

Voices of Experience

Newsletter for OEA-Retired

Omaha Education Association–Retired is an affiliate of NSEA-Retired and NEA-Retired
Roger Rea, Editor – email: rrea68154@yahoo.com www.OEaretired.org May 2026

Omaha Zoo, OEA-Retired elections on May 7th agenda

USA Today recently announced that Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo & Aquarium and Lee G. Simmons Wildlife Safari Park earned top national recognition in the 10Best Readers' Choice Awards, ranking #1 in four categories: Best Zoo; Best Zoo membership; Best Exhibit (Desert Dome); and Best Safari Park.

Evy Ganfield, the Zoo's Volunteer Manager, will come to the May 7th meeting for OEA-Retired to share information about the zoo. She will give a short overview of Zoo history, the education and docent programs, the new hospital, and other exciting upcoming projects. She has been with the Zoo since 2022, and brings a diverse background in informal education.

In addition to providing unique experiences watching zoo animals interact with their exhibits, adults

can help coordinate visitor experiences in the zoo by becoming a zoo docent. Evy will explain what the volunteer zoo docents do and how you can become one! Whether welcoming visitors, supporting educational programs, or assisting behind the scenes, every volunteer plays an important role in helping the zoo mission come to life.

Also on the agenda for the May 7th meeting will be elections of OEA-Retired officers. More details on that election can be found elsewhere in this newsletter. There will be a brief update on the status of bills passed by the Unicameral this year.

The Thursday, May 7th meeting will begin at 10 a.m. at the OEA Office, 4202 S. 57th Street. Call the OEA office at 402.346.0400 if you need driving directions.

President's Message

By: Deb Pauley, OEA-Retired President

I hope all of you have had a great start to 2026. May 7th will be the last meeting for OEA-Retired for this year. I hope to see you there! The OEA-Retired Board will meet in August to plan next year's agenda.

May is the month for the election of OEA-Retired board members. You will find more complete details on the election elsewhere in this newsletter. Board members are volunteers. Being active in OEA-Retired is very important to keep updated on information regarding your pension and other benefits.

The Primary Election is held May 12th. Please read any and all information you can on your choice of candidates. It is important to make informed decisions and vote for candidates who will move Nebraska forward.

OEA-Retired has new business cards with a QR code that you can scan to take you directly to our website. Thanks to Roger Rea and Walta Sue Dodd for bringing forth this item and creating it – we will have cards to hand out at the May meeting.

Walta Sue keeps things updated on our Facebook page, and all members can join. It is a private page and is for "members only." It is

called, *OEA-Retired Association*. Please request an invitation to join. We are always happy to have more people join. This page will update you on current issues and keep you in the know.

Our membership committee has been active in recruiting new members for OEA-Retired. You don't have to be retired to join! We attend all OEA AR meetings, hand out pens, conduct drawings for two \$10 Scooters gift cards each month, and hand out membership forms and membership information. We have signed up several new members as a result of our presence at the meetings. We get a very positive response from OEA members! OEA President Kathy Poehling and OEA staff member Gloria Bustillos have been very helpful, and we look forward to continuing our working relationship with OEA members – and to increasing the membership of OEA-Retired.

As always, thank you to our wonderful board members; Roger, for his invaluable information regarding so many matters; Walta Sue for attending meetings and bringing forth current information; Sue, Doreen, Ruby, Sherry, and Cheryl for all you do for members and our board. All of your help is much appreciated.

One year down, two to go for my presidency. It has been a very informative year!

Update your contact information on our website, www.oearetired.org. Click on the *Contact* tab at the top of the webpage. You can also contact the NSEA office at 1-800-742-0047 with your new information.

OSERS Skipped COLA is addressed in Legislature

By: Roger Rea

It's been a long time coming, but a "fix" is now in place for the Omaha School Employees' Retirement System (OSERS) cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) that was skipped in January 2025. The annual OSERS COLA has been paid in the January pension check every year since it was implemented in 2000. The COLA is calculated on the fiscal year for OSERS (which ends August 31), and was paid on a calendar year basis, beginning in January following the fiscal year end.

The January 2025 OSERS pension checks did not include the expected inflation adjustment. The Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Systems (NPERS) assumed administrative duties for OSERS in September 2024, and the January 2025 COLA would have been the first adjustment made under the new management. NPERS issued a statement on their website in January 2025, stating that they were reinterpreting the state law regarding the OSERS COLA payment, and skipped paying the benefit as had been done for 25 years. Members were not notified of the reinterpretation by mail until late January 2025. That did not seem "right" to me.

OEA-Retired Board members Roger Rea and Walta Sue Dodd went to the January 2025 meeting for the Nebraska Public Employee Retirement Systems (NPERS) Board to demand that NPERS follow 25 years of past practice, and what they saw as the clear language in the law, and pay the annual COLA in January. NPERS did not respond immediately. They put generic language on their website regarding their new interpretation of the law, and the matter seemed to be dead.

OEA-Retired called on members to contact NPERS to ask for a restoration of the COLA payment date, with little to no effect. OEA-Retired then crafted a new business item for consideration at the annual NSEA Delegate Assembly (which was held in April 2025), calling for NSEA to work with the legislature and NPERS to correct the payment of the OSERS COLA. NSEA Delegate Assembly passed the new business item without a dissenting vote.

NSEA officials worked with both the Legislative Retirement Committee and NPERS for the next several months to find a possible solution to the COLA payment. The result of those discussions produced LB 1102, introduced by Sen. Beau Ballard. Sen. Ballard is the Chair of the Legislative Retirement Committee. NSEA President Tim Royers and Roger Rea testified at the initial legislative hearing for the bill. OEA-Retired members and members of other retired teacher organizations submitted written testimony in support of the bill. There was no testimony in opposition to the bill.

NPERS wanted to streamline the payment of

OSERS benefits, and align the OSERS payments with those of the other five retirement plans that they manage. All of the other plans pay retirement benefits on the last working day of the month in which a benefit is earned. For example, if a member retired in May 2025, their effective date of retirement was June 1, 2025. Their first pension check would be issued on the last working day of June 2025. OSERS pensions had been paid on the third of the month following an earned benefit. For example, if an OSERS member retired in May 2025, their effective date of retirement was June 1, 2025, and their first pension check would be issued on July 3, 2025. NPERS wanted to create a method to pay all retirees on the same schedule – with benefits being paid on the last working day of the month in which the benefit was earned. LB 1102 makes that change.

LB 1102 also changes when the Medical COLA is paid. The fiscal year for OSERS and for OPS ends August 31. The Medical COLA benefit has been paid on October 3rd to eligible retirees for the month of September – reflecting payment on the third of the month following an earned benefit. LB 1102 will move payment of the Medical COLA to eligible retirees on the last working day of September each year. As an added bonus, OSERS retirees will receive two payments in September 2026: one on September 3 (for the August pension), and a second check on the last working day of September (for the September pension). And the payment on the last day of September will also include the automatic COLA for the fiscal year as well as the Medical COLA payment (for retirees eligible to receive this benefit). That means that you will receive 13 pension checks in 2026.

LB 1102 was amended into LB 820, which was declared a Retirement Committee Priority Bill. The amended LB 820 was passed by the Unicameral on April 10, 2026 on a vote of 49-0. The effective date for this bill is September 1, 2026. OPS employees who retire this May will not be impacted. But anyone who retires in May 2027 will have an effective retirement date of June 1, 2027, and will receive their first pension check on the last working day of June 2027. Without the passage of LB 820, their first retirement check would be issued July 3, 2027.

As I said, it has been a long time coming, and the path was not entirely clear at the outset. The solution to the skipped COLA contained in LB 1102 is beneficial to all OSERS retirees. It pays earned benefits earlier than they were paid before. It moves the payment date for both the general COLA and the Medical COLA to more closely align with the end of the fiscal year for the retirement plan. And it puts money into the hands of OSERS retirees earlier than in past

years.

Look for two checks in September. And remember to thank the hard work of OEA-Retired, NSEA, the Legislative Retirement Committee, and the

staff of NPERS for working together to create a good solution to the issue of the “skipped COLA.” It is a win for all parties!

OEA-Retired Elections in May!

By: Cheryl Richardson, OEA-Retired Vice President

As our next OEA-Retired meeting approaches in May, so does our annual election of officers. OEA-Retired officers serve for three-year terms, with a maximum of two consecutive terms in any one position. Elections will be held at our Thursday, May 7th meeting for those officers whose terms end in 2026. The current OEA-Retired officers and their terms of office are:

President = Deb Pauley (2025-28)

Vice President = Cheryl Richardson (2025-28)

Secretary = Doreen Jankovich (2023-26)

At-large Directors = Sue Kalina (2023-26); Ruby Davis (2023-26); Sherry Brodkey (2025-28), Walta Sue Dodd (2025-28)

Bookkeeper, Newsletter & Webmaster = Roger Rea

This year we will elect a Secretary and two At-large Directors. As of April 15, Susan Kalina has filed to run for secretary. Doreen Jankovich, Paula Aguire, and Ruby Davis have filed for the two positions as At-large Directors. If you would like to run for one of these positions, please contact Cheryl Richardson at crichardson.omaha@gmail.com, or call her at 402-681-9788.

EHA health Insurance for 26-27

Public school retirees aged 50 to 64, who have been insured through the Educators Health Alliance (EHA) for five years immediately prior to their retirement, can continue their EHA coverage in retirement (prior to signing up for Medicare) through the EHA Direct Bill Plan. The premiums for 2026-27 for this coverage will increase an average of 7.25% on September 1, 2026. There is no change in the deductible offerings, but there are changes to several copays as a way to reduce the rate increase. The EHA plan will maintain zero dollar copays for mental health and substance abuse visits, and there will not be any increase in the copay for primary care visits.

There are five options for retirees insured through the Direct Bill Plan: (a) \$400 deductible with alternate provider networks; (b) \$1,050 deductible; (c) \$4,000 deductible and HSA eligible; (d) \$2,500 deductible; and (e) \$3,800 deductible and HSA eligible. For retirees who are married and wanting to cover their spouse (and who do not need to cover dependent children), the Direct Bill Plan allows you to save money by choosing two “Retiree Only” coverages, rather than

“Retiree and Spouse.”

New this year is the \$400 deductible plan with alternate provider networks. While this plan has lower premiums, there are restrictions on the providers who participate. You must use a participating provider to get the discounts this plan offers. There are two alternate networks available: (a) Premier Select Blue – a Methodist and Nebraska Medicine (UNMC) network in Omaha, and Brian Health in Lincoln; and (b) Blue Print Health – CHI Health and Creighton in Omaha. If your provider is part of one of these alternate networks, it might pay to change your coverage for next year. Choose carefully, since providers that are not in the alternate network are not covered at the same rate as the participating providers.

Current premiums and deductible options can be found on the EHA website, www.ehaplan.org. A 29-minute video explaining retiree coverage can be found by clicking on the *RETIREEES* tab at the top of the EHA website. The video has a full explanation of the alternate providers network for the \$400 deductible plan, as well as a detailed explanation of Health Savings Accounts (HSA) that are available for some plans.

Great News from the OEA Foundation!

By: Liz Rea, OEA Foundation President

The OEA Foundation Board of Trustees met on Wednesday, April 8th, to select the 2026 honorees for each of the scholarships offered by the Foundation. The seven trustees who serve on the board are: Walta Sue Dodd, Carol Krejci, Susan Kalina, Doreen Jankovich, Robert Miller, Hope Smejkal, and Liz Rea. All are past OEA Presidents or Vice Presidents. Our administrator is Linda Richter.

The selection of the 2026 Scholarship honorees marks the 62nd anniversary of the founding of

the OEA Foundation in 1964. Tax-deductible donations to the Foundation are invested to provide a permanent endowment fund for the scholarships. The first Foundation scholarship was for \$250, awarded in 1966. Thanks to generous contributions to the Foundation over time, in 2026 we will award 91 scholarships to 51 graduating seniors, with scholarship amounts ranging from \$1,000 to \$15,000 each. This year, a grand total of \$367,800 will be awarded to graduating metro-area seniors—the majority of the scholarships will be awarded to students during their school’s honors night.

We are thrilled to honor very qualified and deserving 2026 graduates in this way! Watch for a ½ page ad in the Mother’s Day **Sunday, May 10th Omaha**

World-Herald (in both the print and electronic editions of the paper) listing the scholarship honorees and the scholarship(s) they were awarded. Some honorees received more than one scholarship.

The scholarships are supported by contributions to the OEA Foundation from members of the OEA and OEA-Retired as well as from members of the public. The OEA is one of a very few local associations across the country that offers scholarship awards. A complete listing of the Foundation scholarships can be found on the OEA Foundation website, www.omahaoeafoundation.org. Scroll down the page to find information regarding the various scholarships awarded each year. Generally, students can begin to apply for scholarships in November or December of their senior year.

You are encouraged to make a tax-deductible contribution to the OEA Foundation by sending a check (payable to the OEA Foundation) to OEA Foundation, 4202 South 57th Street, Omaha, NE 68117. You can also contribute on our website by clicking on the **Donate** tab at the top right corner of the webpage. If you wish to contribute to a specific scholarship, write the name of the scholarship on the "Memo" line of your check. For additional information, please contact Linda Richter, Administrator, at oeafoundation@gmail.com. All contributions are welcome and greatly appreciated.

OEA-Retired

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Also, we are in need of hiring a new Administrator as Linda Richter retires. Linda has been the part-time administrator for the Foundation for more than three decades. Potential candidates should be familiar with the use of spreadsheets, basic accounting duties (the Foundation uses QuickBooks accounting software), and general administrative duties. If you are interested, or know of someone who might be interested in taking this part-time position, please contact Liz Rea at irea.omaha@gmail.com. Her phone number is 402.330.6870.

Changes in how soon you can substitute after retirement

Federal law prohibits retirees from drawing a pension and then continuing to work. The law requires a mandatory break in service before a pension can be collected. For all Nebraska retirement systems other than those for school employees, the break in service is a mandatory 120 days with no exceptions.

Nebraska teachers have dealt with a hodgepodge of return-to-work rules over the past few decades. State senators tried several ways to create special rules for educators, based on the fact that they have two months between the end of one contract (in June) and the beginning of another contract (in September). Instead of a 120-day break in service, school employees had a 180-day break in service. To accommodate the need for substitute teachers at the beginning of the school year, a special rule allowed newly retired teachers to substitute up to eight days per month during that 180-day break in service.

LB 824 changes the required separation of service period to a hard 120 days, with no exceptions for temporary work. Beginning on the 121st day after

retirement, retirees would be allowed to return to unlimited substitute teaching positions, or even take a full-time job with their previous employer. Senator Dan Lonowski, sponsor of the bill, said that the change would align the teachers' retirement plans with other state retirement programs by requiring a "hard bona fide break" in service that is easy to understand and helps alleviate the teacher shortage by getting retirees into classrooms earlier as substitutes.

The bill has an effective date of May 1 to ensure that all plan members who retire this year are under the new 120-day rule. The bill was passed and signed by the governor on April 7, 2026. The bill has an "emergency clause," which means that the bill became effective one day after it was signed by the Governor. Without that clause, the bill would become effective three months after the adjournment of the legislature.

Annual dues will be billed in the fall – pay promptly!
About 95% of OEA-Retired members are life members, and do not pay annual dues. You'll get our calendar of meetings for next year in Oct. 2026.