

Fall 2022

Volume 25, Issue 1

# Connections

A Publication of VEA-Retired



## Inside this Issue:

Newsletter Recognition	2
Distinguished Service	3
PAC Update	3
Vacant Council Seat	3
About the State	4
NEA-R Annual Meeting	6
Know Where You Live	6
VEA Board of Directors	7
Meet Your Council	7

## President's Column

By Lola V. McDowell

I am so proud to be representing VEA-Retired members as your president for the next two years. I've previously served as secretary, vice president, and president of Richmond Education Association-Retired; the VEA Board of Directors and Minority and Women's Concerns Committee; and numerous other Association committees including the NEA Black Caucus. I've also been your VEA-Retired vice president for the past four years.

Retired since 2012 from teaching pre-K through 5th grades, all in Title I, I continue to be a strong advocate for public education, teachers, ESPs, and students. Since retiring, I've been working at Virginia Commonwealth University on the adjunct faculty as a student teacher supervisor.

My mother was a teacher and most of my family were/are educators, which is where I likely inherited my passion for teaching. I've been actively involved in unions in Baltimore and Richmond since I began teaching over 50 years ago. Again, credit to my mother who was an active member of the Virginia Teachers Association prior to its merger with VEA.

As VEA-Retired president, I plan to highlight retirees and how we might help teachers, mentors, and students. I envision retired and active educators working as a team to support public education. With council members, I would like to visit local active units and retired chapters.

I plan to stand up and speak out to help improve pensions, health benefits, Social Security, and Medicare for retirees. I am ready, willing, and able to work hard to make VEA-Retired the best it can be. I hope to see you at VEA events and/or local meetings soon!

## Retired Membership Committee Seeking Feedback

By Vashti Mallory

How might you like to engage this year? What are some activities you'd be interested in doing with other retirees (e.g., organized trips, virtual or in-person conferences, webinars, book clubs, etc.)? What are some topics you'd be interested in learning more about (i.e., in a training or webinar)?

You can take [our online survey](#) or send responses to Vashti Mallory at [t2ladyv05@comast.net](mailto:t2ladyv05@comast.net) or mail to 6710 South Grand Brook Circle, Richmond, VA 23225.

**2022-23 VEA-Retired Council**

**Lola McDowell**  
President

[lolavannn@gmail.com](mailto:lolavannn@gmail.com)

**Malia Huddle**  
Vice President

[malia.l.huddle@gmail.com](mailto:malia.l.huddle@gmail.com)

**Kathy Davis**  
Secretary-Treasurer  
[katydidwvu@cox.net](mailto:katydidwvu@cox.net)

**Dot Walton**  
Retired Member at Large,  
VEA Board  
[waltonds@comcast.net](mailto:waltonds@comcast.net)

**Dennis Pfennig**  
Immediate Past President  
[vearetired@veanea.org](mailto:vearetired@veanea.org)

Congressional District Reps:

**Holly Jackson-Conrad, 1<sup>st</sup>**  
[hollyjacksonconrad@gmail.com](mailto:hollyjacksonconrad@gmail.com)

**Shirley George, 2<sup>nd</sup>**  
[smgplus3@cox.net](mailto:smgplus3@cox.net)

**Sid Neighbours, 3<sup>rd</sup>**  
[sidneighbours@gmail.com](mailto:sidneighbours@gmail.com)

**Vashti Mallory, 4<sup>th</sup>**  
[t2ladyv05@comcast.net](mailto:t2ladyv05@comcast.net)

**Connie Coates, 5<sup>th</sup>**  
[connie.coates@gmail.com](mailto:connie.coates@gmail.com)

**Vacant, 6<sup>th</sup>**

**Barbara Wilson, 7<sup>th</sup>**  
[barbwwilson@hotmail.com](mailto:barbwwilson@hotmail.com)

**Karen Beasley, 8<sup>th</sup>**  
[ksbalex08@gmail.com](mailto:ksbalex08@gmail.com)

**Eddie Fifer, 9<sup>th</sup>**  
[refifer@bvu.net](mailto:refifer@bvu.net)

**Marni Matyac, 10<sup>th</sup>**  
[walkergirl3466@yahoo.com](mailto:walkergirl3466@yahoo.com)

**Allison Batty, 11<sup>th</sup>**  
[acbatty@verizon.net](mailto:acbatty@verizon.net)



**The 2022-23 VEA-Retired Council is already hard at work, holding its first meeting of the year on September 15-16 at the Hyatt House Richmond/Short Pump.**

**Pictured from left to right are: (front) Malia Huddle, Lola McDowell, Kathy Davis, Dennis Pfennig, (middle) Marni Matyac, Dot Walton, Connie Coates, Vashti Mallory, Holly Jackson-Conrad, Karen Beasley, (back) Sid Neighbours, Allison Batty, Eddie Fifer, Barbara Wilson, and Marlene Parker. Not pictured – Shirley George.**

**Newsletter Recognition**

*By Dennis J. Pfennig*

VEA-Retired's *Connections* newsletter earned the NEA-Retired State e-Newsletter Runner Up award for 2021-22. Then-president, Dennis Pfennig, accepted the award this summer at the NEA-Retired annual meeting in Chicago where our newsletter was honored for its "extraordinary support of NEA-Retired and public education." NEA-Retired President Sarah Borgman made the presentation.



**Sarah Borgman and Dennis Pfennig at the 2022 NEA-Retired Annual Meeting in Chicago.**

## Nominations Open for Distinguished Service Award

By Marlene Parker

VEA-Retired is now seeking nominations for the 2023 Martha Wood Distinguished Service Award. Named in honor of its first recipient, this annual award is meant to recognize retired members who have made significant contributions to the growth of the active and retired Association, promotion of public education, and the welfare of public educators since retirement.

Nominees must have been members of NEA-Retired/VEA-Retired for at least five consecutive years as of January 15<sup>th</sup> of the award year and cannot hold a position on the VEA-Retired Council at the time of nomination. Additional information and nomination forms are available at [vea.link/distinguished-service](http://vea.link/distinguished-service). Please contact us at [vearetired@veanea.org](mailto:vearetired@veanea.org) with questions. Nominations must be received at VEA by the close of business on January 9, 2023. The award will be presented at the 2023 VEA Delegate Assembly to be held March 16-18 in Roanoke.

## PAC Update

By Meg Gruber

Once again, NEA-Retired members have given generously to political action fundraising...almost \$250,000!

VEA-Retired had 4,777 members as of August 31. Its members made 1,359 donations to the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education ([educationvotes.nea.org/donate](http://educationvotes.nea.org/donate)), totaling \$7,425, an average of just \$1.55 per member, a 5% decrease from last year!

For the VEA Fund for Children and Public Education ([veafund.org/get-involved](http://veafund.org/get-involved)), we have just 70 retirees contributing monthly by Easy Pay or credit card. Those 70 individuals have raised \$10,437 for the VEA Fund. That averages to \$149 per person.

As we watch what is happening to our schools and our students, we see the importance of electing candidates who truly support public education with their voting record, not just their campaign rhetoric.

Thank you to all who donate, and I beg of you, if you do not contribute, please consider beginning today. The links above are the websites where you can contribute to help support friends of education at the state and national levels. **As a reminder, no dues monies are ever used for political donations.**

Please donate to both funds today and consider making a recurring monthly contribution.

## Vacant Council Seat in CD6

The VEA-Retired Council consists of five executive officers plus one representative from each of Virginia's 11 congressional districts. The CD6 representative seat is currently vacant. Congressional district representatives on the VEA-Retired Council must live in the district they seek to represent. If you live in CD6 (currently represented by Ben Cline) and are interested in getting more involved, please consider serving on the VEA-Retired Council.

If you have any questions or are interested in serving, please contact Meg Gruber at [ursamg@aol.com](mailto:ursamg@aol.com).



### About VEA-Retired

- We are the fastest growing division of VEA
- Council members are elected by VEA-Retired membership
- We elect our own delegates to the VEA and NEA assemblies
- We have active local chapters across the state
- VEA-Retired members are eligible for the same NEA Member Benefits they had while working
- Information is published in *Connections*, *Virginia Journal of Education*, and is available on the VEA website
- Contact us at [vearetired@veanea.org](mailto:vearetired@veanea.org) for information on local chapters

### 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 to [vearetired@veanea.org](mailto:vearetired@veanea.org) by February 15, 2023.

## About the State

### Congressional District 2

By Shirley M. George

After the recent redistricting, Congressional District 2 now includes Virginia Beach, the Eastern Shore, Suffolk, Franklin, Isle of Wight, and parts of Southampton and Chesapeake. Reminder to our members, to all Virginians, please become familiar with the new boundaries before November's elections as you may now be in a different district.

Our group plans to start meeting virtually in October and, over time, have speakers on an array of topics such as election procedures, Medicare and Medicaid, gerontology, AARP, elder law, wills and trusts, mental health, assistance with prescription purchases, home health care, breast cancer awareness, identity theft and fraud, and information on tax preparation and investments.

We advocate for each local to have a retiree on their board, to plan and set up retiree receptions, and to encourage lifetime retired membership (lifetime dues can be made in payments). Many active members are not aware that if they have a loan, insurance, or credit card through NEA, they need to continue membership in retirement to continue eligibility for benefits. We plan to make sure our members are knowledgeable, that they become pre-retired subscribers early in their careers, and they take advantage of all the many opportunities membership provides, especially in retirement.

### Elizabeth River Retired Educators

By Malia Huddle

As a relatively new retired chapter that formed just before the chaos of COVID, Elizabeth River Retired Educators (ERRE) is focused on growing our membership and exploring ways to serve our community. We meet the second Thursday of each month at noon at a local restaurant. Each month we choose a project to support. During July and August, we donated personal care and feminine hygiene products to the H.E.R. Shelter in Portsmouth. During August and September, we collected school supplies that were donated to the Elizabeth River Uniserv for distribution during new employee orientations. We encourage any retired member who lives nearby and would like to attend a meeting to come join in the fun. Message our secretary-treasurer, Malia Huddle at [malia.l.huddle@gmail.com](mailto:malia.l.huddle@gmail.com) for the meeting location. Membership in ERRE is open to any retired VEA/NEA member who resides in Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk, or Virginia Beach.

**Fairfax Education Association – Retired***By Marni Matyac*

Marni Matyac and Dave Thomas are the newly elected president and vice president of the FEA-R Council. Mimi Dash, Michael Hairston, Adrienne White, Robin Rubio, and Lynda Vincent were announced as incoming council members. Past FEA-R President Cheryl Binkley was appointed as the government relations (GR) team chair.

At our September 6th council meeting, we made plans to meet with the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) human resources department to discuss retiree benefits. We also plan to meet with Dr. Michelle Reid, the new superintendent of FCPS. Our members are attending her Community Conversations across the division this fall. Our GR team meets with Northern Virginia legislators to support VEA's positions and advocate for our retirees.

On September 10th, FEA-R members attended the 45th anniversary celebration of the opening of Tysons Towers Apartments. In 1977, concerned with the high cost of living in the area, FEA established the Tysons Towers Apartments in Vienna, VA. This newly renovated independent living community has provided seniors with affordable housing for 45 years. Happy Anniversary, Tysons Towers!

We were fortunate to have Diane Ravitch as the guest speaker at our May luncheon. She encouraged our members to be unafraid, and talked about how the word "woke" had been twisted in social media. So instead, she encouraged us to be WOKE: Wide Open to Knowledge and Enlightenment. This is the energy FEA-R hopes to carry into the 2022-2023 school year.

**Richmond Education Association – Retired***By Vashti Mallory*

REA-R continues to remain active. In June, we held our retiree recognition and reception at the Embassy Suites in Richmond. The program included greetings from Dr. Shonda Harris-Muhammed, chair of the Richmond Public Schools (RPS) school board; Dr. James Fedderman, VEA president; Carol Bauer, VEA vice president; and Katina Harris, REA president. Our guest speaker was Rodney Robinson, 2019 national teacher of the year, who spoke on, "What Would We Do without Retirees?" Music selections were provided by Marsha Meekins and Company.

We recognized those individuals who retired from RPS in 2020, 2021, and 2022. All were members of REA when they retired. We presented each retiree with a certificate of appreciation for their years of service to public education in RPS, a VEA-Retired pin, and REA-Retired pen. We had an enjoyable celebration.

**York, Hampton, Newport News***By Maureen Abrahamson*

Several VEA-Retired members from York, Poquoson, Hampton, and Newport News have been meeting monthly at Sage Kitchen inside Anderson's Garden Center. Since it has been difficult to get individual units to meet, we have tried to create a social network, and we encourage others to join us. Our next lunch dates are Wednesday, October 26th and Wednesday, November 30<sup>th</sup>, both at noon. We will not meet in December. Please contact Maureen Abrahamson at [maureenabrahamson@gmail.com](mailto:maureenabrahamson@gmail.com) or Rita Cooper at [fsucalum@cox.net](mailto:fsucalum@cox.net). We hope that meeting for lunch and socializing will encourage more participation.

---

## NEA-Retired Annual Meeting

By Dennis J. Pfennig

NEA-Retired held its first in-person/virtual meeting in three years June 29-30 in Chicago. There were 334 total voting delegates. VEA-Retired was represented in Chicago by Ralph Booher, Ernest Holley, Dennis Pfennig, and Martha Wood. Incoming VEA-Retired President Lola McDowell attended virtually from her home yet was every bit as active as the four in-person delegates seated in the auditorium. Our own Princess Moss, NEA vice president, addressed the group on the first day. “You are my favorite,” she began. She went on to proclaim the need for retirees to join the fight to protect our democracy. Well, retirees are doing just that; as of the end of June, they had donated \$249,000 to political action. The next day NEA President Becky Pringle declared how she appreciated retirees’ wisdom and dedication, adding, “You inspire me!”

One highlight of the meeting was when Dennis Pfennig got its business session to adopt a NBI requiring the NEA-Retired president and executive committee to lobby the NEA executive director to put in place a phone connection at NEA’s DC headquarters dedicated to retiree issues. Presently, if a retiree phones NEA, a machine offers seven phone prompts, not one of which is for retired issues. But the real highlight as far as Virginia was concerned was when it was announced that our *Connections* newsletter was honored for its “extraordinary support of NEA-Retired and public education.”

After the annual meeting, VEA-Retired’s delegates spent four days (July 2-6) attending the NEA RA, starting each day at 7 am with a state caucus session and ending about 6 pm at the McCormick Place Convention Center. Our four in-person delegates were on the floor when the gavel fell at 8 pm on July 6. Virginia was well-represented and well-served.



*VEA-Retired delegates (from left to right) Ralph Booher, Martha Wood, Ernest Holley, and Dennis Pfennig attended the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting in Chicago in June. Not pictured is Lola McDowell who attended virtually.*



## It's Almost Election Day...Do You Know Where You Live?

You may be residing at the same address and your polling place may be the same, but many of us have moved to a new congressional district as a result of Virginia’s 2021 redistricting process. Check out the [redistricting page](#) on the Virginia Public Access Project website ([vpap.org](http://vpap.org)) and click on your district from the interactive map to see its profile, information on upcoming elections, and more.

## VEA Board of Directors – July 2022

By Dennis J. Pfennig

The VEA Board of Directors held its final meeting of the 2021-2022 fiscal year in Harrisonburg on July 18. The highlights of this meeting follow.

- ❖ The Board approved a new one-year contract with VPSA.
- ❖ The Board approved holding the 2026 VEA Convention in Norfolk (April 16-18). Previously approved locations are:
  - Roanoke in 2023 (March 16-18),
  - Hampton in 2024 (April 11-13),
  - Abingdon in 2025 (April 3-5).
- ❖ The Executive Director discussed various potential plans to renovate or sell our Richmond office.
- ❖ The Board adopted a motion requested by the Uniserv Standard Advisory Committee (USAC) to, “investigate realignment and restructuring of current USAC” service areas. President Fedderman will appoint a three-person ad hoc committee from the Board to begin this process.
- ❖ The Treasurer reported that at the end of the third quarter of the fiscal year, VEA had a net loss due mainly to membership and investment decline. In addition, this year’s convention cost more than anticipated. Nevertheless, the Association as of the end of March had over 11 months of monthly expenses in reserve.
- ❖ Outgoing Board members were given plaques in recognition of service. The author of this article received one for his eight consecutive years on the VEA Board of Directors.

## Meet Your Retired Council: Vice President Malia Huddle



I'm honored and excited to be a part of our retired leadership team as your new vice president! I serve on the VEA-Retired membership, grant, and legislative committees, and have been your secretary-treasurer for the last four years.

We can likely all agree that calling ourselves "retired" is just a bit misleading as many of us are finding ourselves busier than ever in retirement. I'm still subbing for Chesapeake Public Schools and for ACCESS College Foundation while working with the Virginia Camellia Society, Chesapeake Master Gardeners, and Elizabeth River Retired Educators. I decided

to add running for school board in Chesapeake to the list because, like many of you, even in retirement, I remain committed to serving my community and building brighter futures for our students, our colleagues, and our public schools.

Election day is almost here. Please encourage everyone you know to elect education-friendly candidates up and down our state and local ballots. As educators, we know how much every election matters. Our voices, our votes, and our continued commitment to public education is needed now more than ever. I look forward to seeing you somewhere soon as we do the good work of our union!

**ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**

If you received this newsletter via email, then we already have your email address. Thank you!!  
Please let us know if your email address changes.

**\*\*\* Please help us keep our records up to date \*\*\***

If any of your contact information changes, please consider letting us know in one of two ways:

1. Complete the contact update form at: <https://vea.link/vear-update>
2. Email your information to: [vearetired@veanea.org](mailto:vearetired@veanea.org)

We appreciate your help!