

# Connections

A Publication of VEA-Retired



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## President's Column

By Lola McDowell

Retirees, this has been a busy year for the Council and me, and we still have so much more to do. Your Council has been working hard to recruit, communicate, and be visible. We started this year off with the wonderful news that we were awarded two NEA grants: a retired organizing grant (\$7,000), and a CORAL grant (\$5,000).

The goal of CORAL (Coalition of Retired and Active Leaders) is to recruit new members across all membership categories, with an emphasis on retirees, by forming partnerships through the development of CORAL teams. Virginia was one of 10 states selected for this grant!

What else have we done, you ask? We attended Lobby Day and participated in the rally; we presented at each pre-convention caucus; and we had tables at the EPIC conference, Teachers of Color Summit, and VEA convention with wonderful swag and prizes to give away.

Five of us attended the NEA-Retired conference in San Francisco in March, where we participated in training sessions, heard inspirational speakers, donated silent auction items, and met candidates running for NEA office. I was excited to share what we were doing with our CORAL grant. We also participated in a gallery walk, where states displayed posters highlighting events or grant work they were doing. I was honored to be asked to do the land acknowledgement during the opening session.

We had 17 elected retired delegates attend the VEA convention in Roanoke. We outreached all districts in PAC fundraising and also recruited 20 new pre-retired subscribers!

We retirees are a family of strong men and women who love public education and are ready and willing to help in any way we are needed. We may be retired, but we are still active.



Dot Walton, Lola McDowell, and Vashti Mallory at the VEA Convention last month in Roanoke.



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### 2022-23 VEA-Retired Council

**Lola McDowell**

President

[vearetired@veanea.org](mailto:vearetired@veanea.org)

**Malia Huddle**

Vice President

**Kathy Davis**

Secretary-Treasurer

**Dot Walton**

Retired Member at Large,  
VEA Board

**Dennis Pfennig**

Immediate Past President

#### Congressional District Representatives:

**Holly Jackson-Conrad**

1<sup>st</sup> Congressional District

**Shirley George**

2<sup>nd</sup> Congressional District

**Sid Neighbours**

3<sup>rd</sup> Congressional District

**Vashti Mallory**

4<sup>th</sup> Congressional District

**Connie Coates**

5<sup>th</sup> Congressional District

**Vacant**

6<sup>th</sup> Congressional District

**Barbara Wilson**

7<sup>th</sup> Congressional District

**Karen Beasley**

8<sup>th</sup> Congressional District

**Eddie Fifer**

9<sup>th</sup> Congressional District

**Marni Matyac**

10<sup>th</sup> Congressional District

**Allison Batty**

11<sup>th</sup> Congressional District

## VEA Board of Directors Meetings

By Dot Walton

### October 14-15, 2022, Omni Hotel in Richmond.

- VASO contract – Reported from executive session and was approved.
- Prince William EA trusteeship – Executive committee recommendation that *Memorandum of Understanding* be terminated was approved.
- VEA Treasurer's Report:
  - Income – under budget for the year, mostly due to membership dues (\$756,000 under) and investment losses (\$794,000 under). Net income for the past 12 months was \$375,331.
  - Expenses – total YTD expenses are over budget by \$317,996. This included approximately \$250,000 spent from the \$350,000 board-designated reserve for collective bargaining efforts.
  - Cash reserve status – As of August 31, 2022, VEA had approximately 11 months in its operating reserves.
- VEA HQ renovation vs selling/renting – presented by Brenda Pike.
  - Current annual operating expense – \$190,766 (predicted to increase by 3% annually).
  - Condition of building:
    - Last building renovation was about 30 years ago.
    - Elevator is old and expensive to replace.
    - New chiller is needed for HVAC system.
    - Exterior paint is cracked and absorbing water.
    - Limited space to grow as internal configuration is not conducive for work collaboration.
    - Additional space is needed for storage, IT, etc.
    - Parking lot is sloped toward the building rather than away.
    - Excavation is needed to address foundation issues.
    - Building does not meet present code requirements.
  - Options presented:
    - Renovation estimates – interior – \$1,572,025 + \$150,000 for elevator replacement; exterior – \$496,000
    - Purchase land and build – cost prohibitive
    - Purchase an existing structure – cost prohibitive
    - Sell building and rent office space
      - Current value of building – \$2.6 to \$3M
      - Information was given on three locations currently for rent in Henrico County
  - Executive committee's recommendation was to sell the VEA headquarters; VEA BOD then voted to sell the building.

*(continued on page 7)*

## Distinguished Service Award

By Kathy Davis

The Martha Wood Distinguished Service Award recognizes those retired members who have made significant contributions to the growth of the active and retired Association, the promotion of public education, and the welfare of public educators. Nominees must have been members of VEA/NEA-Retired for at least five consecutive years as of January 15 of the award year.

This year's award recipient is Ralph Booher, who retired from Washington County Public Schools in 2005 after 38 years of teaching government and American history at John S. Battle High School and decades of participation in all three levels of the Association. Education is a family affair for Ralph, with his wife Anna having taught for 44 years, and his daughter more than 30.

Like so many future leaders, Ralph started out as a building representative and eventually served as president of his local, the Washington County Education Association. He was also elected twice as district president, giving him the opportunity to sit on the VEA Board of Directors. In that capacity, Ralph was elected to serve on the executive and budget committees for several years. Ralph was also elected to the NEA Board of Directors. Nearly every year since the 1960s, he has been a delegate to the VEA and/or NEA assemblies.

Before and since retiring, Ralph has been an important part of VEA's lobbying efforts. He has lobbied legislators locally, and yearly was a strong influence at district legislative dinners. For many years he has met with legislators during Lobby Day and attended rallies at the state Capitol.

Since retirement, Ralph has continued to be a leader, serving on the VEA-Retired Council for several terms. While on the Council, he once again sat on the VEA Board and was elected to the executive and budget committees. In addition, he served on the NEA Issues committee and the VEA Professional Rights and Responsibilities (PR&R) commission and was appointed as VEA's representative to the Appalachia Educational Laboratory's Board of Directors.

Membership recruitment has always been a priority for Ralph. He has been part of many membership campaigns at conventions and conferences and has worked to establish local VEA-Retired chapters in Southwest Virginia.

Past VEA-Retired presidents have sung his praises. Eddie Fifer wrote that Ralph, "demonstrated true leadership as an active and retired member." Referring to Ralph's participation at many NEA-Retired annual meetings, Dennis Pfennig described him as "a man always with ideas and thoughtful presentations."

As busy as Ralph has been working for the Association, he found time to be a member of the Masonic Lodge for more than 50 years, serve on the board of directors of Southern States, and raise and show quarter horses! His friends also know him as a devoted Kentucky Colonel, a West Virginia Mountaineer, and a Tennessee Squire. Congratulations, Ralph!



*Ralph and Anna Booher with James Fedderman at the award presentation.*



**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 September 15, 2023.

**About the State**

**Arlington Education Association – Retired**

*By Judith Knight*

During recent meetings, AEA-R has received updates on its annual scholarship program for Arlington high school seniors and its grants for STEM/STEAM teachers. This spring, members hope to hear from some of the grant recipients teachers about what they have learned. AEA-R received updates from the AEA president on the Association’s progress in its collective bargaining process. Arlington retirees are fully in support of AEA’s efforts to achieve collective bargaining. Both AEA and AEA-R have reviewed their documents and processes recently, and AEA-R will make any necessary updates or revisions.

**Elizabeth River Retired Educators**

*By Malia Huddle*

ERRE meets the second Thursday of each month at a local restaurant where we enjoy fellowship and a speaker or program. We are a regional chapter open to any retired educator who resides in Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Chesapeake, or Virginia Beach. Our current ERRE chair is Angela Peterson, who retired from Portsmouth Public Schools.

Our members are committed to supporting and building our active and retired union chapters while serving our local community. Each month members bring items for the YMCA food bank, or a book for the little library that we presented to New Mount Olive Baptist Church in Chesapeake at our December membership recruitment social. We have also collected personal hygiene items for the H.E.R. Shelter and a local homeless organization. Two of our members, Tuwana Okafor and Jeff Cobb, represented ERRE at VEA Lobby Day. We are currently working with VEA-Retired to assist the local active chapters in surrounding school systems as they recruit new members.



If you are ever in the Hampton Roads area, please come to visit. You can reach out to our secretary-treasurer, Malia Huddle. We’d love to see you and share a meal along with some laughter and conversation. Visitors are always welcome at ERRE.

**Fairfax Education Association – Retired**

*By Marni Matyac*

Walt Mika, past VEA and FEA president and FEA-R council member emeritus, passed away on December 15, 2022, after a long struggle with Alzheimer's disease. He advocated for active and retired Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) staff, and Fairfax County's supplemental retirement program exists largely because of his efforts. As a board member of the Virginia Retirement System, he helped to reduce the retirement age to 55. His forward thinking improved thousands of lives, and we are incredibly grateful.

Our council has been busy meeting with FCPS leadership. FEA-R and Fairfax County Retired Educators (FCRE), an independent group, met with Sherry Wilson, the new assistant superintendent for the FCPS human resources department, in October. Topics included the latest health insurance for retirees under 65, and changes to our dental plan. Our next meeting with HR is on April 27th. Also in October, the FEA-R council met with Michelle Reid, FCPS's new superintendent. We discussed the viability of the retirement plans for active employees and the future of our supplemental retirement program. In addition, Reid invited the FEA-R council to meet with her quarterly to share our institutional knowledge. Our next meeting is on April 26th.

In December, our Government Relations Team (GRT) and FCRE met with local state legislators to review our legislative priorities for the 2023 General Assembly session. In place of attending Lobby Day, GRT members were alerted when to contact delegates and senators about legislation and the budget.

Our all-member meeting will be held May 2<sup>nd</sup>, with special guest state Senator Dick Saslaw. With the pandemic in our rearview mirror, we look forward to meeting in person for the first time since 2019.

On March 9th, the FCPS school board voted unanimously in favor of collective bargaining. FCPS employees now have what many of our retired staff didn't have: a voice. However, this is only the beginning of the work that needs to be done. FEA-R is ready to support our active counterparts in any way we can as we move on to the next step of the journey of making sure FCPS employee voices are heard.

**Richmond Education Association – Retired**

*by Susan Damron and Dorothy Marie Rice*

At our October meeting, school board and REA-R member Cheryl Burke gave an update on school division needs and programs. At our December holiday gathering, Boaz Young-El gave an update on union negotiations. We collected gift items for Fairfield Court students under the chairmanship of new REA-R member Theresa Crowley, who recently retired from Fairfield Court. Through her efforts, 250 students were able to receive a hat, mittens, socks, and books.

At the February "Love Your Heart" meeting, Edward Gates demonstrated CPR. Recent deaths or near deaths justify the need for everyone to be familiar with life-saving skills. Those in attendance agreed that the program was excellent.

Susan Damron and Dorothy Rice answered the call in March to take over REA-R co-chairing duties since Lola McDowell and Vashti Mallory moved into new positions. We look forward to our retirement celebration in June and to welcoming new members.

## VEA-Retired Receives CORAL Grant

*By Vashti Mallory*

VEA-Retired has received a Coalition of Retired and Active Leaders (CORAL) grant from NEA. The goals of the program are to recruit new members across every membership category with an emphasis on retirees, to form partnerships across membership categories, to increase the presence of all membership categories at each statewide event for the purpose of promoting membership, and to develop and implement local CORAL teams throughout the state. Goals are to be realized by the end of the 2022-23 membership year.

We are hoping to develop ten local CORAL teams throughout the state and recruit 100 new members by the end of the grant period. Our statewide team, composed of leaders from each membership category, has been busy satisfying the conditions of the grant. We have visited several locals and to date we have identified 10 members from different parts of the state who are interested in working on local CORAL teams.

Our recruitment effort was visible at the five virtual pre-convention caucus meetings, at the Teachers of Color Summit held in Norfolk, and at the recent VEA convention held in Roanoke. At each we engaged with attendees, bringing awareness to VEA-Retired and the availability of pre-retired subscriptions, and speaking about the importance of belonging to the retired association.

The CORAL team will continue membership recruitment efforts at all VEA events throughout the year. We are also contacting local active presidents seeking invitations to attend local meetings for the purpose of introducing VEA-Retired and our work.

## PAC Report

*By Dennis J. Pfennig*

During the 2023 VEA convention, President James Fedderman on several occasions commended retirees for their contributions to political action. Rightfully so, as over the past year, VEA-Retired contributed \$13,570 to the VEA Fund. Likewise, NEA-Retired has reported that as of mid-February retirees nationwide had contributed \$82,250 to the NEA Fund. **Reminder – no dues monies are ever used for political donations.**

To break it down a bit, VEA retirees have contributed \$6,169.36 (\$1,165.38 to the NEA Fund and \$5,003.98 to the VEA Fund) in total PAC contributions between September 2022 and February 2023. There are 68 retirees enrolled in EasyPay during the current fiscal year. All members are requested to donate monthly via EasyPay. Just \$5 per member per month will help make retirees a force in national, state, and local elections.

## VEA-Retired Membership

As of March 31, 2023, VEA-Retired had 4,702 members (4,458 retired lifetime and 244 annual retired members).

## VEA Board of Directors Meetings (continued)

By Dot Walton

### January 14-15, 2023, Hilton Downtown Richmond.

- President James Fedderman congratulated VEA-Retired on being selected to receive a CORAL grant.
- VEA HQ building was shown to four potential buyers. No offers. Three finalist options for renting future space have been chosen.
- Calibre CPA Audit Report: The accountant stated that VEA would receive an **A** if put in teacher terms.
- Treasurer's Report: While total income is running under budget, so are departmental expenses. Investment income has increased.
- The Board forwarded to the VEA Convention: Major Goals and Objectives, Standing Committees and Commissions, Standing Rules, and a 2023-24 budget.
- No nominations were received for the 2023 VEA Friend of Education Award.

### March 16, 2023, Hotel Roanoke & Convention Center

- Dot Walton (VEA-Retired, at-large BOD member) was given the opportunity to speak about becoming a pre-retired subscriber. Board members received a VEA-Retired flyer and enrollment forms for both certified and ESP members. Dot stated that a goal of VEA-Retired was to have all BOD members become pre-retired subscribers.
- BOD members were also given a brief report on the NEA-Retired conference held in San Francisco in March. Lola McDowell (VEA-Retired president), Vashti Mallory (CORAL team chair), Meg Gruber (NEA-Retired executive committee), Bea Snidow (VEA-Retired state staff liaison), and Dot Walton attended the conference.
- VEA Executive Director Brenda Pike gave updates on the sale of the VEA headquarters building. No offers have been received; however, there is interest in the property. Meanwhile, final negotiations are complete for a ten-year lease on office space in Henrico County. The first-year lease cost will be \$204,100. Estimated move-in readiness is September 1, 2023. The estimated renovation cost borne by the landlord is \$360,609.
- Organizing2Bargain: twenty-seven (27) local associations are in the process.
- The 2023 NEA convention will be in Orlando, Florida. The VEA delegation will be staying at the Hyatt Regency Orlando.
- VEA-Retired will be represented at the 2023 NEA-Retired Annual Meeting and the NEA Representative Assembly by elected delegates Ernest Holley, Dennis Pfennig, and Martha Wood along with our two retired directors on the VEA Board, Lola McDowell and Dot Walton.

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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!