The 67th annual OREA Convention and House of Delegates was held on Tuesday, November 12th, at Tulsa Renaissance Hotel and Convention Center. Despite the frigid temperatures, delegates were smiling and eager to take care of the business of the organization. Break-out workshop sessions were offered to attendees before the start of the General Sessions.

The keynote speaker was Mr. Bob Blancato, a well-known advocate on aging issues. He currently serves on the AARP Board of Directors and is the executive director of the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Service Programs. His timely message was both informative and encouraging—we must continue our fight of protecting and improving the retirement benefits of retirees!

Awards were presented to several local units and individuals:

Volunteer of the Year  
Dr. John Ludrick  
Custer/Dewey/Washita Counties

Pioneer Volunteer of the Year  
Grace Dempsey  
Jackson/Tillman Counties

Community Service Project  
Tulsa Metro Retired Educators  
“Waste Not”

It is hard not to be inspired by the contributions of our members. There are many retired educators working across our state every day, contributing valuable time to improving the lives of others in their communities. Thank you to all volunteers. In fact, OREA reported 156,205 hours of volunteerism for 2018. That’s an estimated VALUE of over $3.9 MILLION to the state of Oklahoma. Again, those are just the reported hours. Please don’t hesitate to report those volunteer hours in the future. They allow us to celebrate all that retired educators do for our communities and our state.

Membership growth awards were presented to large and small local units. First and second place, respectively, were presented to Creek County and to Canadian County for large units, and the small units were Pushmataha County: 1st, Major County: 2nd, and Nowata County: 3rd. Congratulations to those local units!

The Local Unit Newsletter large unit awardees were the Tulsa Metro REA’s The Banner, and Oklahoma County’s Capitol Chronicle. The small unit recipient was Washington County REA’s Applevisions. Congratulations to those publications and to the members who create them.
Twenty-three individuals from across the state were selected by the local units to be recognized as VIMs - Very Important Members. The OREA was proud to shine a light on the following members:

Adair County - Wilma Washington
Beckham/Roger Mills Counties - Larry Long
Caddo County - Marilyn Graham
Canadian County - JoAnn Morgan
Cleveland/McClain Counties - Donna Brown
Comanche County - Minnette Page
Comanche County - Rita Wilson
Creek County - Trudi Barnett
Lincoln County - Earlene Anderson
McCurtain County - Virgil Romine
Major County - Terry Coffey
Mayes County - Betty Prentice
Muskogee County - Darla Ryan
No Man’s Land - Monte Wolgamott
Nowata County - Barbara Towers
Oklahoma County - Opal Floyd
Oklahoma County - Linda Manaugh
Ottawa County - Charlene Lingo
Pontotoc County - Gary Cooper
Pushmataha County - Stephen Smallwood
Tulsa County - Glenda Murphy
Tulsa County - Barbara Powers
Wagoner County - Rhonda Baker

Congratulations and thank you to all our Very Important Members. You are the hands and feet of the OREA. We appreciate you, probably more than you even realize.

During OREA House of Delegates, only one new business item was presented. The body voted on and approved the dues schedule for the 2020-2021 membership year - to be retained at $42 annually or $3.50 per month.

The annual budget was approved, and state committees presented reports. With no additional items, the meeting was adjourned.
…and listened to leaders of all the state pension funds report to the Banking, Financial Services, and Pensions Committee, and explain it’s time for a COLA.

A bit of background. Last Session the House overwhelmingly (only three “no” votes) passed a bill to provide a 4% Cost Of Living Adjustment to all state retirees…the first in a decade. After it passed the House, it withered without a Committee hearing in the Senate, and is available to be heard in the Senate when the 2020 Session begins. But this Interim was in the House Committee, attended by several members of the Banking Committee, and some members of the House Common Education Committee, and several Senators as well. Not the Senate leaders we need to bring the bill forward, I will admit.

I got to the Interim Study 30 minutes early – usually plenty of time to catch a seat in the room. But, I was out of luck, and found a spot in front of the windows on the side of the room. I introduced myself to an OPERS retiree also there to support the study. We’ve all been waiting a decade for some small acknowledgement that our service to the state mattered, and that our retirement income should be able to pay the rent, the groceries, and our rising medical bills. I took notes furiously, not in the journal I brought, or the laptop. I took notes with my thumbs on my phone. Old dog learned a new trick.

Representative Avery Frix had organized an informative study, and Chair Lepak kept things running smoothly. Directors of every state pension fund spoke to the health of their fund. All are well funded, and in the minds of the directors, well able to sustain a COLA out of the fund. None of the funds saw a huge growth last year, but even that would not preclude a COLA. They all reported how a 2% and a 4% COLA would affect their funds.

I kept hearing the date 1981 and the consolidation that created the funds – and OREA says, “You’re welcome.” That was when dedicated funding was diverted from our TRS to help establish and shore up other pensions.

In my notes I wrote, “I am the only woman in the room still standing” after 1½ hours. But I was leaning heavily on the shutters. And typing furiously.

The ‘clean-up’ hitter was Tyler Bond, the Research Manager of the National Institute for Retirement Security. He referred to a study, Pensionomics, that shows giving our state retirees a COLA would be good for our state’s economy. A vast majority of state retirees still live in Oklahoma, pay taxes, buy groceries and prescriptions in the state. His rough estimates are that a 4% COLA for retirees would bring the state $1.39 for every $1 in pensions.

We know who supported a COLA: The House. Now our attention and our persuasion skills must be turned toward the Senate. To the Retirement and Insurance Committee, its Chair, Senator Quinn, and the Pro Temp of the State Senate, Greg Treat. We all should also be contacting our own Senators to ask for their support. Start now, before the Session. Make sure they know this is an important issue for us.

Continued on Page 4
Retired educators in Washington County have found a number of ways to contribute to their community without going to a regular job every day. Several organizations in the county benefit from donations of goods, money and time from members of Washington County Retired Educators Association (WCREA) because each month WCREA members bring items and/or money to donate.

Two county-wide organizations that receive donations are Agape Mission and “Pack the Backpacks.”

Each month, WCREA members bring canned goods and paper products such as paper towels, toilet tissue and/or napkins for Agape Mission, a non-profit, non-denominational organization in Bartlesville that provides over 4,000 meals each month for people in need. During the school year, Agape’s Food 4 Kids program gives more than 2,600 sacks of nutritious snack items each month to local school children at risk of going hungry over weekends. Each year WCREA furnished several dozen items to this organization.

“Pack the Backpacks,” sponsored by the Washington County School Supply Drive, provides school supplies to needy students in the Bartlesville, Dewey, Caney Valley, Copan, Osage Hills and Bowring public school districts. WCREA members bring pencils, paper, and other school supplies to monthly meetings, as well as donating money, to help with this project. Some members also help with the actual packing of the backpacks in early August each year. Last fall, 2,400 backpacks were given to area students.

For the past three years, WCREA members helped raise money for a local scholarship program. By filling hundreds of plastic eggs with candy to be sold by the dozen just before Easter, WCREA members contributed to the Lowe Family Young Scholars. This program matches academically promising but economically challenged students with mentors and requires students to maintain academic excellence and participate in volunteer events and skills-building classes. Students who complete the program and successfully apply to Oklahoma State University, Oklahoma Wesleyan University or Rogers State University can receive a scholarship worth as much as $4,000 a year for up to four years.

Another major community effort of WCREA is donating $500 each spring to an active Washington County teacher to help continue his/her education. Each fall, members hold a “silent auction” and sell baked goods, craft items, and other valuables for this fund. A bag is also passed around at monthly meetings to collect donations to this scholarship, named the Wayne Richardson Teacher Scholarship after a former Bartlesville superintendent who was also active in WCREA.
Were YOU an SOEA member? If so, that membership and those chapter experiences may have been your first experience with OEA and union-led advocacy. The student program is now know as OAEA: Oklahoma Aspiring Educators Association, to better match the name of the national student program—NEA Aspiring Educators. Both student programs are also now organized around four Core Values: Teacher Quality, Community Engagement, Legislative Action, and Social Justice. Our OAEA program is beginning to grow again, and our chapters are becoming more active around these Core Values.

However, we could use your help. For some students, the $30/$35 annual membership fee is an economic barrier to membership. I’ve had students explain to me that this $30 was gas money, grocery money, or babysitter money they just couldn’t afford to pay. The 30 scholarships donated at last year’s Organizing Conference and Summer Leadership Conference have already been quickly utilized, and our advisors are telling us they could use more!

You can choose to donate a yearly membership to any of our chapters, or you may designate your donation to a specific college of your choice (please see the donation form for additional instructions). Please know our advisors are aware of students who need this extra help and offer it discretely; this donation is often the last bit of encouragement these students need to become active in their local OAEA chapter. We truly appreciate your donations, as do our advisors and new OAEA members!

SPONSOR A STUDENT MEMBERSHIP TODAY!

OEA Local Association Donation Form

Member Name and/or Local Association Name (no abbreviations please):

______________________________________________________________________________

If Local Association, contact name:  ___________________________________________________________

Cell phone number:  ______________________________Email address:  ____________________________

Please choose how you’d like to donate:

_____ OAEA will choose a member/members at large for this donation (at any college/university chapter--$30 per membership)

_____ I/We would like to donate to a specific college/university OAEA Chapter ($30 per membership unless the following chapters with $35 dues are designated: Cameron University Lawton or Cameron at RSU in Claremore, SWOSU in Weatherford, and Tulsa University)

Chapter(s) Name(s):  _______________________________________________________________________

Total amount paid:  __________________________

Payment method:  ____ Cash  ______ Check

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT OF OAEA!
ELECTIONS AHEAD

The process for the election of the OREA State President and State Vice-President is scheduled for 2020. The declaration of candidacy and nomination forms are available upon request by contacting the Executive Director, Sabra Tucker, either by phone (405.525.2230 or 1.800.310.2230) or email (stucker@okea.org). The deadline for returning candidate declaration/nomination forms to OREA Headquarters is March 1st, 2020. Eligibility for candidacy includes membership in good standing of both the state and local unit.

Ballots will be mailed to credentialed delegates by April 1st, 2020.

The following districts will hold elections in the Spring of 2020:

Capitol District: Thursday, March 12th, 2020
OREA Headquarters, 323 E. Madison, Oklahoma City
10:00 a.m. – Noon
This will be held in conjunction with the OCREA Legislative Day Meeting.

North Central District: Wednesday, April 1st, 2020
Meridian Career Tech Center, 1312 South Sangre Road, Stillwater
10:00 a.m. – Noon

Northeast District: TBA

Eligibility: Any person who is a member in good standing of the Oklahoma Retired Educators Association and of a local unit within the district where the election of a district director is to take place is eligible to declare his/her own candidacy, or be nominated for, the position of District Director.

1. A member’s own declaration of candidacy or a nomination submitted by another member from within the district where the election is taking place must be received in writing by the OREA Executive Director no later than two weeks prior to the date of the election at the following address: Sabra Tucker, Executive Director, Oklahoma Retired Educators Association, P. O. Box 18485, Oklahoma City, OK 73154. To ensure timely delivery, use of certified mail is recommended, but not required. Members in good standing may also be nominated from the floor at the district meeting.

UPDATE

TRS ACTUARIAL REPORT

At the October meeting of the Teacher Retirement System Board of Trustees, the latest Actuarial Valuation Report was presented as of June 30, 2019. Highlights from this annual report show that there are 181,135 members of the TRS, including 64,821 retirees and beneficiaries.

Assets are valued at over $17 billion. The number of years to full funding is 14 and the current funded ratio is 72.4%. The Teacher retirement system will be sending out it’s quarterly publication, The Advisor, to members in January 2020.

Remember, OREA serves as the “watchdog” for your pension system. We are in attendance at all meetings of the TRS Board. We are working for YOU!