Fall 2026
Volume 29, Issue 1

Connections

A Publication of VEA-Retired

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Upcoming Events:

January 18 – Join us for VEA Lobby Day. Click here or scan below for information and registration.

President's Column

By Dot Walton

It is an honor to be serving as VEA-Retired's seventh president, and I look forward to working with the VEA-Retired Council and our members as we continue to advance our mission and support public education.

For those I haven't yet met, I retired in 2016 after a 38-year career as a special education teacher. My teaching experience included two years on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation in North Dakota, nine years with Fluvanna County Public Schools, and 27 years with Charlottesville City Schools.

Throughout my career, I have been an active member of VEA and with the Fluvanna and Charlottesville Education Associations. At the local level, I served in various leadership roles as a school representative, treasurer, president, and UniServ Council representative. At the state level, I served as Blue Ridge UniServ Council Chair, District 11/J President, and as a member of the VEA Board of Directors under Presidents Bankos, Moss, Boitnott, Gruber, and Livingston.

I just completed two terms as the second VEA-Retired Member-at-Large on the VEA Board, and as a member of the VEA-Retired Council and VEA's Legislative and Elections and Campaign Practices Committees. I also serve on NEA-Retired Legislative and PAC Fundraising Committees.

Throughout my career and into retirement, I have remained committed to the belief that strong professional associations are essential to advocating for educators, retirees, students, and public education. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve as your VEA-Retired president and look forward to partnering with VEA as we continue to strengthen our organization and advocate for our members.

In conclusion, I would be remiss if I didn't take this opportunity to thank my predecessor, Lola McDowell, for her years of leadership and commitment to VEA-Retired. Her dedication and service have helped position our organization for continued success, and I am grateful for the strong foundation she leaves for those of us who follow.



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2026-27 VEA-Retired Council

Dot Walton
President

Vashti Mallory
Vice President

Cindy Kennedy
Secretary-Treasurer

Barbara Wilson
Retired Member at Large, VEA Board

Lola McDowell
Immediate Past President

Congressional District Representatives:

Meg Gruber, 1st

Sid Neighbours, 2nd

Malia Huddle, 3rd

Stella Little Johnson, 4th

Steve Whitten, 5th

Nena Koch, 6th

Vacant, 7th

Kathy Davis, 8th

Debbie Jessee, 9th

Lisa Levy, 10th

Vacant, 11th

Outgoing President's Message

By Lola McDowell

I am incredibly proud of what we've accomplished over my time as president these past four years. It's been a privilege to serve alongside so many dedicated leaders. During this time, VEA-Retired has continued to grow, strengthen its voice, and expand its impact across the Association.

Serving as VEA-Retired president and representing retired members on the VEA Board has been one of the greatest honors of my Association career. I have especially valued the opportunity to advocate for retired members while continuing to support our active colleagues and the broader work of public education. The commitment and involvement of VEA-Retired members continue to show just how much retirees contribute to the strength of our Association.

Although I am stepping away from the presidency, I am certainly not stepping away from VEA. I look forward to continuing to work with active and retired members to advocate for public education.

I have every confidence that VEA-Retired is in capable hands. Dot Walton, Vashti Mallory, Barbara Wilson, and Cindy Kennedy, along with our new and returning Council members, will continue to provide strong leadership for VEA-Retired.

Nominations for 2027 Distinguished Service Award

By Barbara Wilson

VEA-Retired is seeking nominations for the 2027 Martha Wood Distinguished Service Award. This annual award is meant to recognize 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 since retirement. The recipient will be Virginia's nominee for the NEA Retired award.

Nominees must have been NEA/VEA-Retired members for at least five consecutive years as of January 15th of the award year and cannot hold a position on the VEA-Retired Council at the time of nomination. Additional information is available at vea.link/distinguished-service. Please contact us at vearetired@veanea.org with questions. Nominations are due by January 6, 2027. The award will be presented at the 2027 VEA Delegate Assembly to be held March 18-20 in Spotsylvania.

Convention Highlights: VEA Delegate Assembly

By Allison Batty

Seventeen VEA-Retired delegates attended the 2026 VEA Delegate Assembly last April in Norfolk. In between sessions during which the business of the Union was conducted, delegates were treated to beautiful music performed by students of varying ages from nearby schools. As usual, retirees brought in the most money for the VEA Fund for Children and Public Education, which is a legacy we want to continue. We greatly appreciate the many non-delegate retirees from the Elizabeth River (ERRE) and Colonial (CRUE) local retired chapters who staffed a VEA-Retired table in the exhibitor area outside the convention floor.

One convention highlight was the re-election of Carol Bauer as VEA president and Dr. Jessica M. Jones as vice president. Another was the speech that Dot Walton, then VEA-Retired president-elect gave honoring outgoing VEA-Retired President Lola McDowell. Here is the speech:

"On a point of personal privilege, I would like to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude to our outgoing President Lola McDowell for her dedicated service to VEA-Retired.

As VEA-Retired president, Lola has worked tirelessly to support and uplift retired educators, ensuring that our voices continue to be heard and our contributions remembered. Because of your efforts, this organization has remained strong, connected, and purposeful. You have set a meaningful example of service that will continue to inspire those who follow. On behalf of all of us, thank you for your time, your passion, and your unwavering dedication."



Above: Earl Wiman, Carol Bauer, Jessica Jones, Lola McDowell, Gwen Edwards, Dot Walton, and Vashti Mallory

Below: Lola McDowell and Dot Walton



VEA-Retired Membership Grants

By Malia Huddle

Would you like to start a local or regional VEA-Retired chapter in your area? Your VEA-Retired Council would love to help you! We'll even provide up to $500 to help you get started. We've created a starter kit with sample bylaws, ideas, and instructions to make it as easy as possible. We'll assign a couple of members of the Council to serve as mentors to help you along the way.

Contact us at vearetired@veanea.org to request grant application forms. It's a great way to stay connected to your profession and VEA friends.

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 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 by January 8, 2027.

Convention Highlights: NEA Retired Annual Meeting

By Barbara Wilson

The RAM began with a travel day for delegates on June 29. Dot Walton and I traveled from Charlottesville, while Lola McDowell and Vashti Mallory departed from Richmond. We all met up in Denver with Meg Gruber who had arrived early for NEA-Retired executive council.

On June 30, the RAM celebrated the USA's 250th birthday with a video. NEA-Retired President Anita Gibson presided over the meeting and a land acknowledgement was given by Jay Alire of the Lakota. Following the standard opening, the credentials report was given and 323 delegates were found eligible to vote as of June 15. As of the 30th, 311 delegates were present.

The agenda was adopted with flexibility, which allowed a visit from NEA President Becky Pringle who proclaimed from the late John Lewis, "Democracy is not a state. It is an act, and each generation must do its part to help build what we called the Beloved Community, a nation and world society at peace with itself." While in house, President Pringle presided over the first live auction for a bottle of bourbon, which brought $1,875.

Delegates heard speeches from candidates, including then-Vice President Princess Moss, whose speech centered around a four-part plan for voting in this year's midterms:

1. Fuel the movement.
2. Make a plan to vote.
3. Promote the vote.
4. Protect the vote.

The second live auction, presided over by Princess Moss, for an iPad, netted $1,300. To round out the day, Susie Jablinske of Maryland received the NEA-Retired Distinguished Service Award.

On July 1, election results were announced. Anita Gibson was re-elected as president for a 3-year term, Brenda McGowen as secretary, and Brett McKim and Karen Randell were elected to the executive council. Janice Poirier and Penny Cyr were elected to the NEA Board, and a new Bylaw amendment was adopted. Georgia Association of Educators–Retired's newsletter, "The Know," won the top newsletter award and the top website award went to Education Minnesota–Retired.

Mary Kusler, director of the NEA Center for Advocacy, came and gave a rousing speech, as she always does. Secretary Noel Candelaria also visited and spoke on the financial state of NEA. Again, PAC auctions were held. Mary always gets the money, “it’s for the children.”

And FINALLY, we got down to business! We had nine NBIs and most interestingly, three were withdrawn, three were ruled out of order, and three were brought to the floor for discussion.

The first NBI (#1) was adopted as amended. It dealt with developing a guide for members to use in estate planning to donate to the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education.

The second NBI (#2), also adopted, requested NEA Retired support for an RA NBI that proposed development of a lobbying plan to ensure Social Security taxes applied to high income earners, i.e., advancement of the Social Security Expansion Act (HR1700/S770). Currently, Social Security taxes apply only to the first $184,500 of income. This plan would include electronic communication with all members. The motion, authored by Meg Gruber, did make it to the floor of the RA. However, it was sent to committee for consideration.

The third NBI (#6) passed unanimously: “We strongly request that the NEA Retired will support the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the John Lewis Voting Rights Act, and encourage the continuation of said act and all amendments through 1992, as well as the adoption of said act into the U.S. Constitution. We ask NEA Retired to use current print and digital outlets to post the support.”

The final credentials report indicated that 316 members were present and Retired delegates gave $28,079.63 in total to PAC.

Convention Highlights: NEA Representative Assembly

By Lola McDowell

Following the NEA Retired Annual Meeting, our five retired delegates, Meg Gruber, Vashti Mallory, Lola McDowell, Dot Walton, and Barbara Wilson, went on to represent VEA-Retired at the NEA Representative Assembly, which opened on July 3rd. The convention was also held in Denver. Outside of the business meetings there was much to enjoy. The most exciting happening during the RA was the election of Virginia’s own Princess Moss as the new NEA president.



Left: Dot Walton, Lola McDowell, Princess Moss, Barbara Wilson, and Vashti Mallory at NEA RA.

Right: Princess Moss and Becky Pringle at NEA RA



About the State

Elizabeth River Retired Educators

By Malia Huddle

ERRE continues to meet at local restaurants on the second Thursday of each month. At our August meeting we elected new officers for 2026-2028. They are:

Chair - Joanmarie Kulinka
Vice Chair - Malia Huddle
Secretary/Treasurer - Jeff Cobb

We were pleased to have several guests in attendance. They were VEA-Retired President Dot Walton, VEA-Retired 2nd Representative to the VEA Board Barbara Wilson, NEA-Retired Executive Committee member Meg Gruber, CEA President Katelyn Ritenour, and ERU Chair/EAN Vice President Patrick Berry. In late August, we assisted Chesapeake Education Association by staffing the recruitment table at the Nutrition Services in-service.

Fairfax Education Association - Retired

By Allison Batty

FEA-Retired had its annual member meeting and luncheon in May, discussing matters that concerned and interested our members and electing new council members. Leonard Bumbaca was elected to the Council and Adrienne White was re-elected. They join Allison Batty, Cheryl Binkley, Mimi Dash, Marlene Parker, Dennis Pfennig, and David Thomas on the Council. The Council voted Leonard Bumbaca as the FEA-Retired president.

Delegate Marcus Simon was our keynote speaker. We had several guests, including FCPS Superintendent Michelle Reid and President of FCRE Cathy Shelton. In addition, our members were able to meet VEA-Retired then-President Lola McDowell, VEA-Retired President-elect Dot Walton, and VEA-Retired Vice President-elect Vashti Mallory.

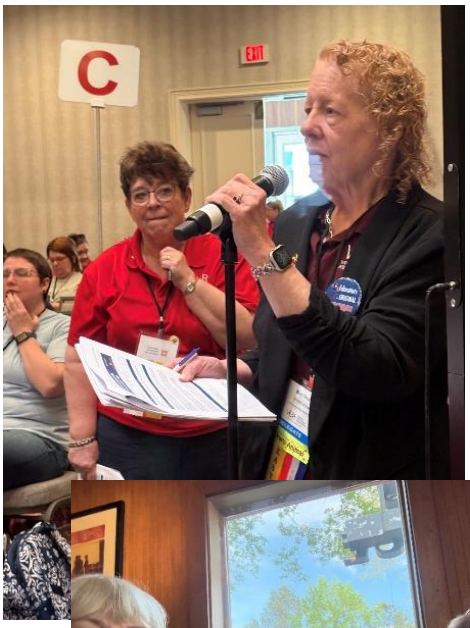


FEA-Retired with Delegate Marcus Simon



Allison Batty, Cheryl Binkley, Lola McDowell, Vashti Mallory, and Dot Walton

VEA-Retired Showed Up!



Pictures from VEA convention in Norfolk unless otherwise noted.

Clockwise: Colonial Retired United Educators (CRUE) members; retired delegates at NEA RA in Denver; retired delegates at VEA convention; Meg Gruber and VA Attorney General Jay Jones; Vashti Mallory and Cheri James; CRUE members at VEA-Retired table; post-convention lunch at Pierce's BBQ for Allison Batty, Dot Walton, and Barbara Wilson; Dot Walton and Meg Gruber at the mic.















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1. Complete the contact update form at: vea.link/vear-update
2. Email your information to: vearetired@veanea.org

We appreciate your help!