



March 2019

From the President's Podium

Thoughtful: *A truly special teacher is very wise and sees tomorrow in every child's eyes.*

Humorous: *When all else fails, pray for a fire drill!*

Authors Unknown

Greater Bridgeport Retired Teachers Association

Bridgeport Easton Fairfield Milford Monroe Shelton Stratford Trumbull

Another year has arrived with a new Governor and many new legislators, but the story remains the same: underfunded accounts that affect the retired teachers of Connecticut!

However, in all fairness, the Governor and those serving on both sides of the aisle are publicly recognizing that the retirement and health savings accounts have been underfunded for many years and the time has come to make amends.

There are several proposals that are being floated to address issues ranging from dedicating lottery proceeds to changing the retirement plans for new teachers. I urge you to stay informed as these proposals work their way through the appropriate committees and contact your legislators to either support or oppose these bills as necessary.

One way to do this is to attend Lobby Day on April 30th. You will have the opportunity to meet with your legislators and discuss issues of concern to retired teachers. Consult our website (www.gbrta.org), the ARTC website (www.artcl.org) and our emails to stay informed on these and other issues.

One of the issues that has drawn attention is regionalization. Connecticut has many school districts with fewer than 2,000 students, with several that are even below 500! The rationale is that by regionalizing there can be a cost savings, particularly at the administrative level, savings that can then be passed on to student needs. Many other states require this of their smaller districts, and it will be interesting to see how this plays out in Connecticut. Battle lines are already being drawn!

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Time to Meet Your Legislators

Put this into your calendar:

Lobby Day, Tuesday, April 30, 2019 at the Capitol in Hartford.

It's your chance to meet and talk with your legislators—the ones you voted into office in November. You remember—the ones who work for you. Are you nervous about meeting them? They're just as anxious about meeting their constituents.

Don't know what to say? That's easy! There will be a brief review of issues with ARTC's Lobbyist before time to meet with legislators. You'll receive a list of talking points to use or you can just ask legislators to say "yes" to the promises that were made to retired teachers. Legislators promised that you would receive the pension you contributed to all your working years, yet they haven't funded that pension. Legislators agreed to pay one-third of the cost of retired teachers' health insurance but haven't done so in many years. Legislators agreed to exempt 50% of your pension from the state income tax, but that exemption has been stuck at 25% for the past 3 years.

To avoid the morning commuter traffic to Hartford, GBRTA, together with the Association of Retired Teachers of Connecticut, will provide a bus for the minimal cost of \$5 and will include a free lunch! OK—it's a bag lunch with a sandwich, cookie and beverage, but it's free. If you need a more substantial lunch you can purchase one at the Capitol cafeteria and

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Trips

A number of GBRTA members have told us that they prefer trips on weekdays, rather than on weekends. We have asked Marcella Chamberlain if we might “tag along” on some of the trips that she arranges in conjunction with Friendship Tours. She agreed and we will be able to participate in the “Friends of Marcella” trips that she arranges.

Departure is from the Commuter Lot at the junction of Route 25 and Route 111 (Main St. in Trumbull).

Checks are made payable to Friendship Tours and mailed to:

Marcella Chamberlain
PO Box 292
Trumbull, CT 06611
203-261-6182

Scheduled for the next few months are:

May 15, 2019

The Sicilian Tenors at the Aquaturf

The \$97 cost includes coffee “and” on arrival; Family Style lunch; entertainment and transportation. Make reservations by April 15th.

June 6, 2019

On Your Feet—Westchester Broadway Theatre

The production tells the story of Gloria and Emilio Estefan and their journey to become the international sensation that they are today. The \$110 charge includes transportation, entertainment and a selection of lunch entrees. Make reservations by May 5th.

Flyers for the trips will be available at our meetings and online at www.GBRTA.org

Contact GBRTA’s Travel Coordinator Angela McKelvey (203-227-3222) for additional information.

President’s Podium

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Our General Membership Lunch meetings are an excellent way to see old friends and colleagues, discover the latest information on health and retirement issues, be entertained and have an excellent lunch.

At our April meeting, a slate of officers will be presented, the budget for next year will be proposed and an updated version of the GBRTA By-laws will be considered. We’ll vote on these at our May meeting.

Our guest for the April meeting will be Ms. Sheena Graham, Music Teacher at Warren Harding High School and Connecticut’s 2019 Teacher of the Year. Ms. Graham will bring members of the Harding Choir to the meeting.

Leading our May Memorial Service will be Reverend Edward McAuley, Pastor of St. Bridget of Ireland Parish in Stamford. Father McAuley is a retired Social Studies teacher who entered the seminary following his retirement from Trumbull High School.

Come, enjoy the day and bring a retired teacher friend.

Bob Pitzschler

Save the Date

- Lunch Meeting—April 11, 2019; Testo’s Restaurant
- Lobby Day, April 30, 2019; The Capitol, Hartford
- Lunch Meeting, Memorial Service, May 9, 2019; Testo’s
- ARTC Spring Luncheon— May 14, 2019, Aquaturf
- CEA-R Spring Luncheon—May 21, 2019; Aquaturf

Time to Meet Your Legislators

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literally rub elbows with your legislators.

While making an appointment with your legislator is advisable, there will be packets of information that you can leave behind with them or their assistants.

Join us in working toward a better retirement—for us and for future generations of teachers. To reserve a spot on the bus, contact Bob Pitzschler at rbpitz@att.net

Send your check, payable to GBRTA, for \$5 to Bob Pitzschler,
4 Laurel Ridge Chatfield Farms Beacon Falls, CT 06403,
203-723-8488

In Brief

Scholarships

GBRTA presents a \$1,000 scholarship to a senior in each of the 16 public high schools in our eight town area. The requirements are that the applicants demonstrate scholarship, citizenship, community service and an interest in pursuing a career in education. The Guidance Departments in the individual schools have additional information.

Proceeds from the December raffle added \$589 to our scholarship fund.

Community Outreach

Those sample sized toiletries you collect on trips are much appreciated by organizations supporting the homeless. Ginny Girouard will get them to the organization.

Merton House appreciates those lightweight grocery store plastic bags. They are used to send leftovers home with their guests. Angie McKelvey will be happy to see that they get there!

Samaritan's Purse

At our December meeting we collected 63 Shoeboxes of gifts for needy children around the world along with \$ 230 to help defray postage.



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Annual Dues—\$20

Life Membership \$250

The membership year runs from July 1—June 30. Members whose dues are two or more years in arrears will be dropped from the membership file and must repay two years of back dues for reinstatement.

Please check the address label on this newsletter. If the message after your name is anything other than *Life Member* or *July 1, 2019*, your dues are in arrears.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Year Retired _____ School System _____

New Member Renewal Amount of check _____

Mail form and check, payable to GBRTA to

Ann Block 60 Ridgeview Avenue Trumbull, CT 06611

Have You Seen These Headlines?

- 1)*Pensions will sink Connecticut* CT Post, 02/11/19
- 2)*Lamont: Surplus to backstop teacher pensions* CT Post, 02/20/19
- 3)*Lamont seeks pension givebacks; unions say no* CT Post, 02/20/19
- 4)*Lamont asks lawmakers to help cut deficit, fix pension fund* CT Post, 02/21/19

The good news is that the Legislature is paying attention to Connecticut's seriously underfunded pension accounts.

The bad news is that retired teachers' pensions are being addressed as if those pensions were negotiated.

Unlike State employees, there is no union that represents retired teachers. The union support that negotiated for your salary, benefits and working conditions ended with your retirement. The union mentioned in headline #3 is the State Employee Bargaining Coalition—negotiating for State employees. Retired teachers, hat in hand, ask the State administration and legislature to keep their promises and treat retired teachers fairly.

A variety of possible solutions to the pension shortfall under consideration include restructuring the pension debt by increasing the time period over which the State must repay the 2 billion dollars the State borrowed to strengthen the Teachers' Retirement Fund in 2007; by applying State assets such as the Lottery or state-owned property to the pension fund; by requiring that municipalities contribute to the fund; or by restructuring teacher contributions for new hires to a defined contribution plan.

The decision will be made between now and the end of the legislative session in June. Each of us needs to be aware of the proposed solutions and the effects they will have on present and future teacher pensions.



Alert! WEP/GPO Action

A number of members have expressed concern about the effect of the WEP/GPO on their Social Security benefits—either earned or on their spouses' accounts. This information was received too late to be included in GBRTA's print newsletter. Please pass it along to anyone who does not have access to the information from *Social Security Fairness*.

We have a new **Senate bill, S.521**, introduced by Sherrod Brown, which already has 4 co-sponsors: Collins and Murkowski, Baldwin and Leahy. The House of Representatives Social Security Fairness Bill **H.R. 141**, has 109 co-sponsors, 33 of them Republicans. Its original sponsor, Congressman Rodney Davis from Illinois, is a Republican. This is truly a bipartisan effort! **(There are easy links on the homepage of ssfairness.com to check on your legislators. We need 290 co-sponsors to force a vote in the House.)**

Please note that, at this time, Connecticut representatives John Larson and Jim Himes have not signed on as sponsors. Neither have our senators—Richard Blumenthal or Christopher Murphy.

Join Us for Lunch at Testo's Restaurant

1775 Madison Avenue, Bridgeport

10:30 am

Price \$28

April 11, 2019

Choice of: Chicken Francaise Roast Beef w/Gravy Stuffed Sole

Our guest speaker for the April meeting will be Sheena Graham, Music Teacher at Harding High School in Bridgeport and Connecticut's Teacher of the Year for 2019. Ms Graham will showcase a number of her talented students in the Harding Choir.

Reservations by April 5

Cancellations by April 8

May 9, 2019

Choice of: Roasted Chicken Baked Ham Scrod Oreganato

In May the Memorial Service will be led by the Rev. Edward McAuley, pastor of St. Bridget of Ireland Parish in Stamford. Father McAuley is a retired social studies teacher who entered the seminary after many years at Trumbull High School.

Reservations by May 3

Cancellations by May 6

Make check payable to GBRTA with date, menu choice and your phone number on the check. CHECKS MUST ACCOMPANY RESERVATIONS; NO PAYMENT ACCEPTED AT THE DOOR.

Reservations and payment to: Trudi Black

487 Church Hill Rd.

Trumbull, CT 06611

Phone: 203-261-6576