

SCRTA NEWS

Summit County Retired Teachers Association

THE SUMMIT COUNTY AFFILIATE OF Ohio Retired Teachers Association October - November 2024

UA Steel Drum Band Artistic Director to Speak and Entertain at the November 12, 2024 Luncheon Meeting

Matt Dudack the artistic director of the University of Akron Steel Drum Band, which is one of the oldest collegiate ensembles of its type. He will speak about steel drums and he and a UA student percussionist will provide musical entertainment.

The University of Akron Steel Drum Band consists of percussion majors at the University of Akron and is dedicated to performing the musical art form of Trinidad and to educating people about the history of pan. They have been fortunate to have this major force in the cultural and entertainment community of Northeast Ohio since 1980.

Alumni have helped found numerous steel bands across Ohio and beyond at all levels of education. The documentary, "Hammer on Steel: Bad Boys and Genius," aired on PBS and earned eight Emmy Award nominations. Recordings and more can be found at www.uasteelband.com.

We look forward to hearing this delightful uplifting music and learning about the history of the band and UA's role in spreading this art form far and wide.



President's Message



It was really great to see so many of you at the September meeting. Special appreciation goes to our guests N'ecole Ast, Woodridge local Superintendent, Walter Davis, retired Woodridge Superintendent, and Tom Morehouse, Woodridge Treasurer. Together they gave a very interesting and informative presentation on school vouchers and how this system is hurting taxpayers.

We welcome Christina Haas to the SCRTA Board Management team. She will be working as the chair of the teacher grant committee. She was a teacher grant team member last year. We look forward to working with her. Donations can be given at any time to our scholarship and teacher grant programs.

The next SCRTA Luncheon and General Meeting promises to be very entertaining. Invite a friend and join us on November 12, 2024. Doors open at 11:30 AM. *Johnnette Curry, SCRTA President*



2024 SCRTA MANAGEMENT BOARD

- President** - Johnnette Curry
- 1st VP/ Program** - Elaine Jarvis
- 2nd VP/Legislative** - Bill Siegerferth
- Administrative Assistant** - Rebecca Moore
- Treasurer** - Bill Siegerferth
- Asst. Treasurer/Membership** - Jackie Hovey
- Past President** - Mary Lou Swartz
- Membership Luncheons** - Micki Lavis and Phyllis Lewis
- Sunshine Committee** - Christine Bean and Rozanne Emich
- Newsletter Editor** - Elaine Jarvis
- Web Master** - Leroy Martin
- Nominating Committee: 3 elected members**
Carol Caughron, Micki Lavis and Phyllis Lewis ;
- 2 At-Large Members: Community Service** - Christine Bean and **OPEN** Member At-large
- Scholarship Committee** - Vicky Shaw and Judi Hill
- Co-Chair
- Bulk Mailing** - Rozanne Emich
- Travel/Excursions** - **OPEN**
- Teacher Grants** - Christina Haas



These brands earn Community Cash Back for our Scholarship Fund. Save your Acme receipts showing cash back rewards at the bottom of the receipt.

" VOLUNTEERISM IS THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE PUT INTO ACTION. THESE ACTIONS SHAPE AND MOLD THE PRESENT INTO A FUTURE OF WHICH WE CAN ALL BE PROUD. "

- HELEN DYER

Legislative and Legal Updates



Bill Siegfert

Talent Leaving STRS in Wake of "Reform" Board Members' Endless Complaints

Media outlets have had a lot to write and talk about lately when it comes to our retirement system. One term appearing often in reports about the recent goings-on at STRS is "chaos."

Here's why. Just within the last six months, **Aon**, a global company that provided governance advice to the System, quit. **McLagan**, a company providing compensation advice and research to STRS for over 20 years, also quit in July. Two board members have resigned. In perhaps the biggest blow to the system, it was announced at the end of September that three top leaders were leaving. Executive Director **Bill Neville**, who nearly a year ago was anonymously accused of misconduct then cleared of the accusations after an independent investigation ordered by the Attorney General, signed a \$1.65 million separation agreement. Acting Executive Director and Chief Financial Officer **Lynn Hoover** is retiring December 1 and **Matt Worley**, Deputy Executive Director—Investments and Chief Investment Officer is leaving March 31.

Board member **Julie Sellers** provided all that was needed for the chaos to continue when she made a motion at the September 20th board meeting for a vote of no confidence in ***all senior management and investment staff***. Her motion was quickly seconded by fellow "reformer" **Michelle Flanigan** who joined the Board a couple months ago. The basis for Sellers' motion is her displeasure over a 14-page memo sent by a member or members of the STRS staff to the Governor alleging misconduct by two of her fellow reformers...**Rudy Fichtenbaum** and

Wade Steen. Both men allegedly promoted investing \$65 billion of STRS assets in QED, a firm whose legitimacy has been openly challenged by more than one source. Some Board members questioned the intent of the motion, including **Pat Davidson** who is considered by some a "reformer" but who was not wearing the reformer hat in this case: "I guess I just want to get clarification on what the no confidence vote is again, because what I heard you say before is a little different than what we just said now..." Sellers replied, "As we are moving forward that we are making sure that we have all of the information to make the decisions that, uh, we need in order to make the decisions that, uh, we will have to have you know making those decisions." (Good luck figuring that one out!) Fortunately, her motion failed. (It's interesting to note that Ms. Sellers gave no thought to offering a no confidence motion aimed at the author of the anonymous complaint against Mr. Neville even after he was exonerated.)

Sellers has served several years as president of the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers, an affiliate union of the Ohio Federation of Teachers. Insofar as the number of STRS employees who were involved in producing the memo is unknown, her motion's inclusion of "all senior management and investment staff" conflicts with what certainly had to be part of her training and practice as a K-8 certificated teacher, i.e., you don't punish the whole class for the misdeeds of one or a few. Beyond that, there is a legitimate question about whether sending the memo to the Governor can even be considered a misdeed. A clear case can be made that whoever sent the memo was "whistleblowing" and is protected by the U.S. Department of Labor's Whistleblower protection laws. Those laws prohibit an employer from retaliating against an individual for reporting any of a wide range of issues, including fraud and financial issues. Retaliation is defined as an employer taking adverse action against an employee for engaging in protected activity. The Labor Department defines "adverse action" as any action that "would dissuade a reasonable employee from raising a concern about a

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Legislation continued from page 3

possible violation or engaging in other related protected activity.” Apparently, Sellers does not recognize the similarities between an STRS employee (or employees) raising a concern about his (her, their) employer (the STRS Board) under the Whistleblower Act and her own union members reporting a possible district violation, contractual or not, to her as union president. If the Cincinnati school board took adverse actions against a teacher for going to the union, it would be subject to a very legitimate unfair labor practice charge by the union.

After the no confidence vote was rejected, the board members recessed into executive session. When they reconvened, Lynn Hoover set aside a scheduled presentation to express her frustration and disappointment with the no confidence motion even though it failed. She pointed out to the board how harmful and counter-productive the act was in terms of the System’s effort to find legislators willing to sponsor a bill to increase the employer contribution. She expressed how discouraged staff has become as a result of the constant criticism by reform Board members. She challenged members to tell staff what they expected of leadership that leadership isn’t already doing. Only Wade Steen came up with an example and that was for staff to investigate selling the STRS building. Steen conceded that leadership had in fact been working on that assignment, but that they needed to move faster.

The board now must find replacements for positions that are vacant or will soon be vacant. Hopefully, the process will not be chaotic and the new leadership selections will not drive more key personnel to leave the System.

U.S. House Will Vote on WEP, GPO Repeal

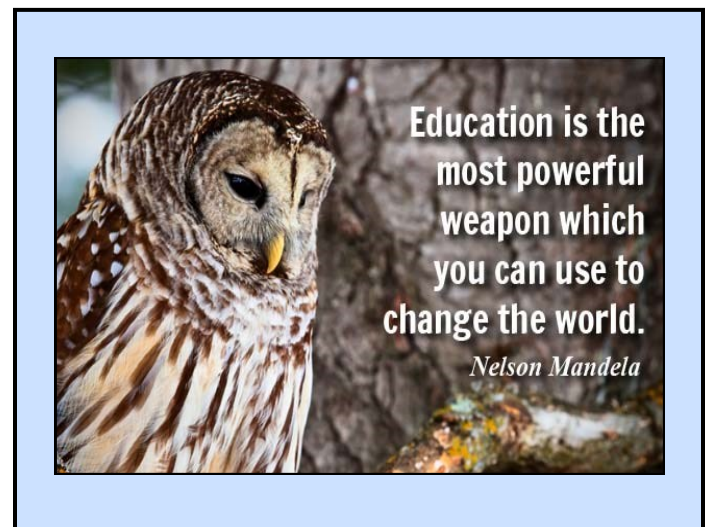
The U.S. House of Representatives will vote whether or not to repeal of the Social Security Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and the

Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and the Government Pension Offset (GPO). Co-sponsors Abigail Spanberger (D-Virginia) and Garret Graves (R-Louisiana) collected 327 co-sponsor signatures in support of repeal. The House vote will take place as the result of a discharge petition reaching the 218 signatures (47 R’s and 171 D’s) necessary to force the vote. A discharge petition is a strategy used to advance a bill to a vote of the full House without a report from the relevant committee.

WEP is a social security rule using a formula to reduce benefits for individuals who held jobs under social security but also earned a public pension. GPO likewise reduces spousal benefits for retired public pension employees. Estimates are that WEP affects two million and GPO 800,000 retirees.

In spite of unprecedented bi-partisan support, if the House votes to repeal WEP and GPO, the legislation faces a battle on the Senate side, even though the Senate version of the bill has 62 bipartisan cosponsors. Repeal would result in an average \$7,300 annual increase in benefits for those affected beginning in *December, 2023*. At this time, the two greatest obstacles to passage of the bill are the additional cost which would be added to the unresolved Social Security program funding for 2025 and the short amount of time remaining between now and the end of the current session of Congress.

Bill Seigferth, Legislation Chair





Pull for the House, Ronald McDonald House that is! Our year long drive of collecting and turning in pull tabs from soda pop, soup, pet food, and other canned goods is coming to an end. At our November meeting all those who donate or have donated at previous meetings will be entered into a drawing for two (2) gas or grocery gift cards. Those who bring pull tabs to this meeting will also be able to choose a small prize or treat.

Please remember that Ronald McDonald House gives parents a place to stay and rest while their child is undergoing treatment for often very serious illnesses. The money from the recycled pull tabs goes into the Ronald McDonald Family Fund, which gives families staying at the Ronald McDonald House special moments of normalcy and joy – like birthday gifts, trips to the hair salon, and anniversary dinners. So please bring all those tabs you have been collecting to our November meeting and **thank you** all so much for your help and support of this valuable project. *Rozanne Emich*

Save Those Acme Fresh Market Receipts!

Acme's Community Cash Back program for 2024-2025 begins **August 1** and runs through **February 15, 2025**. We are asking SCRTA members to help fund our scholarship program by saving Acme Fresh Market receipts during this time. We will earn 5% cash back on all purchases of the following participating brands: Acme Fresh Market, Food Club, Top Care, Crav'n, Tippy toes, Simply Done, Full Circle market, Sweet P's, Over the Top, Cape Covelle, That's Smart, Pure Harmony, Wide Awake Coffee Co. and Paws Happy Life.

In spite of a late start last year, we earned over \$100 for the SCRTA Scholarship Fund. We can do better this year!

As you accumulate receipts, mail them any time during the program to: SCRTA, 82 Cedar Woods Drive, Cuyahoga Falls, OH 44223. Thank you!



"All dues shall be payable, beginning in September, for the following year with December 31 being the deadline each year." We welcome our new members Brian and Sherri Nank, Jocelyn Perge, Jacqueline Rebillot, Barbara Dolensky and Linda Green! All retired from APS.

It was great to see so many familiar faces at the luncheon. Attending our luncheons is not the only way to become involved with our worthy causes. There is always room for members to be involved with awarding scholarships, grants and currently, SCRTA supports two community organizations ... Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC) and Shelter Care ... primarily by giving them toiletries, cleaning and paper products that are donated by our members at our General Luncheon meetings. We welcome help, a little or a lot! Total membership is 343 with 227 Lifetime members. Resources are limited!

We are grateful for our Lifetime Members who have made contributions towards our Teacher Grants and Scholarships.

Your dues and contributions will help us achieve our goals, benefit current and future educators and ensure that you will continue getting our newsletter.

We have 20 members that still owe dues. If there is an * by your name on this newsletter, your dues are due!

If you have any questions about your membership status, contact me.

Jackie Hovey jhoveysue@gmail.com

Scholarship News

It's Double Good Popcorn Time! Yes, the SCRTA Scholarship Committee, and any of you who would like to, will be selling Double Good Popcorn to raise funds for our 2025 scholarship recipients! For the last two years we have raised \$1600.00 (with four people selling) in our quest to aid those students from high school who intend to major in Education and college students who are currently majoring in Education.

Additionally, we will still be participating in the ACME Fresh Market Community Cash Back Program. If you currently have receipts dated August 1, 2024 or later, please bring them to our quarterly luncheon meeting on November 12th. Remember, we have until February 15, 2025 to purchase items and you can mail me the receipts (or I can possibly pick them up).

Lastly, along with the donation cups on the table, we will also sponsor our popular 50/50 raffle. As you see, there are many ways to help the scholarship committee reward some of the most deserving young people in the Summit County area.

Vicky Shaw and Judi Hill

Scholarship Co-Chairpersons



ORTA Donations Under Investigation?

The Ohio Ethics Commission will not disclose whether or not ORTA is under investigation for paying over \$100,000 in legal fees for STRS board members **Wade Steen** and **Rudy Fichtenbaum**.

Laura Bischoff of the USA Today Network recently reported that the "(Ethics) Commission has said that public officials can't accept contributions to pay for their legal fees from any 'prohibited' sources—those that have interests before the public agency." The Ethics Commission Director said that whether ORTA is considered a "prohibited source" would have to be determined via an investigation. A Case Western Reserve law professor said the ORTA contributions raise a "red flag." "If you have certain benefits being paid to an individual, who's supposed to represent a complete group of people, from a segment of that group of people, it creates concerns that there are going to be policies that favor them."

It has been reported that ORTA did not seek an opinion from the Ethics Commission before paying the legal fees. In recent correspondence with ORTA liaisons, Robin Rayfield said that ORTA instead did receive a lawyer's opinion that the legal fee payments comply with the law. The opinion did not come from an ORTA attorney but, incredibly, from one who is on the receiving end of the payments, Wade Steen's attorney!
Bill Siegferth - Legislative Chair

SCRTA GRANT COMMITTEE GOES FOR THE GOLD!

Here's how it works. Read carefully!

The SCRTA Teacher Grant Applications were mailed to each of the seventeen school districts on October 2, 2024. Applications are due by December 1, 2024. The SCRTA Grant Committee members will, for the second year, meet in early January 2025. We will share our individual evaluations of each Teacher Grant Application. Each application will be rated 1-10, and grants will be awarded to the applicants with the highest cumulative scores. The number of grants awarded will largely depend on funds contributed by SCRTA members and others, *who will share your enthusiasm in direct proportion to the enthusiasm you display!*

Tell others how this endeavor directly impacts students. Teachers took the time out of their busy day or evening to complete an application displaying creativity, practicality and the expected positive student impact. You would be surprised how willing people are to help!

Last month, I enthusiastically told my lunch group of 11 ladies, all of whom are retired educators, about the twelve Teacher Grants we awarded last year. I described how the grateful and positive responses from the winners made us so happy. Our committee is determined to exceed our grant numbers in 2025. I suggested that if we all pitched in, say \$30.00 each, our little group could collectively sponsor a grant and ... give a great boost to a teacher who really *went* for it!

Right then, wallets opened and check books popped out, and I came home with contributions to sponsor one entire grant and part of another! This week, at lunch, I received \$30.00 more and one lady is going to use her RMD (Required Minimum Distribution) to fund her contribution. I know the promised RMD contribution will actually bring our sponsorship to two teacher grants of \$300.00 each! My lunch ladies, who very well remember how many times they paid out of their own pockets to provide

lesson enhancement for their students, are as excited as I am. They all referred to their students as "MY KIDS". *"If I could have applied to receive \$300.00, I might have been able to _____ for MY KIDS"*.

So, I challenge all members of SCRTA to meet or beat me! We all belong to one group or another. When you meet, bring up the suggestion of contributing together to sponsor a Teacher Grant.

Every contributor will receive a thank-you letter which has the information needed for a tax deduction. When you collect money for a grant, please send it to our treasurer, Bill Siegferth, with the NAMES AND ADDRESSES, AND AMOUNT OF EACH CONTRIBUTION! We need this information to thank the contributors and provide tax-return information for each.

Practical Information:

Checks should be made out to: SCRTA or Summit County Retired Teacher Association. The memo should read Teacher Grant Fund

Checks should be mailed to Bill Siegferth, our SCRTA Treasurer

Address: 82 Cedar Woods Dr. Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio 44223

Cash should be given directly to our Treasurer, Bill Siegferth. We have a meeting at Guy's Party Center on Tuesday, November 12. You can give Bill the monies you have collected at that time, or contact me and I can arrange a pick-up.

If you collect cash, you must list the name and address of each contributor! Very important!

Our Teacher Grant Committee members, Mary Austin, Sandy Baer, Jean Dickey, Leroy Martin, Bill Siegferth, and I thank you all for your help and contributions to make our second year even more successful than the last.

Christina Haas

Chair of the Teacher Grant Committee

christinahaas@hotmail.com (330-686-2963)

FROM the SCRTA ARCHIVES: 25 Years Ago

Have you invited a retiree to attend a meeting lately? Recently the SCRTA Marketing team has worked diligently to get the word out about our Association. Lately we have had fifty to sixty-some members in attendance at the meetings. Our archives show much greater numbers for the year 1999. Back then the board members were able to mail hundreds of letters and newsletters to new retirees over the summer inviting them to join SCRTA. Because of privacy rights, gone are the days when two board members were able to acquire contact information for new retirees from all the Summit County schools.

In the October 1999 newsletter, SCRTA President Blin Scatterday began his "President's Message" with these words: "It was really exciting at the September luncheon as we added forty (40) NEW MEMBERS! I hope this is just the beginning of a membership surge for **1999**. You can help by calling a retired friend and inviting them to attend the luncheon with you. "Here are a few other details gathered from the year's management board minutes:

A board member asked why our chapter did not offer a scholarship. The reason given was it was not financially feasible at that time. (This did get the ball rolling. More on this another day.)

There was a request for \$45 from the Honor Fund. The fund was established in 1983 in memory of teachers to financially aid retired teachers with medical expenses. Contributions to the memorial fund were made by members - sometimes through their estates - and from a portion of life membership dues. It was a separate 501(c) (3) organization with its own board of several retirees. (Later after a long time passed with no requests, the fund was dissolved.)

The Fall trip for the year was to see a few highlights in Cleveland: a guided tour of the Plain Dealer, a visit to the Eastside Market, Luncheon at Sokolowski's Inn in Tremont, a guided tour of the Civil War exhibit at the Western Reserve Historical Society, and other stops if time permitted.

Meetings were held at the Tangier Restaurant. After the buffet lunch, there was musical entertainment followed by a speaker, some of whom were a French horn trio from Firestone High School and speaker Mrs. Laura Ofobike, a writer from the Akron Beacon Journal. (It was noted later that she donated her honorarium to the Ronald McDonald House.) At another meeting, a flute player and a clarinet player from Norton High School played classical pieces followed by the Marketing Director of the Akron/Summit Public Library who spoke about the plans for expansion and progress of the proposed cultural district. At a later luncheon, the Jazz Band from Miller South School played several numbers.

Attendance at luncheon meetings that year ranged from 195 to 270. Membership was reported to be 851 with 503 life members, 496 ORTA members and 285 prospective members.

Announcements at luncheon meetings always included requests from area organizations for volunteers. Several members attended and reported back on out-of-town ORTA district meetings.

Among several legislative reports were updates about Ohio's HB199, proposed by insurance companies, that would provide an alternative to the state's pension plans. SCRTA's legislative chairperson wrote to AARP indicating our displeasure with their stand in supporting nationwide mandatory Social Security for teachers. If either of those proposals had passed, it would have greatly hurt Ohio's retirees.

The Community Participation committee made many reports on donations SCRTA made to Ronald McDonald House and listed numerous items donated month after month.

The archives not only show the many activities of SCRTA but also the connectedness of the people to each other and to the Summit County community. *Rebecca Moore, Administrative Assistant*



DOUBLE GOOD POPCORN

SCRTA SCHOLARSHIP FUNDRAISER

NOVEMBER 11 (5:00 PM) – **NOVEMBER 15** (5:00 PM)

JOIN US IN PURCHASING OR SELLING THIS SCRUMPTIOUS POPCORN AS WE PROVIDE SCHOLARSHIPS TO FUTURE EDUCATORS!

SCRTA GENERAL LUNCHEON MEETING

Tuesday, November 12, 2024

Guy's Party Center

500 East Waterloo Road, Akron, OH 44319

12 Noon

Price: *\$23.00

**The rise in cost is due to the increase in food prices for the restaurant.*

DOOR PRIZES AND A SPECIAL PRIZE

Bring 5 or more items for the Community Service Project and receive an extra chance to receive a gift card.

There will be a special prize for the person who brings the most guests to this meeting.

The meal entrées are Beef Tips, Chicken Paradise, and Rigatoni with Meat Balls. Along with the entrées, they will be serving potatoes, green beans, salad, rolls/butter, and desert. Coffee, tea or lemonade are included with your meal. Tax & tip are included.

**Clip this reservation form and send to: Micki Lavis 6106 Akron Ave., NW Canal Fulton, OH 44614
Phone: (330-854-3054)**



NAME _____ PHONE # _____

Please make checks payable to **SCRTA** and send to **Micki Lavis**. She must receive this reservation form and your check by **Friday, November 8, 2024**.



**MEMBERSHIP FORM for
SUMMIT COUNTY RETIRED TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION**

NAME _____ PHONE # _____

ADDRESS _____ / _____ / _____
Street City Zip

SCRTA MEMBERSHIP DUES **\$20** _____ YEAR YOU RETIRED _____

SCHOOL DISTRICT _____ EMAIL _____

**MAKE ALL CHECKS PAYABLE TO SCRTA. CHECK # _____
BRING OR SEND THIS FORM WHEN PAYING SCRTA DUES.**

FOR ORTA MEMBERSHIP: VISIT <https://www.orta.org/plans-pricing>

I would like to volunteer: Scholarship _____ Luncheon _____ Leadership _____

BY MAIL SEND TO: JACKIE HOVEY 1085 COOKHILL CIRCLE, AKRON, OH 44312

Summit County Retired Teachers Association
82 Cedar Woods Dr.
Cuyahoga Falls, OH 44223

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
U. S. POSTAGE PAID
AKRON, OHIO 44309
Permit No. 418

ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED

October—November



2024

SCRTA Website
www.summitcountyrta.org

Leroy Martin - Webmaster
lmartin561@gmail.com



Thank you for showing so much interest in the Ronald McDonald pull tab program. You were very generous with the donations of toiletries, cleaning supplies and food. We always receive thank you letters from Ronald McDonald House and Shelter Care (Safe Landing for boys and girls). You should be proud of yourselves for doing so much to help others.

Christine Bean, Community Service Chairperson



November 12, 2024 (Tuesday) ... SCRTA General Luncheon Meeting ... 12 noon Guy's Party Center. Doors open at 11:30 am.

February 11, 2025 (Tuesday) ... SCRTA Management Board Meeting ... 10 am at the AEA Building.

April 1, 2025 (Tuesday) ... SCRTA General Luncheon Meeting ... 12 noon Guy's Party Center. Doors open at 11:30 am.

"A Teacher's Heart Never Retires"