

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 March 2025

Joslyn Tour set for March 13 – sign up now!

Joslyn Art Museum is open again following a two-year period of construction and renovation—now with a 42,000-square-foot addition, expanded art collection, new gardens, and reimagined amenities. 5,000 years of human creativity in art across three stunning buildings!

OEA-Retired members will have a guided tour of the Museum on Thursday, March 13 at 10 a.m. to get a wide-ranging look at the most well-known and beloved objects in the Museum. This itinerary is ideal for first-time visitors who are hoping to understand just what it is that makes the Joslyn Art Museum so special.

The second hour of the visit is self-guided with access to all permanent collection galleries. Joslyn has a ticketed temporary exhibition called *All Aboard: The Railroad in American Art, 1840-1955*, which explores the influence of trains on American art during an era of US expansion, industrialization, and urbanization. Anyone interested in visiting that exhibit on their own can get a ticket at the Museum's welcome desk: \$10

per adult, free for Museum members.

OEA-Retired members for whom we have an email address received advance notice of the tour. The response was quick! To create a more intimate experience, our group will be divided at the entry into smaller groups of about fifteen each. We've requested additional guides, but the space available will likely be filled quickly. There is no charge for members for the guided tour or for touring the permanent Joslyn collection, but registration is required. Due to the limited number of spaces available, this guided tour is a members-only event.

The tour will begin at 10 a.m. on **Thursday, March 13 at the Museum North Entrance, 2200 Dodge Street**, Omaha. Plan to arrive a few minutes early to facilitate starting the tour on time. More information about this tour and a link to registration is posted on our OEA-Retired website, www.oeretired.org. If you have questions, please contact Walta Sue Dodd, wsdodd@aol.com, 402-659-1564.

President's Message

By: Walta Sue Dodd, OEA-Retired President

Public education is facing many challenges. Public school educators are being accused of not just teaching the students but indoctrinating them. People complain about not teaching the courses necessary to prepare students for life in the twenty-first century.

There is not enough time to teach with all the state and federal government requirements that public school educators must engage in beyond teaching students. Did you know that educators have administrative duties, professional development requirements, compliance with regulations, and assessment and reporting requirements along with parental communication?

These administrative duties require completing paperwork, maintaining records, and attending meetings. Teachers have professional development duties that require participating in ongoing training and workshops to stay updated on educational practices and policies. They must keep up-to-date on compliance with regulations that ensure adherence to state and federal laws such as those related to student privacy

(FERPA), special education (IDEA), and school policies.

In addition, teachers must do assessments and administer standardized tests and generate reports on student performance. They must communicate with the school principal and parents by keeping them informed about the students and the child's progress and school behavioral activities.

I know these tasks are essential for the smooth operation of schools and the well-being of students, but they can take time away from direct teaching. I wish the public understood that public school educators need time to teach, and look at all the challenges public school educators must face daily.

I know I am talking to the choir, but active public school educators need your help in communicating the day-to-day requirements public educators face. They need help to come up with ideas to alleviate some of the burdens that public school educators face, such as class size, the need for teacher aides to help alleviate paperwork, review state and

federal regulations to see if some are no longer needed or need to be revised, etc.

Can public school educators count on YOU to help?

OEA-Retired Elections coming in May

By: Cheryl Richardson, OEA-Retired Vice President

OEA-Retired will hold elections for officers at our Thursday, May 8th meeting. This year four positions are up for election: President, Vice President, and two At-Large Directors.

Serving on the OEA-Retired Board is a great way to stay involved in education and help teachers become more knowledgeable about current trends in education. Being on the board also allows time to be social – like going out to lunch together and supporting OEA, NSEA, NSEA-Retired, and NEA with their various projects. Board members become more knowledgeable about retirement issues and can share that information with their friends.

OEA-Retired officers serve for three-year terms, with a maximum of two consecutive terms in any one position. Elections will be held in May 2025 for those officers whose terms end in 2025. The current OEA-Retired officers and their terms of office are:

President = Walta Sue Dodd (2022-25)

Vice President = Cheryl Richardson (2022-25)

Secretary = Doreen Jankovich (2023-26)

At-large Directors = Sue Kalina (2023-26); Ruby Davis (2023-26); Deborah Pauley (2022-25); Sherry Brodkey (2022-25)

Bookkeeper and Newsletter = Roger Rea

This year we will need to elect a new president, because the current president, Walta Sue Dodd, is term-limited. Cheryl Richardson is eligible to run for another term for Vice President if she chooses to do so. At-large Director Deborah Pauley is term-limited, but Sherry Brodkey can run for another term if she chooses to do so. If you would like to be a candidate for one of these offices, send your name, contact information, and the position you would like to run for to: Cheryl Richardson, OEA-Retired Vice President, at crichardson.omaha@gmail.com, or call her at 402-681-9788.

Please consider volunteering to serve your Association and its members, and let me know what position you want to run for by April 15. Names received by Tuesday, April 15 will be printed in the next newsletter. Remember our motto, *“Now, more than ever, the commitment continues!”*

NSEA-Retired Elections underway now!

Elections for NSEA-Retired officers and delegates to NEA Representative Assembly (NEA-RA)

Membership recruitment update

By: Deb Pauley and Sherry Brodkey,
OEA-Retired Directors At-Large

and NSEA Delegate Assembly (NSEA-DA) are underway now! NSEA-Retired is governed by a Board that includes officers and Directors from each of the six NSEA-Retired Districts across the state. The NSEA-Retired offices of Secretary and Treasurer will be elected by the total membership of NSEA-Retired. Metro District retired members will elect a Metro District Director to the NSEA-Retired Board, five delegates to NSEA-DA and one delegate to NEA-RA. Two additional delegates will be elected “at large” to NSEA-DA, and three additional delegates will be elected “at large” to NEA-RA.

Several OEA-Retired members are candidates for various NSEA-Retired positions. Among the OEA-Retired candidates for NSEA-Retired Board of Directors are: Roger Rea, candidate for NSEA-Retired Treasurer; Susan Kalina, candidate for NSEA-Retired Secretary; and Walta Sue Dodd, candidate for NSEA-Retired Metro District Director.

OEA-Retired members who are candidates for either NSEA Delegate Assembly or NEA Representative Assembly are: Ruby Davis, Walta Sue Dodd, Doreen Jankovich, Susan Kalina, Roger Rea, and Liz Rea.

Remember, for the NSEA-DA and NEA-RA candidates, you can vote for the same candidate for both the District position and the At-large position. Ballots were mailed in February. The deadline to return the ballots is Wednesday, March 19. Please return your ballots on time to have your vote count! Engage in *YOUR* retired association by casting your ballot!

OEA-Retired meeting calendar

OEA-Retired will have two more general meetings this year. The May meeting will be held at the OEA office, 4202 South 57th Street, from 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. The meeting dates and tentative programs as well as NSEA-Retired meetings of note are:

March 13, Thurs. – Tour of Joslyn Art Museum, 2200 Dodge Street, 10 a.m.

April 24, Thurs. – NSEA-Retired Spring Conference, SAC Museum, Ashland

April 25-26, Fri. and Sat. – NSEA Delegate Assembly (Lincoln)

May 8, Thurs. – OEA-Retired elections; Scams perpetrated on seniors

OEA-Retired will not meet in person if OPS schools are closed for inclement weather or health reasons. .

retired members of OEA-Retired. We attend OEA Association Representative (AR) meetings each month to encourage active members to become pre-retired members of OEA-Retired and answer any questions they may have about retirement and our organization.

To help promote membership, we have a random drawing for two \$10 gift cards at each AR meeting. Anyone who signs up as a lifetime member also receives a \$10 gift card. One of our goals is to be sure that OEA members are aware of OEA-Retired, and how important it is to join sooner, rather than later! We have had a lot of positive feedback from teachers regarding these gift cards.

It's been rewarding to greet and to award gift cards to active OEA educators who give their time after work day hours to educational issues and concerns.

Please spread the word to members that anyone who signs up for OEA-Retired lifetime membership will receive a bonus \$10 Scooters gift card in addition to the myriad of benefits that membership provides. Active members can use the OEA-Retired website, www.oeretired.org, to join OEA-Retired. As an added bonus, our website has information about our retirement system, OSERS.

Remember, you don't have to be retired to join OEA-Retired! You can join at any time during your career just by paying the dues. OEA-Retired is unified with NSEA-Retired and NEA-Retired, so you get the benefits of membership in all three organizations. Encourage your teaching friends to join us. With increased membership comes increased strength.

OSERS COLA causes controversy and confusion

By: Roger Rea

Inflation erodes the purchasing power of retirement incomes over time. Retirees, who may have had a comfortable retirement income when they retired, often struggle to meet their expenses without any inflation-adjustment to their retirement annuity. In 1998, LB 497 was introduced at the request of OSERS and OPS to provide a permanent cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) to OSERS pensions. The bill was enacted, and OSERS immediately paid a one-time increase to all current retirees and established an annual automatic COLA not greater than 1.5% beginning January 1, 2000.

Service credits, salaries, and retirements match the fiscal year for OPS, which ends on August 31 of each year. The inflation factor was to be calculated on the employee's fiscal year income. The computer system that OPS used at the time the automatic COLA began was one that was written entirely by in-house computer programmers, and lacked the automated sophistication of current programs. Once the IRS published the inflation data for August, OSERS employees had to generate a spreadsheet for each of the 5,000 retirees to calculate the COLA adjustment for the following year. Technically the COLA should have been added to the October 3rd check, to reflect the inflation-adjusted pension for August, but the calculations could not be completed in time for the October 3rd check. Nor for the November 3rd check.

Because of the logistical impediment to implementing the COLA for the October 3rd check, OPS made a decision to pay the fiscal-year COLA beginning January 1, for the following full calendar year. The OSERS attorney drafted legislation that would implement the COLA in that manner. That was the intent of the plan sponsor, OPS. That was the way that OSERS implemented the COLA payment. That is the way the COLA has been paid for more than twenty

years, without either a legal or auditing challenge.

The annual OSERS cost-of-living adjustment is authorized by Neb. Rev. Stat. 79-9,103(8), which states: "*Beginning January 1, 2000, and on January 1 of every year thereafter ... a cost-of-living adjustment shall be made The cost-of-living adjustment ... shall be the lesser of (a) one and one-half percent or (b) the increase in the consumer price index from the date such annuity first became payable through the August 31 preceding the January 1 adjustment date*" [Emphasis added]

The details of the COLA law are clear. The COLA is to be calculated on the inflation in the CPI-U for the fiscal year ending August 31, and is to be paid on January 1 for the following calendar year. The adjustment on the January 3rd retirement check is for inflation that ended August 31 of the previous year. Again, the legislative intent of the plan sponsor is clear from the plain language of the statute, is clear from the way that the COLA was implemented and paid, and is clear from the more than twenty years of payments without either legal or auditing challenge.

In January 2025, the retirement checks for OSERS members did not have the traditional increase for the automatic COLA. A short time after the checks were deposited, a letter was sent to OSERS retirees, indicating that the COLA would be implemented for the February check. There is no record of the shift in COLA payment in either the Agenda or the Minutes for the NPERS Board for December 2024. The change in payment date was apparently an administrative decision. I question whether a state agency has the authority to ignore the plain language of the law, ignore more than twenty years of past practice in implementing the law, and ignore the clear intent of the plan sponsor regarding the OSERS COLA.

Walta Sue Dodd, Doreen Jankovich, and I

attended the January 27, 2025 meeting for the NPERS Board. I expressed my concern that the COLA was not being paid to OSERS retirees as it is prescribed in law. Since I gave my testimony during the "public comment" section of the Board meeting, there was no formal response to my concern.

How is the COLA administered for other defined benefit retirement plans that NPERS manages? For those plans, the payment of the COLA matches the fiscal year for the state, which ends on June 30 of each year. The COLA is added to the retirement check for July, the month after the fiscal year ends, for all other retirement plans.

If you have concerns about how the OSERS COLA is paid, you can make your concern known to NPERS by emailing the NPERS Director, Tyler Cummings, at tyler.cummings@nebraska.gov.

OEA-Retired

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OEA Foundation scholarship applications due March 13!

By: Liz Rea, OEA Foundation President

The OEA Foundation was founded in 1964 as the educational and charitable arm of the Omaha Education Association. We have helped teachers and their families in various ways over the past 61 years. We are entirely funded by donations from educators, their family members, and friends of OEA. The donations are invested in an endowment account that now funds about 100 scholarships that are awarded to deserving high school seniors each year. The scholarship amounts run from \$1,000 to \$15,000, and applications are being accepted now!

Some of the scholarships are awarded based on how involved a relative was in the OEA. If you have a relative who qualifies for one of those scholarships,

be sure to have them summarize your Association experience in their application. If you served as a leader in OEA (either as an officer or as a Building Representative or Association Representative), include that. Other ways you may have been involved include: serving on OEA Committees; collecting signatures for petition drives; serving on interview committees for candidates for public office; distributing materials for elections; and going door-to-door with campaign fliers.

Applications for OEA Foundation Scholarships are now posted on our new OEA Foundation website: www.omahaeafoundation.org. There is a link to the Foundation website on the OEA-Retired website. The application deadline this year is Thursday, March 13.

Thanks for updated email address!

By: Roger Rea, OEA-Retired Webmaster pro-tem

When Cox Communications switched to Yahoo email, we had a significant number of email addresses that "bounced" when I sent a blast about the OSERS COLA in January. If you kept your Cox email account, it now apparently "works," even though it bounced in January.

In any event, I updated all of the email addresses from our general database before sending an email to announce our Joslyn Art Museum tour coming in March. To my surprise, we added more than

150 new email addresses! Thank you for letting us know of your current email address so we can keep in touch with you from time to time.

When your mailing address or email address changes, you can update your contact information on our website, www.oeretired.org, by clicking on the *Contact Us* tab. An email will be opened in Microsoft Outlook. If you don't want to start an Outlook account, just send an email to membership@nsea.org to change your contact information. The good news is that by updating your information for OEA-Retired, you automatically update it for NSEA-Retired and NSEA at the same time!

Reminder: NPERS no longer sends notice of how much your pension check is unless the take-home amount changes. You can count on getting your pension deposited on the 3rd of the month, unless the 3rd falls on a weekend or state holiday. You can create an on-line account at NPERS, npers.ne.gov, to check the amount, or you can simply credit your bank account with the pension amount on the 3rd of the month.