

# Connections

A Publication of VEA-Retired



**Inside this Issue:**

President's Column	2
Important Dates	2
Past Pres. Remarks	3
Fairfax Retirees Unite	3
NEA-R Annual Meeting	4
VEA Lobby Day	5
Digital Connections	5
VEA Board of Directors	6

## Meet Brenda Pike, New Executive Director

At its October meeting, the VEA Board of Directors approved the selection of Brenda Pike as the VEA's new Executive Director. Having most recently served as Executive Director of the Alabama Education Association (AEA), Brenda has been a classroom teacher, UniServ Director, UniServ Manager, and Executive Director at two affiliates, the Indiana State Teachers Association and the AEA.

VEA President Jim Livingston said of Pike, "We are truly fortunate to have found someone whose love of public education is matched by her track record of advocacy, leadership, and accomplishment." Brenda's educational background includes a B.A. from Union University in Jackson, Tennessee, an M.S. from the University of Tennessee at Martin, and both an Ed.S. and Ed.D. from the University of Memphis. She is VEA's first female Executive Director.

Brenda began work at VEA on October 29<sup>th</sup>. Interim Executive Director Tim Dedman stayed on for a portion of the week to help with transitional activities, and his last day was October 31<sup>st</sup>. The VEA-Retired Council looks forward to working with Brenda in the coming years, thanks Tim for his invaluable leadership since March, and wishes him well on his re-retirement.

## 2019 VEA-Retired Elections Information

*By Pat Kennedy*

In January, we will be electing representatives from the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> congressional districts as well as a secretary-treasurer and retired delegates to the VEA Delegate Assembly and NEA Representative Assembly. Petitions for council seats and self-nomination forms for retired delegates to the VEA and NEA assemblies are now available upon request from Barbara Rackley, who can be reached at [brackley@veanea.org](mailto:brackley@veanea.org) or (800) 552-9554.

Beginning in 2020, VEA-Retired elections will be held only in even years. In order to align with the new election cycles, this year's candidates for secretary-treasurer and odd-numbered congressional district seats will be running for three-year terms (i.e., 2019-2022) instead of the usual two-year terms. The open seat for the 2<sup>nd</sup> congressional district is for a one-year term (2019-2020).

You must live in the congressional district you seek to represent. All petitions and self-nomination forms are due back to VEA by the close of business on December 14, 2018. Online voting will be held January 23-25, 2019 with results announced on February 1, 2019. To vote, visit [www.veanea.org](http://www.veanea.org) during the 48-hour voting window and click on the "Election Central" link.





### Important Dates

#### December

- 14 Petitions, nominations and bios due to VEA
- 14 Distinguished Service Award nominations due

#### January

- 2 Last day to request paper ballot from VEA
- 22 Deadline to return completed paper ballots
- 23 Online voting begins at noon **(To vote, visit [www.veanea.org](http://www.veanea.org), click on "Election Central.")**
- 25 Online voting ends at noon
- 28 Elections committee certifies results
- 28 VEA Lobby Day

#### February

- 1 VEA-R election results announced

#### Share your stories!

If you or your local retired chapter would like to have an article in the next issue of *Connections*, please forward it by January 15, 2019 to Pat Kennedy at [patkennedy@mindspring.com](mailto:patkennedy@mindspring.com)

### President's Column

By Dennis Pfennig

It is an honor and privilege to serve as president of our retired association. I thank former President Eddie Fifer for the ease with which we made the transition. He and the three presidents who served before him, Martha Wood, Ernest Holley and Pat Kennedy, all of whom were with me and Eddie at the 2018 NEA Representative Assembly in Minneapolis, have been most generous in their advice and support.

Since taking office in August, I've had the pleasure of presiding over the fall VEA-Retired Council meeting. And amid its productive two-day meeting, the Council was honored to be joined at dinner by a few special guests in recognition of our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Present and past elected leaders of VEA and VEA-Retired joined together to toast the past and look to the future of our nearly 4,900-member association.

Having the opportunity to visit local retired chapters has also been a joy! I was delighted to accept an invitation from the Loudoun Education Association-Retired to attend their October meeting and share information about VEA-Retired. What an enthusiastic and fun-loving group! Next month, I will travel south to join Richmond Education Association-Retired at their December meeting, and I am in preliminary discussions to do the same with the Arlington County retirees. If other local retired chapters would like a visit, email me and we'll see if we can arrange schedules. Again, it's an honor to serve this organization. I look forward to meeting more members around the state and thank you all for your trust and support.



The 2018-19 VEA-Retired Council (and friends) – October 2018

Sitting, left to right: Dennis Pfennig, Lola McDowell, Denise Davis, Pat Kennedy, Eddie Fifer

Standing, left to right: Holly Jackson-Conrad, LaNette Desler, Katherine Hairston, Meg Gruber, Malia Huddle, Bruce Smith, Cheryl Perry, Kathy Davis, Sylvia Hutto, Ralph Booher, Martha Wood, Marlene Parker

## Past President's Remarks

*By Eddie Fifer*

I've been honored to serve as president these last four years. We've accomplished a great deal as a retired association, thanks to the hard work of your VEA-R Council and local chapters across the state. As we move our association forward, remember local chapters are key to success. The more chapters we have, the more visible we are across the state. We need to be there to assist the VEA locals and promote public education. If you are not a local chapter member, find a chapter to join or start a new one.

Continue to elect strong state officers and representatives as well as convention delegates who speak out on issues concerning VEA-Retired and public education. I step down knowing our association is strong and the future is bright with our new president, Dr. Dennis Pfennig.

## Fairfax County Public Employees Unite and Organize

*By Dennis Pfennig*

A few years ago, some retired educators in Fairfax County began to feel the School Board viewed retirees not as individuals, but as a faceless group. To address this, non-NEA-affiliated Fairfax County Retired Educators (FCRE) invited School Board members to lunch with the organization's Board of Directors. Here, retirees could meet School Board members face-to-face and discuss issues vital to both themselves and the school system into which they'd poured their youthful energy.

Viewing this positive approach, Fairfax Education Association-Retired (FEA-R) sought a meeting with the Superintendent of Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) to discuss retiree health benefits. This led to a series of meetings with FCPS Human Resources personnel. As they already had a joint Government Relations team headed by one-time FEA President and 2018 VEA-Retired Distinguished Service Award recipient Barbara Allen, FEA-R and FCRE now requested regularly-scheduled meetings with FCPS's HR. Over the past two years these meetings have seen the reopening of the retiree dental plan, albeit for only for one year, and an improvement in overall health care benefits.

But such friendly chats were seen by some as insufficient to combat a growing threat to Fairfax County public employees' pensions coming from members of the Board of Supervisors and individuals seeking tax reduction. When FCPS proposed reducing retirement benefits for all new school hires a year ago, retired educators of Fairfax County united to resist the reduction in career pay for their younger colleagues. Mimi Dash, FEA-R president, teamed with the president of the firefighters local (IAFF) and began recruiting other labor leaders to join a coalition to fight this change. The outcome was a groundbreaking alliance of fourteen workers' organizations that now included teachers, first-responders, uniformed employees, and other county employees such as librarians, park workers, and office workers.

At its organizational meeting, Standing Altogether for Fairfax Employees (SA4FE) elected as co-chairs Mimi Dash and the president of the local firefighters' union. SA4FE is organized to speak clearly and effectively to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors concerning public employee benefits and directs its efforts on behalf of all Fairfax County employees, active and retired. Its primary goal is to protect working rights and retirement security, so those retiring after a lifetime of public service can afford to continue living in Fairfax County as productive residents. To communicate effectively its message to county residents, each of the 14 SA4FE member organizations has pledged to help fund the costs of communicating a collective message to the media.

Both the Board of Supervisors and the School Board in Fairfax County have now learned that retirees are more than a faceless group. Standing All Together, they are a force in local politics.

---

## NEA-Retired Annual Meeting

NEA-Retired celebrated the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding as part of the annual meeting in St. Paul, MN, June 27-28, 2018. NEA-Retired President Sarah Borgman welcomed the 491 registered attendees noting that each year the growth of the association is impressive. Total membership now stands at 318,000.

But there are concerns on the horizon. First, the NEA has had to cut monetary grants to states seeking to increase retired membership. And, over the next two years, the Supreme Court's Janus decision threatens to cost the NEA a loss of potentially \$50 million.

However, the deep love NEA-Retired members have for the profession and organization, Borgman said, will serve the organization well. Janus will not bust us! NEA saw this coming and is prepared. All members need to get involved in membership campaigns. There is nothing like one-on-one recruiting.

Another address the first day of the meeting was delivered by Mary Kusler, Senior Director of the NEA Center for Advocacy. The highlights of her address were as follows:

1. Corporations and special interest groups are working against the working class. We need to get fired up, fight for our democracy, and use social media to combat the lies coming forth from enemies.
2. Educators are doing this. Currently, 71 are on ballots across the country seeking offices on the local and state level.
3. To pay for the tax cuts for the rich, Congressional foes are seeking to cut health and retirement benefits and close Social Security field offices. The time to stand and be counted is NOW.

Kusler's stirring address was followed later in the day by comments from NEA President Lily Eskelsen Garcia, Vice President Becky Pringle, and Secretary-Treasurer, Virginia's own Princess Moss. Each told how NEA-Retired helped them in the past personally and how the organization is important to the general membership today. The day's activities ended with a celebration cake!

The second business session was called to order at 9 a.m., June 29. The day was spent mainly in speeches and elections---four in all. Between these, President Borgman awarded the Distinguished Service Award to Lynda Smith of Georgia, presided over the awarding of three \$2,500 scholarships to college students hoping to enter the teaching profession, announced the raising of over \$10,000 for future scholarships, and announced that the cost of NEA-Retired lifetime dues will increase by \$50 in 2019-2020, giving those presently employed a year to get in at a lower price.

Alice O'Brien, NEA Counsel, called for attendees to resist the current administration's "unprincipled move to right." Members must work, she said, on personal contacts to remind friends that unless we all work together, the collective will of the powerful will undermine American democracy.

Eight new business items were placed before delegates, three of which passed. One forbids future placement of campaign material inside the meeting room. A second put the retirees in opposition to a move to stop the NEA executive leadership from endorsing a presidential candidate before a spring RA meets, and the third asks NEA staff to electronically post the Report on Action taken on convention-passed new business items. Five other new business items were referred to appropriate committees.

Delegates ultimately elected Jean Dobashi of Hawaii to be the organization's new vice president, selected six representatives to the NEA Resolutions Committee, and filled various other positions.

The gavel fell shortly after 5:45 p.m. Next year Houston!

## Attend VEA Lobby Day January 28, 2019

### LOBBY DAY OVERVIEW

8 am	Legislative briefing (additional briefing offered the evening prior) Learn about VEA's legislative priorities and prepare to meet with your representatives
9 am	Begin scheduled meetings with your legislators
Noon	VEA <b>#Red4Ed</b> Rally at the Capitol Bell Tower. Wear <b>RED!</b>
1:30 pm – 4 pm	Open House at VEA headquarters, 116 South 3 <sup>rd</sup> Street, Richmond 23219

### WHY YOU SHOULD COME

Your elected representatives need to see and hear from you! They need to know why you **Wear #Red4Ed** and fight for adequate school funding and better pay.

### WHAT TO DO IN ADVANCE

- ⌋ Make appointments to meet with your legislators! It will not be possible to “drop in” on any office. You may also wish to meet with your legislators in their home offices this fall.
- ⌋ Learn more about VEA's Legislative Agenda (go to [www.veanea.org](http://www.veanea.org)).
- ⌋ Talk with your local Association colleagues about coming to Lobby Day as a group. Help arrange a car pool or other transportation.
- ⌋ Pack a **RED** shirt, hat and/or scarf!

### CHOOSE ONE OF TWO BRIEFINGS

Sunday, January 27, 5:30 pm	Monday, January 28, 8 am
Holiday Inn Express	Hilton Richmond Downtown
201 E. Cary Street, Richmond 23219	501 E Broad Street, Richmond 23219
804-788-1600	804-344-4300

## Digital *Connections*

Have you moved or gotten a new email address? Please contact us at [vearetired@veanea.org](mailto:vearetired@veanea.org) to update your information. In response to members' suggestions, we are working to increase digital distribution of *Connections* and hope to eventually move to email-only distribution. We need current email addresses to make that happen. If you would like to opt out of paper and receive *Connections* by email only, please let us know that too!



116 South Third Street  
Richmond, VA 23219

PHONE:  
(800) 552-9554

FAX:  
(804) 775-8379

E-MAIL:  
vearetired@veanea.org

**2018-19 VEA-Retired Council**

Dennis Pfennig  
*President*

Lola McDowell  
*Vice President*

Malia Huddle  
*Secretary-Treasurer*

Denise Davis  
*Retired Member at Large,  
VEA Board*

Eddie Fifer  
*Immediate Past President*

*Congressional District  
Representatives:*

Holly Jackson-Conrad, 1<sup>st</sup>

Open, 2<sup>nd</sup>

Open, 3<sup>rd</sup>

LaNette Desler, 4<sup>th</sup>

Sylvia Hutto, 5<sup>th</sup>

Cheryl Perry, 6<sup>th</sup>

Meg Gruber, 7<sup>th</sup>

Kathy Davis, 8<sup>th</sup>

Ralph Booher, 9<sup>th</sup>

Marlene Parker, 10<sup>th</sup>

Bruce Smith, 11<sup>th</sup>

**We're on the Web!**

See us at:

[www.veanea.org](http://www.veanea.org)

## VEA Board of Directors – October 2018 Meeting

The VEA Board of Directors held its first meeting of the 2018-2019 academic year on October 19-20 at the Hilton Richmond Hotel in Short Pump.

While the top order of business was the Board's approval of Brenda Pike as the VEA's new Executive Director, there were several other noteworthy motions and announcements made at the meeting, including:

- ) Virginia's average teacher salary is \$9,218 less than the national average. Virginia ranks 43rd for the percentage of education revenue that comes from state funding.
- ) Governor Northam will put forth his amendments to the state budget in December. VEA members are encouraged to urge him to support public education and increase school funding. It's easy to do on VEA's Action Network campaign site! Use this link: <https://vea.link/FundSchoolsNow>.
- ) VEA Lobby Day is January 28, 2019. There will be a rally for public education in Capitol Square at noon. We hope to send a message to the General Assembly that we are serious in our demands that the Commonwealth's school system be improved. Please plan to attend if you are able, see additional information on page 5.
- ) The Virginia State Board of Education will consider changes to teacher licensure at its November meeting. VEA urges members to email the Board expressing support for changes that will benefit the profession.
- ) Members are encouraged to submit input on the proposed 2019-20 VEA budget. The online survey will be open until November 30<sup>th</sup> and can be found at: <https://vea.link/budgetsurvey>.
- ) VEA received a Racial and Social Justice Grant from the NEA. It will permit advocacy for fairness and equality in the Commonwealth.
- ) There were 593 delegates to the 2018 VEA Delegate Assembly, 36% were minority. Virginia had 121 delegates at the 2018 NEA RA, 43% were minority.
- ) More than one-half of the 2018 candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives are women.
- ) VEA's Communications Division is continuing work on refreshing the Association's primary website, [www.veanea.org](http://www.veanea.org).
- ) VEA opposes Lee County School Board's push to arm teachers.
- ) To better regulate its affairs, VEA-Retired moved three motions to amend VEA governing documents. Two bylaw changes passed; one amendment to the VEA Charter was tabled until January to allow for language improvement.
- ) Motion to amend VEA Bylaws to provide better guidelines for caucuses passed.
- ) Motion to elect two Board members to join the VEA president in developing a constitution and bylaws for the future VEA Foundation passed.
- ) Motion to urge Virginia to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment passed.
- ) Motion to contribute \$1,000 to the Women's Monument on the State Capitol Hill passed.

The meeting concluded late Saturday afternoon with a standing ovation and plaque presentation for Interim Executive Director Tim Dedman.