

# Connections

A Publication of VEA-Retired

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## President's Column

By Lola V. McDowell



Happy New Year, Retirees! I hope you had a wonderful holiday season and are ready for an awesome 2026.

This is an election year for VEA-Retired. All council and delegate seats are up for election for two-year terms. And voting is this week! The electronic ballot will open at noon on Wednesday and stay open until noon on Friday. Please remember to vote! Newly-elected delegates will attend the 2026 and 2027 conventions, and council members will begin their terms on August 1<sup>st</sup>.

Information about voting and a summary of candidates can be found on the [VEA website](#). I'm pleased to see so many competitive races and encourage anyone who missed out this year to plan on running in 2028!



**VEA-Retired Council,  
September Meeting:**

**Meg Gruber, Kathy Davis, Barbara Wilson, Angela Peterson, Lola McDowell, Dot Walton, Allison Batty, Dennis Pfennig, Malia Huddle, Cindy Kennedy, and Eddie Fifer.**

**Upcoming Events:**

February 16 – Join us for VEA Lobby Day.

[Register here](#)

March 1-3 – NEA Retired Conference; Chandler, AZ.

[Information here](#)

April 16-18 – VEA Delegate Assembly; Norfolk, VA

## Membership Grants and Drawing Winner

Would you like to start a local or regional VEA-Retired chapter in your area? We'd love to help and will even provide up to \$500 to help you get started. Contact us at [vearetired@veanea.org](mailto:vearetired@veanea.org) to request grant application forms. It's a great way to stay connected to your profession and VEA friends.

Thank you to the 60 VEA-Retired members who responded to our survey! VEA-Retired members who responded by December 15th were entered in a drawing for a \$50 gift card, compliments of VEA Executive Director Earl Wiman. Congratulations to Joanmarie Kulinka, who was our drawing winner!

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## 2025-26 VEA-Retired Council

**Lola McDowell**  
President

**Malia Huddle**  
Vice President

**Kathy Davis**  
Secretary-Treasurer

**Dot Walton**  
Retired Member at Large,  
VEA Board

**Dennis Pfennig**  
Immediate Past President

*Congressional District  
Representatives:*

**Meg Gruber, 1<sup>st</sup>**

**Sid Neighbours, 2<sup>nd</sup>**

**Angela Peterson, 3<sup>rd</sup>**

**Stella Little Johnson, 4<sup>th</sup>**

**Barb Wilson, 5<sup>th</sup>**

**Nena Koch, 6<sup>th</sup>**

**Jamila Darwish, 7<sup>th</sup>**

**Vacant, 8<sup>th</sup>**

**Eddie Fifer, 9<sup>th</sup>**

**Cindy Kennedy, 10<sup>th</sup>**

**Allison Batty, 11<sup>th</sup>**

## Connections

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## VEA-RETIRED ELECTIONS – PLEASE VOTE THIS WEEK

By Meg Gruber

Did you know? In the 2024 VEA-Retired elections, there were **4,626** retired members who were eligible to vote, but only **154** members voted. That's only a **3%** turnout of our membership. We can do much better, as we all know the importance of voting. Please reach out to VEA-Retired members that you may know and encourage them to vote this week.

Voting begins at noon on Wednesday, January 21 and ends at noon on Friday, January 23. Look for a link on the [VEA website](#) during that time. Any questions or concerns may be sent to [vearetired@veanea.org](mailto:vearetired@veanea.org).



## RETIRED LOBBY CADRE

By Dot Walton

VEA-Retired has been given another opportunity to represent our Union siblings, both active and retired, as we advocate for children and public education. Five retired members – Sam Eure, Meg Gruber, Sid Neighbours, Dot Walton, and Kristen Young – will be part of the VEA lobby team during the 2026 legislative session, which just got underway last week.

The newly-formed Retired Lobby Cadre met on December 11<sup>th</sup> in Richmond with government relations staff to tour the General Assembly Building, obtain lobbyist credentials, and discuss duties and responsibilities. We're looking forward to being the daytime face of VEA this session.



**Left:** VEA GR staff member Chad Stewart gives an overview of House and Senate committee meetings. **Right:** Retired Lobby Cadre members, Kristen Young, Dot Walton, Sid Neighbours, Meg Gruber, and Sam Eure

## ABOUT THE STATE

### Central Virginia Retired

By Barbara Wilson and Dot Walton

CenVaR is the newly-formed Central Virginia Retired chapter of VEA-Retired. This chapter has been a long time coming and will be open to current VEA-Retired members as well as former VEA members of the Blue Ridge UniServ Unit (Albemarle, Buckingham, Charlottesville, Cumberland, Fluvanna, Greene, Louisa, and Orange). VEA-Retired members Dot Walton (CEA), Cheryl Knight (AEA), Connie Coates (LCEA), and Barbara Wilson (LCEA) have already been meeting and worked to establish a draft constitution and bylaws.



Plans for 2026 will be to invite all retirees to a regularly scheduled monthly meeting. Members are encouraged to share this information with your fellow retired friends. The first meeting of all interested will be February 9th at the Zion Crossroads IHOP. We're excited and look forward to seeing you!

### Elizabeth River Retired Educators

By Malia Huddle

ERRE held our annual holiday luncheon on December 11<sup>th</sup> at Kagura. NEA Director Alynn Parham was our guest speaker. We enjoyed an afternoon filled with friends, fellowship, gifts, goodie bags, and poinsettias.



### Fairfax Education Association - Retired

By Allison Batty



Tysons Towers is a retirement housing community in Vienna, VA, for disabled individuals and seniors age 62 or older. Developed by former FEA President Walt Mika, it was originally conceived as a place where retired educators could live. The Tysons Towers board is comprised of FEA Retired members, elected resident representatives, the building manager, and the management company. Tysons Towers had its holiday party at Patsy's Restaurant, where Santa was in attendance and FEA Retired President Allison Batty convinced him that she had earned a place on the *Nice* list.

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**ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**

## **Valley Association of Retired Educators**

*By Dot Walton*

VARE is a group of retired educators from the Shenandoah Valley that meets monthly. While VARE is affiliated with VEA, being a VEA-Retired member is not required for membership. Many of the group's members are also members of VRTA (Virginia Retired Teachers Association), which is affiliated with AARP.

I had the honor of being invited to attend VARE's December meeting. Prior to the meeting, we were entertained by the Shenandoah Valley Ukulele Players. They are comprised of ukulele musicians based around the Harrisonburg area and over half of the musicians are retired educators. Group members not only play the ukulele, but must be able to sing, as well. It was a wonderful hour filled with holiday music, including the Hawaiian Christmas Song "Mele Kalikimaka."



**VEA-Retired members from VARE:**  
*Standing L to R: Twila Lambert, Vrla Leach, Mary Jane McCoy, Bea Morris, and Eldon Layman. Kneeling: Dot Walton, Karen Whetzel, and Brenda Robey*

