

# SERREAM

## Newsletter

Summer 2017

### President's Message: Kay Morcomb

#### A Bit of History

Ethel Percy Andrus was born in California in 1884. She grew up in Chicago while her father studied law. Her father instilled the idea that everyone should do some good, the only reward being the satisfaction of providing an important service. After an associate degree at Lewis Institute and a Bachelor of Philosophy from the University of Chicago Andrus began teaching. After teaching during the day Andrus volunteered evenings and weekends at two pioneering settlement houses, Hull House and Chicago Commons where many impoverished and uneducated immigrants lived.

In 1910 she moved back to California and taught in schools in the Los Angeles area. She was appointed principal of East Los Angeles High School becoming the first woman high school principal in California. The 2,500 students were mostly from poor families representing a range of ethnicities who spoke 32 different languages. The school faced problems of juvenile delinquency and ethnic and racial conflict. Andrus raised academic standards, started student community service projects, and established an evening program to assist immigrant parents. She changed the name of the school to Lincoln High School to inspire the students. She even broke up some street fights between boys and pleaded in court for some to have a second chance. Juvenile delinquency dropped. Test scores rose. Lincoln High School was selected by the National Education Association to be featured in its textbook "Learning Ways of Democracy".

Meanwhile she continued her own education earning a MA and a Ph.D. from the University of Southern California. Summers were spent teaching courses at USC, UCLA, and Stanford. She was concerned about the financial struggles of her retired faculty. In 1927 she organized the Foundation to Assist California Teachers and raised funds for two retirement homes.

In 1944 her beloved career came to an abrupt end when her mother became seriously ill and Dr. Andrus retired to become a full time caregiver. When her mother regained her health she urged Dr. Andrus to help the retired as she had done for students. Dr. Andrus began to examine pensions and other benefits provided across the country and believed a national organization was needed to address the needs of her peers.

She learned from a local grocer outside of Los Angeles that an older woman who came to his store needed food, eyeglasses and dentures. Dr. Andrus set out to visit her. The address led to a sizable bungalow. No one was home. She inquired with a neighbor, who suggested she check on the old woman who lived "out back". "Out back" was a chicken coop. Dr. Andrus knocked on the door of the windowless shack. The occupant, wearing a ragged coat, slipped out the door and closed it behind her. Upon learning the woman's name, Dr. Andrus recalled the woman's reputation as a Spanish teacher of some distinction. Settled in Andrus' car the woman told her story. Sales opportunities for the scenic acreage she had bought over time had been diminished by the Great Depression. While the retiree still had her \$40 monthly pension, she could not afford decent housing or health care. Dr. Andrus was shocked and took action. *To be continued in the next newsletter, meanwhile consider actions needed now.*

**SERREAM SPRING CONFERENCE**  
**April 26, 2017**  
**American Legion, Albert Lea**

The Albert Lea Retired Teachers were our hosts for the day. Pastries, coffee, and juice were provided before the meeting began.

**9 AM.** We were welcomed by Ed Mikulich, chair of the spring conference, who introduced Chad Adams, the Albert Lea City Manager. He spoke of the revitalization of Albert Lea the last 5-6 years. Their biggest issue right now is the need for a skilled workforce.

**9:20 AM.** Ellen Kehr, Executive Director of the Blue Zone Vitality Project, spoke about how Albert Lea became a Blue Zone Community. In 2009 they began a one year pilot project applying principles from areas around the world where people lived longer, healthier lives. They have continued this project resulting in an improvement in well-being, an increased tax base, and a city that is thriving.

**10:20 AM.** After a break, Jay Stoffel, TRA Deputy Director, brought us up to date on what is happening with our pensions. He went through a handout which included the governor's budget proposal, the TRA proposal, and talking points when speaking/writing to legislators.

**11 AM.** President Kay Morcomb presided at the annual business meeting. The minutes of the 2016 meeting were approved as corrected. The treasurer's report was approved as printed. It was m/s/c to leave dues at \$10.

We have 725 members. 197 are unpaid and will be receiving letters about payment. There was a question raised about the difference between REAM and Education Minnesota Retired. REAM is non-partisan and has pensions as its main focus. EMR is political and belongs to the NEA. The major problem is that younger retirees are not interested in joining either.

SERREAM Board members, the Spring Conference Committee, and REAM Board attendees were acknowledged.

SERREAM still needs a president-elect, a newsletter editor, and someone to do the website. All local units should be sure they have a representative on the SERREAM Board.

Edna Thayer presented Educator Awards to Keith Burmeister (Tri-County) and Donna Crowl (Faribault).

The SERREAM Legislative/Health Conference will be held at the Rochester International Event Center on October 11, 2017.

**11:45 AM.** During a delicious roast beef lunch, Barbara and Neil Lang entertained us with music.

**1 PM.** Lonnie Duberstein, REAM president, said the Legislative Committee on Pensions and Retirement (LCPR) should have its pension proposal ready May 3. It will then be presented to the legislature. LCPR has 10 Republicans and 4 Democrats. It was suggested that we thank Gov. Dayton for his support and contact legislators to support pensions.

Dan Sorenson of 3 Oak Winery talked about "Growing a Business". 2011 was their first planting and today they expect to sell 10-15,000 bottles a year.

Lilah Aas recognized the teachers who have passed during the year with a history of education and the importance of nourishing minds.

**1:45 PM.** Linda Evenson, librarian at the Freeborn County Historical Society, told us about the resources of the library and how it is well-used by the public and students in the schools.

**2:20 PM.** Chuck Hellie reminded us of the REAM convention on September 25-26

## SERIAM Conference Cont:

in Hinckley. The website for REAM is MNREAM.org.

**2:30 PM.** Door prizes were awarded. 63 persons were in attendance. Next year's Spring Conference will be held in Waseca.

Sylvia Swede, Secretary

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## SERIAM EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING Minutes for May 17, 2017

President Kay Morcomb called the meeting to order at 9:07 AM at The Homestead. Present were Ben Baratto, Sharon Baratto, Don Leathers, Carol Lozon, Ed Mikulich, Kay Morcomb, Sylvia Swede, Edna Thayer, Don Zwach, and Gayle Goetzman. A mileage sheet and a breakfast contribution envelope were passed around.

**Secretary's Report: (Sylvia Swede).** The minutes of the previous meeting were in the last newsletter.

**Treasurer's Report: (Sharon Baratto).** Our totals assets are \$6517.31

**President's Report: (Kay Morcomb).** Her report will be in the next newsletter.

### Committee Reports:

**a. Membership: (Ben Baratto).** We have 725 members.

**b. Legislative: (Don Leathers).** A lot of legislative meetings have been cancelled. Under the legislative proposal on pensions there is no funding for the increase in employer contributions. It is important to call legislators. How do we get parents involved?

**c. Health: (Don Leathers)** He will write a newsletter article on cell phone usage.

**d. Newsletter:** Send articles to Kay Morcomb by May 24 for the issue to be published June 14.

**e. REAM Division Report: (Don Zwach)** There will be a teachers rally at noon May 20 at the Capitol. Active teachers are taking the hit if the commission's report is accepted. There are many challenges ahead. There are presently 9500 members. The goal is 10,000. REAM is working to get the Mankato unit restarted.

### Continuing Business:

We need representatives on the Board from Rochester and Austin. We also need a president-elect and a newsletter editor. Elections for officers are in even-numbered years.

### New Business:

**a. Spring Conference:** Waseca is the host for 2018. There is some thought about having the conference at the International Events Center in Rochester instead of in Waseca.

**b. The Fall Conference** is October 11 at the International Event Center in Rochester. Three speakers have been confirmed. Flu shots will be available during lunch.

### Announcements:

**a.** The next SERIAM Board meeting is August 16.

**b.** The 2017 REAM conference is Monday and Tuesday September 25 and 26 in Hinckley.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:40 AM.

Sylvia Swede, Secretary

## Tribute to Donna Crowl – 2017 SEREAM Educator Award Recipient

Writing a tribute poem for Donna Crowl has been challenging fun. Attempting to condense three pages of fantastic accomplishments into one. Donna has a B.S. in Elementary Ed from Aberdeen, Northern State University, Then received from the U of MN a master of education degree. Her 37 years of teaching were in South Dakota, Illinois, and Faribault; Serving on committees while teaching kept her on the go. She wrote the District Sexual Harassment policy & chaired an evaluation on gender equity, Served on a site council, curriculum committee, PTA Rep, chair of staff development & sunshine committee. She also directed the after school learning center and then – Retired from teaching in four different grade levels (mostly first grade), in 2010. Giving of her talents and energy to many organizations over the years deserves praising. She's often an officer, chairs committees, writes grants, and does much for fund raising. She's active in AAUW, River Bend Nature Center, Paradise Center for the Arts, & Buckham Library, Rice County Historical Society, Sons of Norway, MN Landscape Arboretum & Hospital Auxiliary. She's a member of Thrivent, Faribault senior center, & the Board for Faribault Foundation, Chaired gender equity for AAUW at the state & a member of their MN Coalition of Organizations for sex equity in Education. With 2 others she raised funds by selling bleeding heart plants out of her garage in order to buy— Heart defibrillators for the Community Center, Archery Range, and the Senior High. For ten years she chaired the Faribault Pool Partners Volunteers to build an outdoor aquatic center in Faribo— After the pool was built she's served another 15 years on the board & raised money so low-income children could go. For her work on the pool, the Daily News named her co-citizen of the year on 2001 – Just the beginning of several honors she's won. The Faribault mayor recognized her in 2002, In 2005, the Exchange Club gave her the Book of Golden Deeds Award, too. The AAUW Agent of Change award was especially nice; She was also their named honoree for the Education Foundation Endowment Fund, twice. From Dakota County Technical College, the Golden Apple Teaching Award came. The 2011 Rice County Project Prevention Champion for Youth, she was named. In 2008, Lincoln School was recognized as one of 320 Blue Ribbon Schools, nationally. She represented the school to accept the award in Washington, D.C. At First English Lutheran Church, she's decorated, taught Sunday School &, Bible School, chaperoned youth in Texas and was on a call committee – She's worked funeral lunches, coffee hour, & has helped bake 1400 rounds of lefse, 700 krumkaka and lots of sandbakkals, annually. For the past four years, she's been president elect and president of FARE Her fantastic job included helping plan a SEREAM annual conference held there. At many conferences and workshops she can be seen, Gathering information to share back home from SEREAM and REAM.

## **Tribute to Keith Burmeister, SEREAM Educator Award, 2017**

A SEREAM Educator award for 2017 goes to Keith Burmeister of Tri-County. He's from Lanesboro with roots also in Spring Valley and Harmony.

He taught Senior High math at Lanesboro and Spring Valley,  
And was a high school counselor in Spring Valley and Harmony.

While teaching he served as the SE Counselors president.  
After teaching 40 years, in 2000, he started retirement.

He's a past president and treasurer of the Tri-County educators,  
And served as treasurer of SEREAM for eleven years.

He was City Administrator of Lanesboro for three years after he retired.  
He attends Bethlehem Lutheran Church, was on the Council, and sang in the choir.

He drove school bus for eleven years after retirement,  
And provided SEMCAC transportation to seniors for medical appointments.

He served in the US Army from 1951 to 1953,  
In Missouri, Texas, France, and Germany.

He received his BS in math in 1959 from Winona State,  
Plus an MS in Counseling and Guidance from there in '71, which he started in '68.

His various involvements have kept him busy.  
He's past president and a member of Sons of Norway.

Talents were shared with the Commercial Club, Lions, Kiwanis,  
And the American Legion, which all benefited from this.

Keith is known around Harmony and Lanesboro as an excellent athlete;  
At Harmony High, he won the District free throw contest twice when he did compete.

Since high school he's won three golf championships at Harmony, Lanesboro,  
and Whitewater State.  
Scoring three official holes in one at three different courses was really great.

The "greens" back then were made of sand, not grass.  
As a recipient of the SEREAM Educator award, Keith is first class!

**Legislative Article for SEREAM Newsletter**  
**May 2017**

---Don Leathers

If you will recall from previous legislative articles in the SEREAM Newsletter, the TRA Board of Directors crafted a sustainability package last fall to be presented to the 2017 Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement [LCPR]. The proposal included a COLA reduction for retirees from 2% to 1% for five years, then to 1.5% thereafter. It also sought a 2% increase in the employer (school district) contribution to the plan while active teacher would not see their contribution rate go up. Overall, the package would put TRA's plan on a course to be 90+% funded by 2047. But, then again, that was last fall.

Over the course of the four month legislative session, plenty of footdragging was on display. Countless LCPR meetings were abruptly cancelled, with no reason given as to why. When the Republican-controlled houses unveiled their budgets in early March, they contained zero dollars for pensions. When one member of the commission asked the chair about the total lack of money in the budgets for pension, her reply was, "Don't worry. We'll take care of it." But, as the session progressed, there was plenty to worry about.

The largest cause for concern was the unwillingness of the legislature to fund the 2% employer contribution rate. And, that's with roughly a \$1.65 billion surplus. Several voices at the Capitol see this refusal to fund the school district share as a first step toward starving the public pension funds with the end result being a conversion of TRA, PERA and MSRS from a defined-benefit to a defined-contribution fund. Think: 401k.

Another provision in the TRA Pension Bill is COLA language. The COLA would be reduced to 1% (from the current 2%) for five years, then increased by 0.1% until it reaches 1.5% in 2027. In addition, active teachers would increase their contribution rate by 0.25% Finally, the assumption rate (the projected financial growth in pension plans) would be reduced from 8.5% to 7.5%, which is a major reason that the sustainability package was crafted by the TRA Board.

All told, this has been a very disappointing legislative session, pension-wise, in St. Paul. And, it doesn't appear that conditions will improve in the foreseeable future.

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**Save the Date**  
**Wednesday, October 11, 2017**  
**SEREAM Fall Legislative and Health Conference**  
**Rochester International Event Center**

## SEREAM Health Article May 2017

---Don Leathers

As of Memorial Day weekend, several session-ending bills await a signature from Governor Dayton. One of the more impactful pieces of legislation is found in the Transportation Bill. It contains language which would get cellphones out of hands of drivers---now. If the measure is approved, it would make Minnesota the 15th state to ban the use of handheld devices while driving (texting while driving is already illegal in the state). Let's go the extra step.

Why is this legislation to ban handheld devices while driving important to SEREAM members? Probably because most seniors do not text or talk on their cellphone while driving. The overwhelming evidence points to younger generations having their devices in their hand when behind the wheel. It really is a matter of public safety, so let's look at some numbers.

In Minnesota, roughly one traffic fatality and 100 car crashes with injuries occur every single day. One out of five fatalities in the state are directly related to distracted driving. Further, one out of four crashes is related to distracted driving. In a year, that amounts to more than 70 deaths and 9,000 injuries. Getting handheld devices out of the hands of drivers would go a long way toward reducing those numbers dramatically. Personally, I'd feel much safer behind the wheel knowing that the car cruising toward me on the highway at 60 miles per hour has a driver with both hands free.

Let's hope that hands free legislation is in the Transportation Bill and that it becomes law.

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### ***SEREAM Membership Form***

Complete this form and mail with \$10.00 per person to:  
Ben Baratto, 779 Bluffview Circle, Winona, MN 55987

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to SEREAM.

Membership year: September 1, 2016–August 31, 2017

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EDUCATORS ASSOC. OF MN  
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