

# May 2012

## Connections



### VEA-Retired now on Facebook

Have you checked out the new VEA-R Facebook site? Come have a conversation with your colleagues or share information about events near you! Go to <https://www.facebook.com/VEARetired> and "like" the page. We post general items of interest and also have a weekly "Life +" post with a specific social theme and/or noted events across 5 regions in Virginia. Recent posts have included savings opportunities, travel packages for those 50+, Memorial Day events, and more.



### NEA-Retired Conference By Martha Wood

NEA Retired met in Las Vegas, Nevada to focus

on membership organizing and leadership development. Virginia was well represented by four members operating in various capacities. Pat Kennedy, VEA-Retired President, attended a full day meeting with 40 other state retired presidents and chairpersons. Pat and Debbie Jessee attended the Organizing and Leadership Conference. Ruthann Kellum presented a session on the Mentoring Program which she and Sue Lively started in the Hampton-Newport News area. Martha Wood assisted with the Fund for Children and Public Education Auctions.



At the Presidents' session there was a briefing on legislation in Congress which affects retirees and active educators. Topics included the reauthorization of the ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act), status of Social Security and Medicare, and repeal of GPO/WEP (Government Pension Offset and Windfall Elimination Provisions).

There was time to meet with other presidents to exchange ideas and share concerns in various states. One of the more disturbing actions in some states is the disaffiliation of the retiree organization.

The keynote speaker was Ed Coyle, Executive Director of the Alliance for Retired Americans. He emphasized the importance of unions and other groups working together for the good of retirees on mutually important issues. Ensuring retirement security and economic and social justice for all Americans are key parts of the work of the Alliance. NEA-Retired is a part of the alliance. An NEA-Retired member sits on the Community Council of the Alliance.

The first General Session opened with greetings from the Nevada State Education Association president, Lynne Warne, and Congresswoman Dina Titus (D-NV), a strong advocate in Congress for public education and security for retirees. NSEA-Retired president, Warren Wish, brought welcoming words to the first meeting of the presidents. He was accompanied by Jody, a golden retriever that Warren has trained as a

service dog. Lily Eskelsen, NEA Vice President capped the meeting with her usual sharp insight into the current state of public education and treated the attendees to music with her guitar.

This conference offered five tracks of four sessions designed to provide leaders with the needed tools to strengthen leadership skills, membership organizing, political action, retirement security information, and NEA Member Benefits. A key track was Intergenerational Mentoring featuring three successful mentoring programs, one of the first of which was started by Ruthann Kellum (VEA-Retired, Hampton) and Sue Lively (VEA-Retired, pre-retired). Other tracks sessions included all inclusive/automatic membership from active to retired status, the power of retirees to defeat legislation that harms public education and public educators, saving our pensions from efforts to change from traditional defined benefit pensions to more risky defined contribution schemes, and using NEA Member Benefits to organize and recruit retirees for retired membership. Other

sessions followed the theme of each track.

There was an auction to raise funds for the Fund for Children and Public Education, with a large number of donations sent or brought by members. Items ranged from cans of macadamia nuts to Ironwood carvings, beautiful jewelry to Waterford Crystal. More than \$14,000 was raised, and attendees also contributed almost \$3,000 for the NEA Retired Memorial Jack Kinnaman Scholarship.

New friendships were made, long-time friendships renewed, and many expressions of satisfaction with the Conference. Most exciting of all was the exchange of ideas and strategies for recruiting and retaining membership in NEA and NEA-Retired.

Copies of session descriptions may be obtained by sending a stamped, self-addressed #10 envelope to Martha Wood, 264 Lakeview Dr., Charlottesville, VA 22901.

*For further information:*

ESEA  
<http://www.veanea.org/home/1210.htm>

<http://www.nea.org/home/1230.htm>

GOP/WEP  
<http://www.nea.org/home/16491.htm>

<http://www.nea.org/home/16494.htm>

*Virginia Alliance for Retired Americans*  
President Melvin Carter  
[Melcarters2@aol.com](mailto:Melcarters2@aol.com)  
(540) 455-6197

## Election 2012



Entering office amid an economic crisis, President Obama has consistently fought for the middle class, protecting children, and education.

The NEA has set up fact sheets on multiple topics (including state specific FAQ sheets) at the [educationvotes.org](http://educationvotes.org) website. An index of these FAQs is here:

<http://www.educationvotes.nea.org/documents-and-resources/>.

**Become an Educator for Obama!** The enrollment form is enclosed in this newsletter.

Regardless of whom you support in the upcoming elections, please make sure – now -- that you

are registered, have proper ID, and transportation for you and a friend so you may vote on Election Day. Your vote counts!

## **VEA Delegate Assembly Update**

Martha Wood, longtime activist in VEA and VEA-R, received the first annual distinguished service award from her colleagues at the delegate assembly this year in Virginia Beach.



The VEA-R Distinguished Service Award recognizes retired members who have made significant contributions to the growth of active and retired VEA members, public education and the welfare of public educators.

Martha's contribution started two decades ago when she was instrumental in creating VEA-Retired. Later, she helped form the VEA-

Retired Council where she has held several positions, including Vice-President, President, Retired Representative on the VEA Board of Directors, and is now the Secretary-Treasurer. Martha has helped create local VEA-R chapters, lobbied legislators, and has tirelessly promoted VEA-Retired membership across the state. For several years she worked in the Blue Ridge UniServ office helping with office duties and membership recruitment. Martha has also held influential positions at the NEA-Retired level.

Since Martha's retirement in 1993 after 34 years of service, her name has become synonymous with VEA-Retired. Martha is what VEA-Retired is all about.

Almost 20 people signed up for VEA-R lifetime membership at the delegate assembly. Volunteers manned the membership booth and awarded prizes to 14 people.

## **VEA Delegate Assembly**

by John O'Neil

More than 900 VEA members traveled to Virginia Beach, creating a chorus of celebration and defiance as the Association looks down the road for public education in the Commonwealth. The celebration was for the often-unheralded work being done with young people in public schools across the state; the defiance was for those who seek to undermine our schools and scapegoat our educators.

NEA Vice President Lily Eskelsen, a Utah teacher, kicked things off with a fire-up-the-troops keynote speech, urging members to take a "personal, obnoxious pride" in what they do every day. This is not easy work, she told the delegation, "and I will not let anyone suck the joy out of being an educator. We have always been proud of our students--it's time to be proud of ourselves, too. There are a million things we have to do every day to meet the needs of our students."

VEA President Dr. Kitty Boitnott also brought the crowd to its feet, issuing a ringing call to action, challenging members to

become part of the solution by taking a strong and lasting stand on behalf of students and schools. Bedford County member Cheryl Sprouse, chair of VEA's Legislative Committee, asked delegates if they were satisfied with what happened in this year's General Assembly. In response to their resounding "No!" she got the delegation chanting, "Now is the time!" to take action on behalf of students, schools and educators.

In other convention happenings, Virginia Beach Education Association President Dominic Melito was elected VEA Vice President, gaining 61% of the votes cast to Mecklenburg's Steve Whitten's 39 %. Melito will begin serving a two-year term August 1.

President-elect Meg Gruber of Prince William addressed the delegation, accompanied to the podium by singing, clapping Prince William Education Association delegates. Gruber, who ran unopposed, thanked members for their ongoing support and calling for collaboration in the months and years ahead. "In this difficult environment for public education," she said, "I

cannot do this job alone. We must do it together."

VEA Executive Director Philip Forgit pointed out the current level of disrespect being shown to educators by many in the general public and some in our state legislature, urging delegates to organize efforts on the local level to promote the truth about our schools and to fight for a renewed appreciation for the irreplaceable work being done in public education.

## **VEA-R President's Corner**

By Pat Kennedy



It must be spring in Virginia, as election time is here again with those wonderful ads on television, in the print media, and the calls on your phone doing "surveys". You know the kind of survey that doesn't always count answers that don't support their candidate. New rules affect the small donor PAC's yet ignore the super PAC's,

and these rules put a big dent (really a hole big enough for the state to fall into and not hit the edges) in the laws which fails to level the playing field. How can you convince a congressman or senator to support your position when the big bucks want something else? I most dislike the mega millions being spent to sling mud with a very obvious disregard for the truth.

Who exactly are these groups that appear as if by magic with millions of dollars to spend?

Maybe you have heard about the Koch Brothers, ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council), The Ryan Plan (severe budget plan offered by Rep. Paul Ryan), Crossroads GPS, Americans for Prosperity, Restore Our Future, The American Future Fund, and more. It has gotten to a point where it's hard to tell all the players apart. Thank you VEA for giving us Rob, Roger, and Carol (our government relations staff) to keep us as up to date as possible. If you are not a cyber lobbyist

with the VEA then now is the time for you to join. These Super PAC's are working every day to figure out how to dismantle public education and your pensions (VRS and Social Security plus Medicare); we can't let them win.

This fall at our VEA-Retired **regional meetings**, we will give attendees information on changes in the laws, threats to our pension, and discussions on what we can expect. Information on when the regional meetings will be held will be posted on the VEA-Retired website (<http://www.veanea.org/home/vea-retired.htm>), on the VEA-R Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/VEARetired>), in the next edition of the VEA-R Connections or call Shana Moore at the VEA (800-554-9554 X 328).

## NEA Retired Annual Meeting

The 2012 NEA-Retired Annual Meeting will mark the 28th meeting of NEA-Retired. The Annual Meeting will be held Wednesday, June

27 through Friday, June 29, 2012, at the Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill, 400 New Jersey Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20001. Delegates elected this winter include: Pat Kennedy, John F. Duncan, Deborah Jessee and R. Edward (Eddie) Fifer. All VEA-R members are welcome to attend as guests but do need to register and pay the \$60 registration fee.

## NEA-Retired Dues Increase

Dues for NEA Retired increase effective September 1. Encourage your friends and colleagues to sign up before then to take advantage of the lower prices. Applications are available at: <http://www.veanea.org/home/327.htm>

or call Shana Moore at the VEA (800-554-9554 X 328)

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*Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young.*

[Henry Ford](#)

## VRS Changes from the 2012 General Assembly

The General Assembly in this year's session made some sweeping changes to your pension plan. None of the changes apply to those already retired.

Among the changes are:

- Requiring employees to pay 5% towards their pension – with an offsetting salary increase (all employees).
- Changes in the formula that determines pension amounts for those not yet vested.
- Capping the cost-of-living adjustment at 3% for future retirees hired after July 2010.
- Requiring people hired after January 2013 to go into a defined contribution/defined benefit hybrid plan with significantly lower benefits.

On a brighter note, the cost-of-living adjustment on July 1, 2012 for current retirees is 3.08%



## Sign up to volunteer!

This election cycle, the National Education Association is organizing and mobilizing like never before. Sign up here to volunteer!

First Name: \* \_\_\_\_\_

Last Name: \* \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \* \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

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| <input type="checkbox"/> I will write a letter to the editor       | <input type="checkbox"/> I will help distribute fliers                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I will talk one-on-one with my colleagues | <input type="checkbox"/> I will contact my elected officials                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I will walk door to door                  | <input type="checkbox"/> I will participate in a visit with my member of Congress |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I will help make phone calls              | <input type="checkbox"/> I will attend a rally or event                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I will conduct a meeting at my worksite   |   |

*Disclaimer: We do not share the information you've given us with unaffiliated groups without your explicit permission. We will not make any of your information publicly available, but we may transmit it to members of Congress and to the President as part of a petition. Education Votes and affiliated groups will send you updates on this and other important campaigns by email. If at any time you would like to unsubscribe from our email list, you may do so.*

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Visit [www.educationvotes.org](http://www.educationvotes.org) to learn more

### Mail this form to

NEA Educators for Obama, 1201 16<sup>th</sup> St., NW, Suite 510, Washington DC, 20036  
or fax to 202-822-7741