up-to-date on legislative issues and member benefits. Last spring we attended the local VEA pre-retirement workshop and LEA Celebration to honor retirees and to spread the word that we are an active part of our professional community.

August found us back to work before school started at the LEA office assembling rep packets and new member packets. Next, we helped recruit new LEA members at the transportation in-service and new teacher orientation.

Our grand 2-day event was to sort and organize teaching supplies donated from retiring teachers last spring! We filled the high school cafeteria and the next day welcomed over 150 new teacher members to a Grab 'n Go! They stocked their classrooms for the coming year with posters, bulletin board materials, supplies from scissors to tape, books for all ages and much, much more! We even had carts as they left with boxes, bags and arms full. The thanks were heartfelt and profuse with smiles all over! Membership pays from the first day in Loudoun!

This month we helped the LEA prepare more new member packets, LEA bulletin boards (with member information) for distribution at the rep training, and are organizing a luncheon to recruit new LEA-R members. Wish us good luck! And please contact me at clairescholz55@gmail.com if you'd like to join us.

Continued on page 7...

Governor's Race 2017

By Dennis Pfennig

Off to the polls once again, this time to elect the Commonwealth's next governor. The two major party candidates are Ed Gillespie, Republican, and Ralph Northam, Democrat. Gillespie was the 61st chair of the Republican National Committee, counselor to President George W. Bush, and a lobbyist for various corporate interests, such as the student loan industry. Northam is a former Army doctor, pediatric neurologist and the state's lieutenant governor. The issue of support for public education divides the two. The issue is an important one as state support for public schools in Virginia is today 11% less than in 2009. In addition, today Virginia's average teacher salary has fallen to 32nd in the nation. It stands now \$7,900 below the national average.

If elected, Republican Gillespie's platform calls for signing the Tebow Bill, which will permit home-schooled students the opportunity to participate on their school district's sports teams; eliminating the requirement that home-schooled families pay tuition to access *Virtual Virginia*, the Department of Education's system for online digital coursework; reforming teacher licensure to create an Adjunct Teacher category, that would permit skilled engineers or scientists, without formal teacher training, to conduct "limited" classes in public schools; and implementing "innovative funding models" to pay teachers that "incentivizes growth," which is a different phrasing for merit pay, a policy long opposed by the VEA.

Gillespie has harshly condemned Governor Terry McAuliffe's vetoing of bills favoring vouchers and support for unaccountable charter schools, bills the VEA fought in the General Assembly. He has accepted more than \$100,000 in campaign contributions from the family of Betsy DeVos—President Trump's Education Secretary, who continues to push policies condemned by the National Education Association. In addition, *Americans For Prosperity*, a group founded by the Koch brothers, global oil tycoons, whose agenda includes defunding public schools in favor of for-profit education, has endorsed Gillespie and recently purchased more than \$1 million in attack ads against Ralph Northam – the VEA Fund for Children and Public Education's recommended candidate.

If elected, Northam promises to sign legislation that will raise teacher pay. "If we're going to stress the importance of public education, we have to make teachers a priority...That's how you help people, and that is how you build a 21st-century economy... I want to give more children the kind of opportunities I had," he said recently. He has pledged to uphold Virginia's strict regulation of charter school growth and accountability, veto vouchers, spearhead the expansion of pre-K education, continue Standards of Learning (SOL) reform, expand the number of students taking computer science, coding and advanced placement courses, and break the school-to-prison pipeline. Unlike his GOP opponent, he has pledged to give VEA a seat at the table at every step of his administration when it comes to education.

Both men stress they are in tune with the needs of the lower and middle class. Gillespie makes mention in his television advertisements that his grandfather was a janitor and his parents grocers, while Northam, who grew up on Virginia's Eastern Shore, claims he can name all his teachers from kindergarten through high school and that public education is the basis for all he has accomplished.

This election will set the stage for the future of public education in Virginia beyond the next four years, as the next governor will sign into law new state legislative districts. Yes, there are other issues besides public schooling that divide the two candidates, and all these must be taken into account when casting your vote, but if you gave about half of your life to the public school system, the stands of Gillespie and Northam on public education should play the major role in decision making on November 7.

Martinsville

By Katherine Hairston

We will be hosting a regional meeting at The Dutch Inn in Collinsville on October 17, 2017 from 11AM to 2PM. VEA President Jim Livingston will be our guest speaker. Members from surrounding areas – Patrick, Franklin, Pittsylvania, and Danville – are welcome and encouraged to join us! Please RSVP to Katherine Hairston, Teresa Setliff, or vearetired@veanea.org if you are able to attend. We hope to see you there!

Prince William

By Bruce Smith

We held an organizational meeting on September 12, 2017 where we discussed activities and projects we'd like to pursue over the coming year. From an advocacy standpoint, we discussed assisting in non-partisan voter registration efforts and outreach to residents who may not be registered to vote and registered voters, especially parents of students in our county schools, who may not vote in non-presidential elections. We also discussed making calls to our elected representatives asking them to support pro-public education legislation. Some of our members have already been doing that, as well as reaching out about the importance of protecting the Virginia retirement fund. We also discussed attending VEA-R lobby day, which will be on Thursday, January 25th. For those of you planning to attend lobby day, it will be extremely important to make appointments with your legislators *prior to* going to Richmond. With the General Assembly building under construction, space will be at a premium for the next few years in the Pocahontas Building and there are no waiting areas. At the local level, the school board public hearing on the budget will be held on March 21, 2018. We'd love to be able to bring out retired members for any hearings, etc. during the day when active employees cannot attend. Read Across America is also in March. We've had some success with this and hope to have even more retired members participating next year. Our next meeting is set for November 14, 2017 at 11:30AM at PWEA.

Richmond City

By Lola McDowell

Richmond Education Association-Retired will be hosting an issues forum on October 10, 2017 from 11AM to 2PM at the 63Thirty5 Restaurant on Jahnke Road. The mayor, school board, city council, legislators and interim superintendent have all been invited to participate. We'll update the event on the VEA-Retired Facebook page as more details become available.

Shenandoah Valley

By Bea Morris

VARE (Valley Association of Retired Educators) which meets in Harrisonburg, held its first meeting of the new year on September 12. The speaker was June Nabors, Program Director of Minnick Schools. The Minnick School in Harrisonburg is an alternative day school under the auspices of Lutheran Family Services, which works exclusively with seven local school systems to provide services to kindergarten through middle school students with IEPs who cannot be served in their home schools. Plans are to support teachers in this school in various ways throughout the year. Our speaker for the October meeting will be from New Creation, a program for women rescued from human trafficking situations. In November, Tom Allen, editor of the [VEA Journal](#) and author of [Grace Happens](#), will be the speaker. A number of members signed up to attend the VEA pre-legislative workshop in our area on October 25. Any retired teacher would be welcome on the 2nd Tuesday each month, September - May at the Sunnyside Retirement Community. To make a reservation, call 540-434-4531.



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2017-18 VEA-Retired Council

Eddie Fifer
President

Pat Kennedy
Vice President

Malia Huddle
Secretary-Treasurer

Dennis Pfennig
*Retired Member at Large,
VEA Board*

Denise Davis
PAC Representative

*Congressional District
Representatives:*

Lola McDowell, 1st

Rita Cooper, 2nd

Open, 3rd

LaNette Desler, 4th

Sylvia Hutto, 5th

Sharon Helbert, 6th

Meg Gruber, 7th

Kathy Davis, 8th

Denise Davis, 9th

Marlene Parker, 10th

Bruce Smith, 11th

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.veanea.org

VEA Board of Directors – June 2017 Meeting

By Dennis Pfennig

The final meeting of the VEA Board of Directors for the academic year 2016-2017 took place at the Boston Royal Sonesta Hotel, June 30, 2017.

President Jim Livingston noted the importance of VEA's early backing of Ralph Northam, the winner of the Democratic primary for governor. It is important we remain committed to supporting pro-public education candidates. Other highlights of the meeting included:

- The NEA has used the Virginia model for its position on charter schools. That position is that charter schools can only be established by local school boards, who then assume responsibility for funding them. This position is not favored by the Virginia General Assembly, which has tried several times to switch granting authority to the appointed Board of Education.
- The governor has asked the VEA president to work with a group he formed to look at teacher recruitment and retention.
- Kevin Hickerson, Sam Eure, Steve Lavery, Christina Bohringer, Gwen Edwards, and Dorothy Carter were elected to the Executive Committee; Sam Eure, Rebecca Jasman, Carol Medawar, and Kelly Walker were elected to the VEA Legislative Committee; and Allison Batty, Carol Bauer, Ramon Moore, James Puckett, and Tony Williams were elected to the Elections and Campaign Practices Committee.
- The Board unanimously endorsed Princess Moss for re-election as NEA Secretary-Treasurer.
- VEA's Office of Field Support, Organizing and Minority Engagement will split into the Office of Human and Civil Rights and the Office of Organizing and Field Support, and the NEA Center for Social Justice awarded VEA a \$20,000 grant to recognize our racial and social just work and support future efforts.
- VEA is seeking legislative support for a pro-public education state license plate. To get the General Assembly to consider such, 450 residents must pay the DVM in advance for such a plate. If the needed legislation is not approved, the money will be returned.

***Connections* is Going Digital**

In response to members' suggestions, we are working this year to expand digital distribution of *Connections*. As always, digital copies of the newsletter can still be found online at <http://www.veanea.org/home/323.htm>. In addition, we are beginning a process to allow members to opt out of receiving the paper version. Members who choose this option will receive *Connections* via email only. If you would like to receive *Connections* by email or if you have any questions, please contact us at vearetired@veanea.org.