

# NEA-Alaska/Retired

WINTER 2012 • Volume XXVII No. 2

## Anchorage Recess by Sharon Lask Munson

Tall and lean  
like a solitary silhouette  
against expanses of white —  
he stands knee deep in snow,  
pant legs tucked, hands gloved,  
parka zipped, its hood pushed back, exposing  
his freshly shaven face to bracing cold.

Nine below zero  
at the foot of the Alaska Range —  
swings and slides glisten in the hoarfrost.  
Frozen ground, the length of the playground  
reveals ruts made by sleds.  
The dark green of spruce and fir  
cradle mantles of snowfall.

Knowing a hundred pair of eyes  
are watching from classroom windows,  
he holds the tin dishpan  
outstretched in his left hand,  
the stainless steel spoon in his right  
and begins to beat, striking  
powerfully and swiftly  
pounding, pummeling  
walking slowly and deliberately  
unaccompanied by alarm —  
until the bull moose turns,  
walks off the playground,  
lumbers across Patterson Road,  
and heads to the neighborhood beyond.

Our leader  
raises his hand for the all-clear  
and the primary children  
sweep out to morning recess.



*Sharon Lask Munson taught in Anchorage from 1969-1989. Now retired and living in Eugene, Oregon, she writes poetry and has been published in many journals and anthologies. Her chapbook, "Stillness Settles Down the Lane," was published by Uttered Chaos in 2010. Her full-length book of poems was published by Blue Light Press in 2011. Sharon's website is [www.sharonlaskmunson.com](http://www.sharonlaskmunson.com).*

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**President's Message**

aka Bob's Blurb

**Reflections**

As another year in our retirement (or pre-retirement) is wrapping up, we have witnessed another year of change, or not. Changes we have experienced include personal life events that impact our future life and the lives of those around us. Some events are positive and some are sad. We continue to march on with positive thoughts as we deal with the hardships we face and march with others who need our support. We strive to support those around us and

accept their support as well.

We have seen changes in the political arena of Alaska. The redistricting and recent election has produced a major change in our legislature. The Senate coalition we worked with in the past is no longer, the majority party agenda is stronger, and we will see the effect of this agenda in funding priorities, taxation of the oil industry, and services for health, education, and social needs.

We will continue to support the priorities of NEA-Alaska and NEA-Alaska/Retired. We will be asking for others to march with us as we strive to achieve our goals. Our unified effort is needed more than ever before to protect funding for schools, protect public education from being weakened through privatization and vouchers, to protect teacher rights, and to protect pension benefits. We must march together.

We now have a second term president who has voiced support for public education, pensions, and health benefits. We heard his support for repeal of the Social Security offsets known as GPO/WEP. We are still waiting to see action on this promise. We must rise as a strong voice to let the White House and Congress know that this is a priority for seniors impacted by these negative offsets. To that end, we need your continued support.

Member involvement is growing within our organization. I would like to thank those of you who have stepped in to help us grow through communication efforts, advocating for pension and health benefits, and addressing our members' needs. We would not be where we are today without member support and group efforts. Let's continue this march, let's honor those who have marched over the years, let's show what we can do as a stronger organization marching together to build a better future.

**AlaskaCare**

The Request for Proposal (RFP) has been issued. The deadline for vendors to respond is December 28. The transition, if there is one, to a new third party administrator (TPA) will probably not take place in July 2013. Our health committee will be meeting on December 10 and this information will be part of their discussion.

Reminder: We will provide updates through our website and newsletter.

Editor: Barbara Stek

*This newsletter is the official publication of NEA-Alaska/Retired, printed four times a year: September, December, February, and May. Retired members are encouraged to submit articles, as well as voice comments and concerns. Articles should be sent in Word via email to bwstekak@yahoo.com no later than the 1st of the publication month.*

## Your representatives at Delegate Assembly 2013 are:

Henry Anderson  
 Bonnie Barber  
 Sherry Barrett  
 Mary Bohanan  
 Leslie Boyd  
 Don Campbell  
 Michael Chitty  
 Steve Click  
 Katie Curtis  
 Patrick DeSmet  
 Bob Deitrick  
 Karen Eddy  
 Lucinda Folsom  
 Karla Gallagher  
 Barbara George  
 Beverly Goad  
 Daniel Greer  
 Don Hadley  
 Gayle Harbo  
 Verna Henkel  
 Rick Kronberg  
 Rod McCoy  
 Trish Patterson  
 Linda Pfisterer  
 Tracy Rivera  
 Jeanne Sande  
 David Schwantes  
 Susan Stitham  
 Kristina Tornqvist  
 Ed Viscardi  
 Carol Waters  
 Robert Waters  
 Stephanie Winsor

## Delegate Election Results

Three (3) nominees had withdrawn from the election: Bette Reed, Julie Gwyther-Egolf, and Becky Seagrave-Nunn (alternate). Just before Thanksgiving, Gary Van Hooser and Mary Kay Van Hooser withdrew; and just recently, Cheryl Emerson and Nancy Hummel withdrew.

We had four (4) write-in candidates: David Schwantes, Don Hadley, Ed Viscardi, and Jody Viscardi. David Schwantes received enough votes to be elected to a seat. Don Hadley and Ed Viscardi have moved from alternates to delegates. That leaves Jody Viscardi as the remaining alternate.

Additional DA information is available on the NEA-Alaska website at [www.neaalaska.org](http://www.neaalaska.org).

Delegate Assembly is January 17-19, 2013. Last year the delegates requested that we have a non-mandatory caucus meeting the afternoon of January 17. We are in the process of working out that schedule. Barbara Stek will once again serve on the Editing Committee.



*The accompanying photo was taken when we completed the notebooks for Delegate Assembly. You can see how much fun we had!! So if you are available on Wednesday, January 16, we are in need of 7 or 8 volunteers to put together the 2013 DA notebooks. If you are interested, contact Trisha at the NEA-Alaska office at 274-0536.*

## Did you know...

...that NEA members and their families - including parents - are able to access the NEA Hearing Care Program? You are entitled to many free benefits, including free annual hearing screening for you and your family, referrals to qualified local hearing centers, discounted prices for high-quality hearing aids from top manufacturers with payment plans, two-year repair warranty, and three years of batteries.

So if you are having symptoms of hearing loss or just want to double-check, call 1-800-286-6149 to register for your free screening. Remember there are no enrollment fees or premiums. You may also check online at [neamb.com](http://neamb.com) for more information.

## NEA-Alaska Board Meeting – November 9-10, 2012

**Directors: Bill Bjork, Don Oberg, Nancy Allen**

The NEA-Alaska Board of Directors met in the Anchorage office November 9-10. During the meeting the Board received an election update from Government employee staff member, John Alcantra.

Actions or recommendations made by the Board:

- Agreed to co-sponsor the Best Beginnings brain research seminar to be presented by Dr. Elise Eliot.
- Approved the refund of \$10,373.02 to ESSA for dues overpayment for 2010/2011.
- Approved the write off of \$6071.21 for dues arrearage for 3 local affiliates for the year 2010-2011.
- Approved budget adjustment for the year 2012-2013.
- Recommend DA pass the two-year budget developed for 2013-2014 and 2014-2015.
- Approved board policy changes to update board policy to current practice.
- Approved the elimination of goal teams.
- Approved the development of a budget and audit committee.

There will be some standing rule changes coming to the floor at the beginning of the first general session of Delegate Assembly. The retired local needs to look over the changes and determine if the changes are acceptable to our local. The changes will be available to review in the DA documents that you pick up at the beginning of the annual meeting.



*Meetings are fun!*

The next NEA-Alaska Retired Board meeting is scheduled for Sunday, January 20. Delegate Assembly is calendared for January 17-19, 2013.

— Nancy Allen

## Alaska Retirement Management Board

**Fairbanks, September 20-21, 2012**

The annual survey of public pension DB plans, conducted by the US Census Bureau, states that for the fiscal year 2011 (ending June 30, 2011) the public plans held \$2.5 trillion, an increase of 13% over the previous year. Of the dollars deposited in the DB funds, 78% came from investment earnings, 16% came from government (state and local) contributions, and the remaining 6% from employees. In Alaska, teachers contribute 8.6% of salary to their DB retirement; PERS employees contribute just over 6%.

In Alaska public pension funds are invested in seven assets classes. The best returns for the fiscal year came from Real Assets and Private Equity. At the September meeting in Fairbanks, the ARM Board reaffirmed their commitment to Real Assets, but the allocation remains at 16% of all assets. Real Assets include Real Estate, Farmland, Timber, TIPS, and Energy. This portfolio had a return of 10.5% for FY'12.

The Division of Retirement and Benefits processed a record number of retirements this past year and is gearing up for the same or more in 2013. The Division does a

super job dealing with retirees and future retirees with a staff that has seen little increase in recent years, except in their work load. Director Jim Puckett has done a fine job making sure members' questions are answered quickly and information is available to help members make decisions.

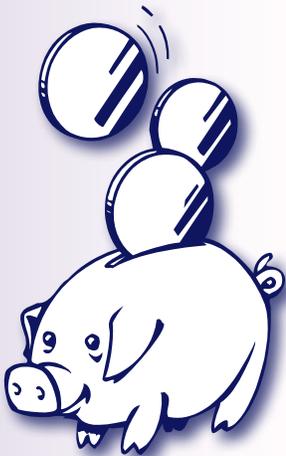
The ARM Board attended an Education Conference in New York City, October 25-26. The meeting was also attended by trustees from the Permanent Fund and the University of Alaska Endowment. It was planned by Gary Bader, CFO for the ARM Board, and Judy Hall, ARM Board Liaison. The topics encouraged trustees to explore different asset classes for investment. Excellent speakers provided insight into the current environment, both in the US and globally. Trustees are always exploring asset classes which provide a good return with minimum risk.

The next meeting of the ARM Board will be in Anchorage, December 6-7. Committee meetings will be held December 5.

— Gayle Harbo

## \$\$ Saving Tips

- Make sure you keep your checkbook balanced. Know where you stand money-wise in all your accounts.
- Recycle and reuse whenever possible.
- Use your own water bottle and make your own coffee. Okay, you could splurge once in awhile!
- If credit cards are your downfall, get rid of them or use them only in special circumstances.
- Save your coins in that piggy bank you have somewhere. Or do as a friend of mine does - she and her hubby save their \$5 bills for travel, etc.
- Netflix Internet vs. cable - check it out.
- Look for books, CDs, and DVDs at the library.
- Sell your little used items on eBay or have a garage sale.
- Track your expenses every month. Are there areas where cutting expenses would work?
- Watch out for impulse buying - what looks good today may not be as necessary tomorrow.
- Check out online airline fares on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. They may be considerably cheaper.



## Affordable Fort Worth



This past spring was the Golden Anniversary of my college graduating class in Abilene, Texas. And while I was in Texas I decided to spend a week in Fort Worth.

For advanced planning I registered with KAYAK.com's airfare alert. When I received notice that Delta had a fare for \$374 I booked it immediately. That was approximately \$200 less than most Anchorage-Dallas/Forth Worth fares.

I booked my rental car with COSTCO.com. And I continued to check back every week or two to see what the fares were.

When a lower fare appeared I booked it and then canceled the previous pricier one. I continued this practice until departure day.

My base for the week was Motel 6 – Ft. Worth East (exit 18, I-30). Yes, it's basic. But it's clean and quiet and the weekly rate can't be beat.

Overall spring is a good time to visit Texas with mild temperatures and only the occasional tornado – yes I was only 10 miles away from Arlington when semi-tractor/trailers were flying through the air.

In downtown Fort Worth you can check your e-mail for free at the public library. Use the nearby parking garage and get your parking ticket validated at the library. Only two blocks away is the Sid Richardson Museum. It features Western art of Remington and Russell. And, you guessed it, it's free.

Out in the city's cultural district you'll find the Kimball Art Museum and the Amon Carter Museum of American Art. Admission to both is free and there is plenty of free street parking.

Flora and Fauna: The Fort Worth Botanic Garden on University Drive is open daily from 8 a.m. Stop at the office next to the Gardens Restaurant to pick up a brochure. In this large Botanic Garden there is plenty of free parking as you move from one garden area to another. Most gardens are free, the exceptions being the Conservatory and the Japanese Garden. The Fort Worth Zoo is one of the top five zoos in the United States. Wednesday is half-price day. Go early because it's crowded later on with lots of families with many, many kids.

Neither man nor woman lives by culture alone. There must be sustenance. On Magnolia Avenue in the hospital district is the Paris Coffee Shop . . . named Paris after the owner not the French city. Open only for breakfast and lunch, Monday-Friday, and closes at 2:30 p.m. Lunch is the big attraction with four daily specials which include a main entree, two side dishes, rolls and butter, coffee or tea, all for \$7.85 tax included. For some serious bar-b-que head to Angelo's. The 1/2 rib plate with sides, beverage, and tax is under \$12.00.

There's much more to discover in Fort Worth. Some places do actually charge admission, but I've always found it affordable.

— Don Schulz



## Does Class Size Matter?

The recent presidential election brought the question of class size back before the public. Governor Romney suggested that the number of students in a class has little or no impact on the academic results of the class. President Obama did not go that far, nor did he refute Governor Romney's assertion, though the President did argue for a greater number of teachers, which would, in a perfect world, decrease the number of students per class.

It is this issue that once again causes gremlins to start roaring in my stomach. Most of us have listened to boards of education and administrators quoting research that explains why not hiring more staff, as well as cuts in staff - thus increasing class numbers - have limited impact on classroom quality. **We hear college level data that "proves" that a good teacher can have the same results in a class of 30-40 as in a class of 20; that all we need to do is use more technology in the classroom and learning will increase, regardless of the number of students.**

Nonsense! The few stated studies that "prove" class size does not matter are often based on conditions which are alien to the typical public school, such as classes of highly skilled and motivated students with no special needs students, nor students who require special attention. Another study compared the results of a highly trained and experienced teacher with a class of 25 students to a first year teacher with an 18 student class. The results were based on a test used for several years by the experienced teacher. It is not surprising that the experienced

teacher did as well as the new teacher with a smaller class size.

An article by Laurene Johnson in the October 2011 District Administrator Magazine offers thoughtful information. She writes in part "...Although the effects of class size have been debated for decades, Tennessee's STAR project in the late 1980s seemed to settle the argument. However, while the STAR project found significant improvements in student learning when class size was reduced for kindergarten through third grade (Word et al., 1990), the body of research on class size suggests a more complex picture of the relationship between class size and student achievement." **However, given the many and varied tasks that teachers and ESPs are given, the impact of larger numbers of students becomes magnified and more problematic.**

Our Alaska legislature will again hear the specious explanations of why it is not necessary to increase the funding of public education. They will be told that Districts have plenty of resources to run the schools and if one or more students are added to a classroom that really has no negative impact. You can help diffuse those arguments by sending your personal views and experiences regarding class numbers and how your classes were affected. **We will collect your information and send it to key legislators with the hope that real life staff experiences will convince the Governor and others to increase public education funding.** Please forward your thoughts to [Doberg907@hotmail.com](mailto:Doberg907@hotmail.com).

— Don Oberg

## Cruisin' From Vancouver BC

In 2008, to celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary, we took our 4 children and their families (16 total) on the Alaska cruise from Vancouver to Whittier. We had perfect weather and loved it. The grandchildren swam all the way from Vancouver to Whittier. Our children, born and raised in the Interior, had never seen Southeast and were thrilled.

Since that time, Sam and I have taken 3 similar cruises, each beautiful and relaxing, with the ability to see the port cities by just walking off the ship, with no need to take tourist excursions, though there are plenty to choose from.

This past August, we took another cruise from Vancouver and discovered some new bargains. We stayed near the airport at the Accent Inn, part of a local western Canada chain. The rooms were fine, there was coffee and a computer in the lobby for guests, and the office staff was very helpful. I found the room on the Alaska Air website for \$83 plus tax and it had a free shuttle from the airport. An IHOP was right next to the hotel (10% discount if staying at the

hotel) and a McDonald's was a block away.

The best part was access to the new Sky Train, installed prior to the Winter Olympics some years ago. The hotel shuttle dropped us at the Bridgeport terminal (cost from the airport would have been \$5 more) and we were able to travel to the Waterfront Station for \$1.75 per senior. We travel light, with carry ons, so this might not be practical for everyone, but it was certainly better than the \$30 cab fare we paid in '08. The walk to Canada Place, the departure pier for cruise ships, was only 4 blocks, and again this might not be practical for people who have large cases or don't like to walk. This time we stayed two nights prior to the cruise and it would have been easy to go to town and visit the city. Vancouver is a lovely city and the Alaska cruise is one "super cruisers" from all over the world have taken, most several times, and they love it, rain or shine. Happy Cruising!!

— Gayle Harbo

## From My House to Yours

Here is a recipe I used this past Thanksgiving from Allrecipes.com. If you like jalapeno poppers, you will like this.

### Jalapeno Dip

#### Ingredients:

2 (8 ounce) packages cream cheese, softened

1 cup mayonnaise (I used light)

1 (4 ounce) can chopped green chilies, drained

2 ounces canned diced jalapeno peppers, drained  
(Use more if you dare!)

1 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Stir together the cream cheese and the mayo in a large bowl until smooth.

Stir in the green chilies and the jalapeno peppers.

Put into a microwave safe serving dish.

Sprinkle on the Parmesan and microwave on high about three minutes. (I put mine in a crock pot and kept it warm.)

Serve with any kind of chips that you like. Yum!



## Spotlight On...

### Hank Harrison

#### Alaska Teacher of the Year – 1972



Hollis Preston Harrison was born in Bashi, Alabama – the navel of the world according to Hank (you’ll have to check with him on that)) – on October 27, 1927. There he attended a one-room school with a pot-bellied stove – no running water, no electricity.

Having served in the Army, the GI Bill afforded him the opportunity to attend Bob Jones University where he developed a great appreciation for music and other arts.

While in the 4th grade, his class studied all things Alaskan and Hank was determined to visit some day.

Upon graduating from college, he took a job with a survey party in the Yukon Territory by Haines Junction and in the Kluane Lake region. The next year he was in Girdwood, teaching in a one-room school with no electricity or running water, with 13 students in 5 grades! He taught on Elmendorf after that (I suspect they had water.)

The traveling bug hit once again and Hank took off for Central America to explore for awhile. Upon his return, he taught on Fort Richardson and also became Education Officer for the troops, encouraging GEDs for servicemen.

Another year was spent on a trip to South America. Returning to Alaska, Hank pursued his Masters Degree in Education Administration at UAF. Then it was back to Fort Rich to teach Social Studies followed by three of his greatest years at Clark. UAF hired Hank to be the first 4-year, full time administrator working out of Anchorage, dealing mostly with military people seeking degrees. Hank was president of the Anchorage Education Association during his last year at Clark and then again while he was working at UAA.

Upon returning to teaching in the Anchorage School District, Hank decided to run for NEA-Alaska president and served during the 65-66 school year. Subsequently, he was NEA Director for several terms. Hank then ran for national office, won the election, and became a member of the NEA Executive Committee for 5 years, no small feat coming from such a small state in terms of voting members. Rob Pfisterer was able to be his team teacher so that Hank could attend important meetings without sacrificing the education of the students. And in his “free” time in 1972, Hank traversed Mount McKinley, starting on the Anchorage side and then walking out to the highway on the opposite side. Amazing!!

Hank’s philosophy of education included a belief that he should not stay in any school longer than four years. Over the years, he taught history, social studies, and philosophy. Hank retired in the spring of 1979. He remained active with cross-country and downhill skiing and windsurfing.

Hank continues to keep abreast of all things related to teaching. He travels frequently and has many opportunities to practice his Spanish and French. And to come full circle, Hank has a cabin in Seward with no running water – but it does have electricity!!

# NEA-Alaska/Retired

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email: info@neaalaska.org



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**Now that winter has set in, at least for those in the cooler climes, your thoughts may be moving toward travel to warmer destinations. Check out our articles on great things to do!**

## AlaskaCare Appeals Process

This is important. If you are having any problems with your AlaskaCare benefits, you must appeal any Explanation of Benefits (EOB) or Pre-Certification denials within 180 days of receipt of the denial.

The AlaskaCare plan booklet on page 93 states the appeal must be received within 60 days of the date the EOB or Pre-Certification denial was issued. File a timely appeal if you disagree with the third party administrator (TPA), currently HealthSmart.

If your issues are unresolved, then contact AlaskaCare. Send a written appeal to the Division of Retirement and Benefits. Be sure to include copies of the claim documents, benefit explanations, and all correspondence between you and the claims administrator. The appeal to Retirement and Benefits must be post-marked or received within 45 days of the claims administrator's final decision.

### Contact information:

Alaska Division of Retirement and Benefits  
P.O. Box 110203  
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0203  
(907) 465-8600  
800-821-2251  
FAX: (907) 465-4668  
TDD hearing impaired:  
(907) 465-2805

## Calendar of Events

### January

- 16-17 NEA-Alaska Board Meeting
- 17 DA Retired Caucus Meeting and Retired Board Meeting
- 17-19 Delegate Assembly, PACE Election, nominations
- 19 NEA-Alaska PACE lunch meeting
- 20 NEA-Alaska/Retired Board Meeting

### February

- 1 Newsletter submissions due
- Ongoing - contact Districts for names of upcoming retirees

### March

- Ongoing - election for Board and RA
- 25-26 NEA-Alaska Board Meeting - Juneau