

# NEA-Alaska/Retired

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## Life After Retirement



We've all worked hard and earned our retirement! Since retiring, many of us have been volunteering, enjoying new hobbies, spending more time with family, starting a new job, traveling, exercising, reading, or just plain relaxing.

Did you know you can get involved or still be active in NEA-Alaska/Retired, NEA-Alaska, or NEA? Many of us never had the opportunity in the past. We often worked two jobs and had family obligations or other commitments in our daily lives. The good news is, yes, it's never too late to be involved as a retiree. Some ways may include running as a delegate for Delegate Assembly or for a position on the NEA-Alaska/Retired Board or NEA-Alaska Board of Directors, joining various committees, or helping NEA-Alaska locals in your area. There are numerous ways to be involved. We would be happy to have you participate in whatever capacity you can.

I myself had this void. Growing up with a strong union role model, my grandmother, a union steward, taught me the value of union membership. I had been involved in unions since I was sixteen and all of a sudden found myself retired after working 30 years in the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District. Wow, what an adjustment! Don't get me wrong, I love being retired and having choices as to what to do next. Yet, there was still something missing in my life and I knew it was my union involvement. Being able to be part of listening tours for my former local, ESSA, started to fill that need. I started running to be a retired delegate at NEA-Alaska Delegate Assemblies. I have been getting my feet wet so to speak as Communications Chair for NEA-Alaska/Retired and representing Alaska on the NEA Virtual Communications Committee. My new endeavor is being editor of the NEA-Alaska/Retired newsletter; I'm so honored to have been asked to do this.



Barrow – Whale bone arch “Gateway to the Arctic”

On that note, I will never be able to thank Barbara Stek enough for the guidance and knowledge she has shared with me to take on this task. Barbara has left big shoes to try to fill. You can lend a helping hand by sending book reviews, special recipes, stories about your travels, photos with a brief blurb, and fun news about your retirement to me, [annie\\_b@mac.com](mailto:annie_b@mac.com), for possible inclusion in the retired newsletter.

Recently I traveled to Utqiagvik (Barrow), Alaska as part of the NEA-Alaska organizing team and immediately felt comfortable and at home with members of the team. This group always has the best interest of members and non-members at heart. Some of the members flew into remote villages as well as visiting schools in Utqiagvik (Barrow) to touch base with local educators. It was important to hear their stories, accomplishments, and concerns and to have the opportunity to let them know they would be supported by the union when joining NSBEA, NEA-Alaska and NEA, as well as securing the many benefits they receive as members. Thank you, Hedy Eischeid, for allowing me to be part of this amazing organizing team.

It's awesome being a member of one of the most recognized and powerful unions in the United States. We would love to have you more involved!

– Annie Baker, Editor

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**President's Message**

Dear Members,

As I write this message, there is terrible turmoil in the world. Many people are suffering. The war between Israel and Hamas is only the most recent cause for increasing hate speech, discrimination, threats, and violence in our country. Reports of student bullying and harassment in schools are proliferating. Teachers are being accused of bias against one side or the other and of providing age-inappropriate instruction.

Life is filled with challenges and uncertainty. We could wallow in worry for our children and grandchildren. We could despair, close our doors and try to ignore it all. But that's not what our members do. I'm honored to know and work with retired educators who understand the moral imperative of speaking out against injustice and oppression; who stand against silence and indifference; who push back against bigotry and hatred; who choose to move forward proactively, listening to others and embracing diversity. They are members who instill hope and who work for positive change.

A retired member recently noted, *"I know I can be more aware, more connected, more intentional in my relationships and how I live."* Yes! I am on board. I, too, can try to do better. I'm reminded not to take for granted all the good things and people around me. There is much for which to be grateful: family and friends; the camaraderie, the voice and strength of NEA-Alaska/Retired members; and the lifelong friendships developed through involvement with our union.

**NEA-Alaska/Retired and what's been happening:**

**Elections October 3-12, 2023:** Thank you for taking the time to vote!

**Results:** Retired Members approved all amendments to the NEA-Alaska/Retired Bylaws. Summary of the amendments:

- Amendment I: Expands the duties of the NEA-Alaska/Retired Board of Directors to include attending Delegate Assembly and the NEA-Alaska/Retired Policy Assembly.
- Amendment II: The Retired president will attend Delegate Assembly and chair the Retired Policy Assembly and Retired caucus meetings at DA. It also specifies that the NEA-Alaska Region R Directors will serve as voting members on the NEA-Alaska Board of Directors, the NEA-Alaska/Retired Board of Directors, and the NEA-Alaska/Retired Policy Assembly.
- Amendment III: NEA-Alaska/Retired will hold an annual Policy Assembly prior to Delegate Assembly. This addition to our Retired Bylaws empowers the Policy Assembly to submit motions and take positions on issues before the NEA-Alaska Delegate Assembly, including establishing legislative priorities; recommend bylaw changes; make recommendations to the NEA-Alaska/Retired Board of Directors for policies, programs, and activities for NEA-Alaska/Retired.
- Amendment IV: Election to the NEA-Alaska/Retired Board of Directors shall constitute election to the NEA-Alaska Delegate Assembly and the NEA-Alaska/Retired Policy Assembly. Election to be a delegate at Delegate Assembly shall constitute election to the Retired Policy Assembly. Delegates to Delegate Assembly and the Retired Policy Assembly are elected by the Retired members at the same time in one election to serve in both bodies.

Editor: Annie Baker

This newsletter is the official publication of NEA-Alaska/Retired, printed three times a year. Retired members are encouraged to submit articles, as well as voice comments and concerns. Articles should be sent in Word via email to Annie Baker: annie\_b@mac.com

*“President’s Message” Cont.*

Members also elected 34 retired members to serve as delegates at Delegate Assembly January 11-13, 2024. Several alternates were elected, should a member be unable to attend. Retired delegates will join fellow active delegates to engage in discussion and debate to forward the mission and goals of NEA-Alaska and to support the interests of NEA-Alaska/Retired.

We continue to work with NEA-Alaska to make sure all members receive emails from NEA-Alaska/Retired, including emails regarding our electronic elections and the voting link. Many members contacted me during the recent election to let me know they hadn’t received the election email or that they found the email, with the link to the ballot, in their spam folder. That’s where I found my elections email. It’s frustrating. We want to ensure that all Retired members have the opportunity to participate with their vote. One thing that can help: It is very important that NEA-Alaska and NEA-Alaska/Retired have your current and correct email address. It’s also necessary to have your current mailing address so you can receive hard copies of the NEA-Alaska/Retired newsletter in your mailbox.

**Board of Directors:** For personal reasons, Christine Villano has taken a hiatus from her positions as one of our Retired PACE representatives, as an NEA-Alaska Board of Director, and as an NEA-Alaska/Retired Board member. I thank Chris for her many years of service to NEA-Alaska/Retired. Her thoughtful contributions are always an asset to our organization.

Congratulations to Ernie Kirby who was selected to replace Chris on NEA-Alaska PACE. Ernie has the unanimous support of the Retired Board of Directors. We are grateful for his willingness to step up and contribute his experience, his ideas, and his time.

Congratulations to Gayle Harbo, who was selected to fill the vacancy on the NEA-Alaska Board of Directors. Gayle brings many years of experience and involvement with NEA-Alaska/Retired and a wealth of knowledge about issues important to active and retired members.

**NEA-Retired Conference:** The 2024 NEA-Retired Conference will be in Chicago, March 3-5, 2024. The theme is “Education. Democracy. Freedom. Our Right! Our Responsibility! Retired and Powerful. Promoting, Protecting, and Strengthening Education.”

The 2024 conference will provide NEA-Retired members and staff with professional learning, networking, and skill development. The conference also enhances leadership capacities for those building strong, thriving NEA-Retired affiliates. Conference attendees will strategize on ways to engage retirees with NEA in promoting the union’s mission and vision.

Online early registration opens December 14, 2023. At that time, a link will be available at [www.nea.org/retired](http://www.nea.org/retired) to register for the conference and make hotel reservations. There is a \$120 non-refundable conference registration fee, which covers meals provided, conference materials, and refreshment breaks at the conference.

**NEA-Retired National Committees:** Our newly elected NEA-Retired President, Anita Gibson is requesting members from each state to participate in several NEA-Retired national committees. Contact me if you are interested and willing to serve.

Committees and NEA-Alaska/Retired members serving:

**Membership:** Barb George

**Communications:** Annie Baker

**Legislative:** Pam Lloyd and Howard Maxwell

**Governance:** open position

**PAC:** open position

Committee descriptions for the two open positions:

The NEA-Retired Governance Committee receives input from members and affiliates regarding the NEA-Retired Bylaws, Standing Rules, and New Business Items. From that input, the committee shapes language that reflects the ideas suggested by a member or affiliate, brings that language back to the member or affiliate for approval or amendment, and presents that language to the delegates at the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting for approval, amendment, referral, or defeat.

PAC: the member serving on this committee will assist with PAC fund-raising activities; work with our delegates to the Retired annual meeting to ensure they have the opportunity to make their voluntary suggested donation; promote and encourage donations for the retired quilt drawing; promote and encourage all members to visit and participate in NEA-Retired virtual auctions held two times a year; and if a delegate, assist as needed at the retired annual meeting.

As President Gibson reminded us in the October issue of the *NEA TODAY for NEA-RETIRED MEMBERS*, NEA-Retired started with a small group in 1983. Now we are 325,000 members strong. As we celebrate the successes of our 40 years of affiliation with NEA, consider the PAC or Governance Committee as a way to participate in your Association.

Until next time,

– Roxanne Abajian

## Alaska Retirement Management Board Report

The retirement trust funds for Public Employees, Teachers, Judicial, and the National Guard and Naval Militia are managed by the Alaska Retirement Management Board (ARMB) trustees and the expert staff at the Department of Revenue, with Zach Hannah, CIO for the ARMB, and Kevin Worley, CFO of the Division of Retirement and Benefits. The funds experienced positive returns for this past somewhat uncertain year for investments everywhere. Annual reported earnings ending September 2023 are a 7.03% rate of return for the PERS DB funds and a 7.02% return for the TRS DB funds. The three-year return for both funds is 9.42%. The Board and staff are committed to a diverse asset allocation that has served the funds well in different investment climates. The financial statements for the end of the year reported at the June 2023 meeting were approximately \$40.5 billion under management. Of that, almost 9 billion participated in directed funds, PERS VI-TRS III Defined Contribution members, and Supplemental Annuity Plan.

At a special one-day meeting this October, the ARM Board met to discuss managed accounts (My Total Retirement)

from the current record keeper and manager, Empower. Currently, there are over 10,000 participants in Managed Accounts. Participants in directed funds have the Managed Account option.

Before the meeting, the Board met several times in executive sessions to review the returns and processes around managed accounts and the fee structure. Callan, the Board’s institutional investment consultants, with full cooperation from both Empower and Morningstar, found managed accounts have lower investment performance than non-managed target date funds. The lower performance is due to the combination of low member participation, fees, and the asset allocation model. The ARM Board passed Resolution 2023-18. The Resolution recommends that the Department of Administration close Managed Accounts to new entry and provide the Board with further steps concerning Managed Accounts.

The ARM Board next meets for the regular meeting on December 5th – 7th in Anchorage.

– Sandi Ryan

# Election News

## You Need to Know

The following NEA-Alaska/Retired members will be representing you at the 2024 NEA-Alaska Delegate Assembly.

Cindy Lou Aillaud  
Nancy Allen  
Annie Baker  
Bonnie Barber  
Mary Bohanan  
Joseph Boyle

Loretta Christie  
Steve Click  
Pat DeSmet  
Teresa Duncan  
Emilia Eaton  
Jenny Feuilles

Barbara George  
Beverly Goad  
Todd Hindman  
Andy Holleman  
Michael Husa  
Stanley King

Ernie Kirby  
Faith Lee  
Bonnie Lind  
Pamela Lloyd  
Howard Maxwell  
Lori Mertes

Rebecca Paul  
Sharon Penttila  
Marilyn Pillifant  
Christopher Provost  
Dianne Shibe  
Tammy Smith

Deedie Sorensen  
Susan Stitham  
Kristina Tornqvist  
Greg Turner

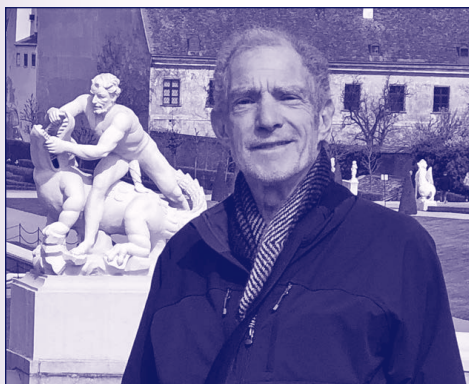
### Alternates

1. James Foehlich
2. Graham Ward
3. A Bryant Christensen
4. Donald Hennessey
5. Jeff Hebard
6. Joan Pragman
7. John Cyr
8. Joy Shantz
9. Ken Varee
10. Pat Romans
11. Tim Parker

Delegates by virtue of their positions:

NEA-Alaska/Retired President: Roxanne Abajian

NEA-Alaska Board of Directors: Gayle Harbo, Trena Richardson, Judy Salo, and Barbara Stek



## Farewell to a Friend

I'm sad to share that Richard Lee Kronberg died at his home in Tacoma, Washington, on October 12, 2023, passing peacefully with his wife and two sons by his side.

Rich was an educator in Anchorage and a leader in NEA-Alaska. He served as president of the Anchorage Education Association, president of NEA-Alaska, and president of NEA-Alaska/Retired. Rich also served on the NEA-Alaska Board of Directors and as the NEA Director.

Throughout his career, Rich fought tirelessly for the interests of public school employees as well as advocating for excellent public education for all students. Rich was a man of great intellect. He was an avid reader, a gifted writer, and an articulate speaker.

Personally, I'm honored to have known Rich and was fortunate to attend a couple NEA-Retired conferences with him. It was Rich who encouraged me to take on a leadership role as vice president for NEA-Alaska/Retired.

I had big shoes to fill following Rich as the NEA-Alaska/Retired president. I'm grateful for his leadership, friendship, humor, wit, and kindness.

Rich is deeply missed by his NEA-Alaska colleagues and friends.

– Roxanne Abajian

## Retiree Health Plan Advisory Board Update

The Retiree Health Plan Advisory Board (RHPAB) has been in existence since 2018. It has filled a void created by the elimination of the TRS Board following the legislative revamp of Alaska's Retirement Systems in 2006. Since formation, the Board has helped to improve communication between retirees and the Division of Retirement and Benefits. That dialog has helped to resolve issues as they arise and to avoid lengthy and expensive litigation.

Much of our work as a Board has had to do with "Modernization" of our plans to keep up with the rapid advancement in medicine and changes at the federal level in Medicare. We have been able to change and even expand coverage, and in many instances have managed to save significant resources in doing so.

The Board approved the adoption of the EGWP program that saved millions of dollars in the prescription drug program by obtaining more federal subsidies for Alaska's retirees who are over age 65. We also recommended the expansion of preventive services to incentivize members to seek primary and preventive care, screen for serious conditions, and generally more proactively manage their health.

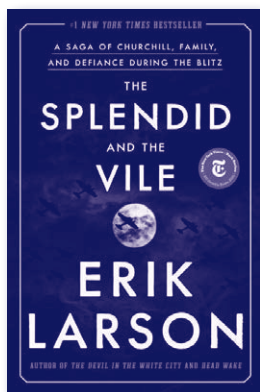
Most recently we have been able to increase the Lifetime Maximum from 2 million dollars to 8 million. This applies to a very small number of retirees, but it is vitally important in those cases. We will soon see the benefits of a non-emergent surgery program which will allow retirees to have surgical procedures done at different locations. This program will offer assistance with travel to areas with lower costs and will assure that those facilities have practitioners with quality experience and expertise. And, finally we are looking forward to a plan to cover virtual Physical Therapy and a Musculoskeletal Care Support Program.

We will continue to work with the Division to keep the Health Insurance Plans relevant and responsive to the needs of the retirees.

– Judy Salo (RHPAB)

## Book Blast

When I retired a few years ago, I challenged myself to read a book a week. I utilize my public library and the interlibrary loan system and I'm able to find an unlimited supply of books to keep me reading.



*The Splendid and the Vile* by Erik Larson. I'm not usually one to read a lot of nonfiction, especially not on history and wartime. But this book was incredibly informative and written in a very readable style. It follows one year of Winston Churchill as Prime Minister, his first year 1940-41. Churchill, his family members, and colleagues come to life. As he has done in so many of his works, Erik Larson was able to paint an intimate picture of history, this time – England during the Blitz. Erik Larson is an established nonfiction writer and has written a number of best sellers.

Happy reading everyone! Keep growing and learning.

– Cathy Carrow

## PACE Committee & Legislative Activity

Over the past year, NEA-Alaska PACE Committee members met several times to discuss and take action on pro-public education issues and candidates. Ernie Kirby, Pamela Lloyd, Howard Maxwell, and Marilyn Pillifant currently represent the Retired Region.

Many of us spent a fair amount of time revising Section 7 of the NEA-Alaska Delegate Assembly Policies, which reside in the DA handbook. After much work, we finalized the suggested changes to the policy as the NEA-Alaska PACE Committee, and the document has been routed to the NEA-Alaska Board, who, we hope, will send it on to DA for review and approval. Two of the most important updates included:

1. An effort to integrate our new “pick one primary” and ranked choice voting systems into the PACE processes for candidate endorsement and support.
2. An effort to codify the policy for donating to independent expenditure groups that support our mission, issues, and candidates.

It is the committee’s belief that an updated policy document will better educate our members on the processes used by the PACE Committee and will help explain the parameters to new members as they come on board each cycle.

As for the main work of PACE, we have taken several other significant actions this year. We were able to support, through independent expenditure groups, a lot of pro-public education municipal candidates in the Anchorage, Fairbanks, and the MatSu areas. In Fairbanks and Anchorage, the candidates we supported came out on top, and they are currently serving on the school boards and assemblies in both major communities. The Fairbanks municipal elections in October were especially rewarding, with a “sweep” of our endorsed candidates over many culture-war and anti-academic freedom sorts who held office previously. These victories in important local races will very likely have a massive influence on promoting the issues that are important to NEA-Alaska members. They will silence the voices of those who put roadblocks in the path of great education and community policy.

In addition, the PACE Committee has recently taken action to endorse a number of high-quality incumbent legislators across the state whom we have previously supported. The committee recommended support for 28 pro-public education incumbents. These off-cycle donations will allow these pro-public education incumbents to build resources for the

anticipated battles that will come from those pushing for cuts to education and who promote increased public funding for private school vouchers and homeschooling. Another advantage of such off-cycle donations is that PACE can contribute additional resources to these significant candidates during the upcoming 2024 cycle, which is fast approaching.

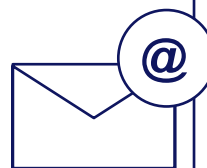
As well as the incumbents that we elected to support, there is a great list of challengers emerging to challenge some of the voices that oppose a substantial increase in the BSA or the return to a respectable retirement. It is likely that one or two key victories for pro-education candidates on the House side could result in a bipartisan coalition that will pass these two important legislative priorities and other key pro-public education initiatives. In the end, our goal is to focus like a laser beam on electing candidates who prioritize public education and a return to defined benefit retirement.

Finally, the PACE committee reviewed two ballot initiatives that will likely come before Alaska voters next year (2024). These include:

1. A **Jobs Ballot Measure** that includes a raise to the minimum wage, some paid sick leave for Alaskans, and a prohibition on certain union-busting activities like forcing employees to watch propaganda while on the clock (so-called captive audience meetings).
2. A ballot measure **restricting the size of campaign contributions** by individuals (currently there is no limit).

We listened to a presentation on the Jobs Initiative and heard from Bruce Botelho, who is leading a citizen-led effort to reestablish campaign contribution limits. NEA-Alaska PACE recommended members vote “yes” for the minimum wage ballot measure and the contribution limits measure. NEA-Alaska PACE recommended to the NEA-Alaska Board that it support both ballot measures and make contributions to the campaigns. It also seems likely that PACE will recommend opposing any ballot measure repealing open primaries and ranked-choice voting, but we are awaiting a formal presentation.

– Howard Maxwell - PACE



Please make sure we have your current email address. Contact Makana Bender at (907) 274-0536 to make changes.

## Congratulations DA 2024 Retired Delegates!

Every year, the retired caucus hosts a table at Delegate Assembly to encourage members from other locals to join pre-retired. This allows them to roll over into NEA-Alaska/Retired when fully retired to continue advocating for educators and students.

This year the theme is “Stand Tall With Us”, represented by a “Unique Giraffe”. Retired delegates, please bring giraffe items or other fun things for our incentive giveaways to our first group meeting.

And don't forget - we need your help to staff the table! Be prepared to sign up to help throughout DA.

– Barb George, Membership Chair  
NEA-Alaska/Retired

*We look forward  
to seeing you in  
January!*



## Zoomin' with the Board

The Fab Four, no not them, us, were on the zoom for the latest NEA-Alaska Board meeting – they would be Gayle Harbo, Trena Richardson, Judy Salo, and me, Barbara Stek.

One of the first orders of business was to make a motion to seat Gayle Harbo on the Board to replace Christine Villano who unfortunately needed to resign. Chris will be missed as she was an integral part of our organization and definitely a hard worker. The motion passed with 100% in favor.

We also have two other important changes:

- We regret to inform you that Fran Linn has had to resign her position due to family concerns. It was a tough decision on her part and we wish her the best. We are lucky, though, to have Zac Mannix appointed as the interim Executive Director.
- Helen Pierce is a new contact as Executive Assistant for us at the NEA-Alaska office here in Anchorage – [Helen.Pierce@neaalaska.org](mailto:Helen.Pierce@neaalaska.org). That local phone number is 907-274-0536.

Monica Southworth presented a summary of state-wide coordinated bargaining. There will be many contracts negotiated in 2024, but she was able to highlight recently settled contracts throughout the state.

Each region gave a brief report on happenings since the last meeting. Judy presented our report. Just as a reminder to our DA delegates, our retired theme this year is “Stand Tall with Us.” Bring your giraffes with you!! We will also have a silent auction where the monies collected will be donated to the Jack Kinnaman Scholarship Fund for aspiring educators.

Ernie Kirby has been appointed to the Region R PACE position. Way to go, Ernie!!

I served on the committee which looked at the submissions for NEA-Alaska awards. Those recommendations were presented at this meeting and were accepted. The awards will be presented at DA.

Our electronic voting system for RA delegates is under question. We are seeing if we are able to obtain a waiver so that we can continue to vote electronically.

Our next meeting will be on January 9 preceding Delegate Assembly.

Have a wonderful rest of 2023 and an even better 2024!!

– Barbara Stek, on behalf of the NEA-Alaska Region R Directors



*Trena Richardson, Barbara Stek, Judy Salo, Gayle Harbo*



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# Who's representing you at the 2024 Delegate Assembly? Look inside!

## Special Holidays

We're thinking of you this time of year,  
Wishing you happiness, joy, and cheer.  
May all your days be warm and bright,  
And your nights enhanced by holiday light.  
Enjoy your delectable holiday foods,  
As parties and gifts create holiday moods.  
Favorite people play a meaningful part,  
While treasured rituals warm your heart.  
You are special to us in many ways,  
So we wish you Happy Holidays!

*By Joanna Fuchs*



## Help Us Find You!

Please make sure we have your current mailing address, phone number, and email address. Contact Makana Bender at (907) 274-0536 to make any changes to your information.



## Calendar of Events

### December 2023

Online early registration opens December 14, 2023 for the NEA-Retired Conference

### January 2024

- 9-10 NEA-Alaska Board Meeting
- 11 PARSAs (7:15 – 8:30 AM)
- 11 NEA-Alaska/Retired Policy Assembly and Meeting (1:00-5:00 PM)
- 11-13 NEA-Alaska Delegate Assembly
- 13 PACE Committee Meeting (1:15 PM – 2:30 PM)
- 14 NEA-Alaska/Retired Board Meeting (9:00 AM)
- 16 Legislative Session Begins

### March 2024

- 3-5 NEA-Retired Conference
- 29-30 NEA-Alaska Board of Directors Spring Board Meeting