

# 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.oearthretired.org](http://www.oearthretired.org) March 2020

### Omaha visitor sites to be discussed at March 19 meeting

When you have visitors from outside Omaha, do you struggle to think of places to see and things for them to do? Omaha has a large number of interesting and historic sites that can be visited, but many of them are not widely known. The March 19 meeting for OEA-Retired will feature Tracie McPherson, Director for Communications for *Visit Omaha*, to share insights into historic sites in Omaha to see as well as newer things to see and do. Tracie will also talk about new exhibits at

existing attractions and venues as well as share things you can do for family reunions! The latest visitor guides for Omaha will be available to pick up at the meeting.

The Thursday, March 19<sup>th</sup> meeting will be held at the OEA Office, 4202 S. 57<sup>th</sup> Street, from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. If you need driving directions, please call the OEA office at 402-346-0400. Come to the meeting to learn more about some of the attractions that Omaha has to offer!

### OSERS Trustee election to begin soon!

The Omaha School Employees' Retirement System, OSERS, will hold an election for the annuitant trustee this spring. LB 447 provided that OSERS trustees are now elected by the constituent groups that each represents. Elections have been held in the last three years for two certificated trustee representatives (DeLayne Havlovic and Lance Purdy were elected to those positions), and one classified trustee representative (Matthew Placzek). This year the retired, or annuitant, members will elect their representative (the current annuitant trustee is Roger Rea).

The list of candidates will be made public at

the March 5, 2020 meeting of the OSERS Board. Ballots will be mailed to all retired members (only OSERS annuitants are eligible to vote – surviving spouses and beneficiaries are not eligible to vote in the election) in April 2020, with voting opening on April 16. Retired OSERS members can mark the paper ballot and return it by the deadline printed on the ballot, or use the control number printed on their ballot to vote their preference on-line when they receive the election ballot. Only one vote per member will be counted.

Look for further instructions about voting in the mail in April. The OEA-Retired Board of Directors has endorsed Roger Rea for this election.

### Better Together Coalition (BTC) update

By: Walta Sue Dodd, OEA-Retired President

On January 7, 2020, the Better Together Coalition (BTC) sent a letter regarding the proposed changes in our retirement system recommended by the BTC. The letter identified the representatives of the Coalition and addressed the challenges facing OSERS, the proposed solutions, and how proposed cost of living adjustments might affect you. Although the letter was sent by BTC, the questions or concerns from retirees have been referred to the OSERS staff.

The *Omaha World Herald* recently had two articles on the BTC proposals with headlines of: (1) *Plan to fix OPS pension debacle shares pain equally but ensures 'system is healthy for everyone'*; and (2) an editorial: *OPS puts forward a responsible,*

*collaborative plan for pension management.* You can find the text for both items on the *World Herald* web page, [www.omaha.com](http://www.omaha.com).

BTC is currently awaiting follow-up from Senator Kolterman, the Legislative Retirement Committee Chair, for the next steps in the legislative process. BTC held a meeting on February 20, 2020 to review amendments that have been introduced along with bills pending on the floor, as well as to discuss the next steps for the BTC proposal.

State law prohibits both the OSERS Director and the OSERS Board from advocating for benefit changes. Any proposed benefit changes must be advanced by the retirement plan sponsor (OPS) and the member groups (teachers, administrators, and

classified staff) of OSERS. The proposals must then have a public hearing before the Legislative

Retirement Committee, be passed by the full Legislature, and signed by the Governor.

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## OEA-Retired elections coming in May

By: Walta Sue Dodd, OEA-Retired Nominations Committee Chair

OEA-Retired officers serve for three-year terms, with a maximum of two consecutive terms in any one position. Elections will be held for OEA-Retired Secretary and two positions for At-Large Directors for the OEA-Retired Board at the May 21<sup>st</sup> meeting of OEA-Retired.

The OEA-Retired officers for 2019-20, and their terms of office, are:

**President** = Walta Sue Dodd (2019-2022)

**Vice President** = Scott McGinty (2019-2022)

**Secretary** = Ruby M. Davis (2017-2020)

**At-large Directors** = Richard Hood (2017-2020); Doreen Jankovich (2017-2020); Deborah Pauley (2019-2022); Cheryl Richardson (2019-2022)

**Bookkeeper and Newsletter** = Roger Rea

If you are interested in running for the OEA-Retired Board, please submit your name and the office for which you wish to be a candidate to Walta Sue Dodd, [WSDodd@aol.com](mailto:WSDodd@aol.com), before the May 21, 2020 membership meeting.

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## NSEA-Retired elections now underway!

Ballots were sent to NSEA-Retired members at the end of February to elect Board Officers as well as delegates to represent NSEA-Retired at both NSEA Delegate Assembly (in April) and NEA Representative Assembly (in June and July). NSEA-Retired Board positions up for election include President and Vice president. All NSEA-Retired officers serve three-year terms, with a maximum of three consecutive terms in any one position.

The following people filed for election as officers for NSEA-Retired: President: De Tonack; Vice President: Roger Rea.

Five delegates to NSEA Delegate Assembly will be elected from Metro District. Two delegates to NEA Representative Assembly from the combined membership of Metro and Capitol Districts will be elected. You can find a complete list of candidates for the various offices, as well as a short biographical sketch of the candidates for Board Officers and NEA RA delegates on the NSEA-Retired web page, [www.nsea.org/retired](http://www.nsea.org/retired). Click on the "ELECTIONS" tab on the home page. A PDF file has both the names of all of the candidates for office and the biographical sketches for the candidates for Board Officer and NEA Representative Delegate – the biographical sketches are at the bottom of the pages that list the candidates.

Ballots are due back to the NSEA office and must be postmarked no later than Saturday, March 21. Be sure to mark your ballots and return them if you have not already done so!

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## OEA-Retired meeting calendar

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

**March 19, Thurs.** – Visit Omaha (things to do locally)

**April 23, Thurs.** – NSEA-Retired Spring Conference at Country Inn & Suites, Lincoln, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.

**April 24-25, Fri. and Sat.** – NSEA Delegate Assembly (Lincoln)

**May 21, Thurs.** – What's New at the Zoo?; OEA-Retired elections

If OPS schools are closed due to inclement weather on the date of our meeting, the OEA-Retired meeting will be canceled. Notice will be sent out if the session is re-scheduled for a later date.

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## OEA-Retired Web Page, [oearetired.org](http://oearetired.org), Use Explained

By: Scott McGinty, OEA-Retired Webmaster

In this update, I'd like to highlight a few features of the website, [www.oearetired.org](http://www.oearetired.org), some of which you need to be registered and logged in to view. To register, we need your email address prepopulated in your profile which then allows you to login using this email address. Send a message to [webmaster@OEARetired.org](mailto:webmaster@OEARetired.org) if you have questions or concerns.

There are problems with how COX.NET addresses handle email from our website. It seems they treat it as spam. Please check your spam folder

for messages from the website and white-list our site so you can receive our messages.

To reveal links to specific pages on the web page, hover your cursor over words and section titles. The pages will contain targeted information. For instance, along the left column of the home page are the words, "What's New". Clicking on it will take you to a summary page listing profile changes and new announcements. It is a fast way to see new information.

Further down the left side is the link, "Notify

Me", where you can control the information that is sent to you by the website along with how frequently you receive updates.

Also down the left side is a link, "Edit Contact Info". Please be careful with this page. We only require your name and email address. ALL OTHER INFO IS OPTIONAL!!! This is also the page where you will update your email address if it should change.

Another important link down the left is "Change Password". Once registered, this link takes

you to a page that facilitates a password change.

The next link below "Change Password" is "Log Out". This is the link you click to close the connection to your account but not to the web site. Should you close the website without logging off, the site will automatically log you out of your account.

Once you are registered and know the basic navigation steps, the site is wide open. I invite you to spend some time looking around. Doing so will inform you of the web site features and their content.

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## Update on OPS Phase 2 Bond issue

By: Cheryl Richardson, OEA-Retired Board Member

The Citizen Bond Oversight Committee (CBOC) is busy overseeing both the 2014 and 2018 Bonds for the Omaha Public Schools. The 2014 Bond is in the process of closeout, meaning that warranties are being collected and filed in the correct place, some schools are having final projects finished, and there are some extra monies to spend. The extra money comes from interest earned on the bond money as well as from costs that were lower than expected. The extra money must be used for further improvements mentioned in the 2014 bond. Plans are for the 2014 Phase 1 Bond close by the end of this school year.

Phase 2, the 2018 Bond, is off to a good start. Construction of the Fort Crook Elementary School has been approved, although the price tag increased by \$800,000. The new middle school at 42<sup>nd</sup> and U Streets will be about \$5 million over budget due to the wetlands at its location. The

district is working with the Corps of Engineers to get the land stabilized; they want the correction to last for many years. Both overages will be covered by the 2018 Bond monies. The Omaha Public Schools and Jacobs Project Managers are working on ways to increase student engagement. They want students to experience hands on exposure during the construction phase, whether that means visiting a work site, designing interior walls, or writing about what they see happening.

There has been a 20% increase in construction activity in Omaha since the 2014 Bond. In 2019, Omaha had over \$3 billion in construction projects started. Construction companies like to work with OPS because they have the money to pay them and are ready to go. Work financed by the 2018 Bond is moving along as land is prepared for five new schools along with additions and improvements to several other schools.

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## STRONGER TOGETHER: NSEA/NEA-Retired Members Support the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education\*

By: Joe Higgins and Peg Alexander, Co-Chairs of NEA Fund – Nebraska

Our organization believes public education is the cornerstone of our republic and provides individuals with the skills to be informed, involved, and engaged in our representative democracy. Over the years, Nebraska has consistently ranked in the top 10-15 states for quality public education but, amazingly, Nebraska ranks near the bottom of all states in the nation – 48<sup>th</sup> – in the percent of state revenue supporting public schools! Every year NSEA/NEA strives to maintain adequate funding for the schools we have helped build.

Last year NSEA staff and teachers actively opposed the erosion of state aid to public education, a bill to allow income tax deduction or tax credits for parents sending students to private schools, and drastic

changes in property tax laws that would have been crippling to public school funding in Nebraska. Recent Nebraska benefits from this NEA fund have helped pass minimum wage and Medicaid initiative petitions.

NEA and NSEA-Retired are working to increase Nebraska's donations to the **NEA Fund for Children and Public Education\***. You may do so by giving electronically at [neafund.org](http://neafund.org) or by writing a check and sending it to NEA FUND; P.O. Box 96225; Washington, D.C. 20077-7501. Please consider a monthly donation of \$5, \$10, or more. Together we will make a big difference for our students, our profession, and public education. Our schools and our democracy need our support. Please contribute to the NEA Fund today!

*\*The NEA Fund for Children and Public Education is a federal political action committee (PAC) for NEA and NEA-Retired members. The fund financially supports pro-public education candidates on the federal and state levels regardless of their political affiliation.*

## Bills introduced to reduce state tax on Social Security

Two bills have been introduced this Legislative session that would reduce the state tax on Social Security benefits. LB 806, introduced by Senator Justin Wayne, would eliminate state taxation of all retirement benefits – Social Security, public and private pensions, and military pensions. Senator Wayne asked that the bill be withdrawn at the public hearing on the bill on February 14, and announced his support for LB 819 instead.

LB 819, introduced by Senator Tom Brewer, would eliminate the state tax on Social Security benefits for married individuals earning less than \$75,000 per year (\$60,000 for single filers) over a five-year time frame. The fiscal note for LB 819 is \$4.6 million in the first year of the phase-out. There are provisions in the bill to tax Social Security benefits at lesser amounts for married individuals earning between \$75,000 and \$95,000 (between \$60,000 and \$80,000 for single individuals). Married couples earning more than \$95,000 (\$80,000 for single individuals) would be taxed on their entire Social Security income.

At the time this issue of *Voices* went to press, LB 819 had not been advanced from the Revenue Committee.

## OEA-Retired

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## US Census for 2020 begins!

The US Constitution provides that the citizens of the USA are to be counted every ten years. The Census for 2020 will be handled a bit differently from past census counts. All households will receive a postcard between March 12 – 20, inviting them to respond to the Census count questions on-line. Areas of the country that are deemed to lack broadband Internet connections will be sent a paper form for the Census.

Households that do not fill out the Census forms on-line will be mailed a paper form to complete.

If the paper form is not returned, a Census taker will knock on the door of the household to get the required information. That process will take place in May, June and July.

The Census is used to determine how Congressional representation is apportioned, as well as to determine how much federal funding comes to your community for various programs.

You are encouraged to fill out the on-line forms when you get instructions on how to do so.

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## OEA-Retired Board to consider changes in bylaws

OEA-Retired adopted its current Bylaws in December 2012. OEA-Retired President Walta Sue Dodd appointed a Committee to review the Bylaws with the goal of updating them to assure that current practices are consistent with the Bylaws. The Committee consisted of Cheryl Richardson, Ruby Davis, and Roger Rea.

The Committee reviewed the Bylaws and recommended several minor changes in them for consideration by the OEA-Retired Board. The changes

are largely editorial in nature and would not make substantive changes in the Bylaws.

The Bylaws state that any changes must be presented to the OEA-Retired Board of Directors for consideration at one meeting, with a vote to change the Bylaws to occur at a later meeting. A two-thirds majority vote of the Board is required to adopt any changes in the Bylaws. The proposed changes will be considered at the March 19<sup>th</sup> Board meeting for OEA-Retired.