

# SERREAM

## *Newsletter*

Summer 2019

### **President's Message: Kay Morcomb**

Join REAM to protect your pension! How does that work? Who does what? Some very dedicated member volunteers study anything and everything that has an impact on pensions, such as the facts and figures TRA has to work with to keep pension funds on a healthy path and the thoughts and proposals of members of the Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement. These volunteers know about individuals and groups that lobby against pensions and what is presented to the public in the media. They gather data from non-biased sources, attend hearings, make multiple visits to legislators presenting data, and meet with each other. They are advocates not policy makers. Their number is very small compared to the number of retired teachers. Legislators want to know how many informed voters these volunteers represent not just a membership number. The volunteer efforts are for naught without informed supporters. REAM has an annual conference and a bimonthly newsletter to inform the membership.

If REAM does all that, what's the purpose of SERREAM?

SERREAM is a link.

Think how important a link is in a chain. SERREAM is a link connecting REAM with local units. The purpose of SERREAM is to increase information to members and to counteract misinformation coming from anti-pension groups. Informed members can contact policy makers to support our defined benefit pension plan, names and contact information are printed in the newsletter annually. When legislators get messages from their constituents saying, "I hope you support...because..." or "Data from ..... shows ....", they take note. Informed members can write letters to their local newspaper. When letters to the editor use data to correct misconceptions that have been printed it helps the public's understanding and gains support. REAM leaders value SERREAM and would like to have regional organizations in other parts of the state. At one time SERREAM had three volunteers in the dedicated group at the capitol. SERREAM conducts a fall and a spring conference and publishes four newsletters annually. At conferences the TRA executive director gives an up-to-date power point presentation and answers questions. Legislators are invited to say a few words and answer questions. SERREAM newsletters always have an article from our legislative chair. We have heard from the Board of Teaching, the Commissioner of Education, and the State Demographer. Where else would you have the opportunity to meet these people and ask questions? The fall conference always has a health topic as does the newsletter. There is a great variety of topics and interesting speakers. Join us for a day of information, socializing, coffee, lunch, and a drawing of door prizes donated by local units of SERREAM.

**Save the date**

**Come to SERREAM's Fall Legislative and Health Conference**

**October 16, 2019**

**Rochester International Event Center**

**Details and registration information will be in the fall newsletter.**

## **SERAM Spring Conference April 24, 2019**

The Winona unit hosted the conference at the Riverport Inn. Pastries from the Bloedow Bakery, coffee, and juice were provided before the meeting. At 9 AM we were welcomed by WAREA president Jane Habeck and by George Borsakowski, representing the mayor. Seven members of the REAM Board were present. Lonnie Dobberstein, REAM past-president, reminded us that REAM played a big part re legislation dealing with our pension. Two areas to watch are the funding of contributions to school districts and the opposition to defined benefits. Paul Erhardt, president-elect of REAM, emphasized that memberships are our life blood and that REAM would like to get 15,000 members in order to protect pensions. We would like to get more retired teacher representatives on the TRA Board.

**9:22 AM.** Liz Heimer of the American Lung Association spoke about the new addiction of vaping and its physical and economic impact. Youth tobacco use has increased for the first time in 17 years. There has been a 50% increase since 2014. Marketing is targeted toward youth and the market is currently unregulated. She passed around samples of the products available. Nicotine has an effect on brain development and the earlier the exposure, the greater the risk.

**10:35 AM.** After a coffee break, Bruno Borsari, PhD., professor of biology at Winona State, spoke of his concerns about industrial agriculture, such as nutrient depletion, loss of wetlands and wildlife habitat, and groundwater contamination. He emphasized learning from the wisdom of our elders and the importance of fresh food vs. packaged, preserved food.

**12:40 PM.** After lunch, Kay Morcomb called the business meeting to order. Sharon Baratto presented the treasurer's report. We have 570 members and the total cash in all accounts is \$10,562.92. Kay recognized the SERAM Board, the Winona hosts, and the REAM Board and acknowledged Don Zwach's work on the REAM Board and his work on legislation. It was m/s/c to keep dues at \$10. A vice-president is needed by the April conference. Kay will not be president for a fourth term.

Mary Osborne announced that Faribault and Kenyon-Wanamingo will host the spring conference on April 22, 2020.

Chuck Hellie reminded members of the REAM trips that are available. The REAM conference in September will be held at Prairie Edge Casino, Granite Falls.

Edna Thayer presented the Educator Award to Phoebe Praxl of Waseca.

**1 PM.** Geraldine Taylor read a poem and a prayer as we remembered the passing of members since our last meeting, followed by Thayerisms from Edna.

**1:15 PM.** Mark Dungy, a Winona County investigator, addressed exploitation and online solicitation of children. He is a member of the Crimes Against Children Task Force. Grooming re exploitation begins with children 12-14 years of age. Various social media is used. There needs to be communication with children about what one posts on social media. One needs to be very diligent because of predators.

**2:30 PM.** Door prizes were given out. 85 persons attended.

**Sylvia Swede, Secretary**

**SERIAM EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING MINUTES**  
**May 15, 2019**

President Kay Morcomb called the meeting to order at 9:15 AM. Present were Kay Morcomb, Sharon & Ben Baratto, Don Leathers, Keith Larson, Lyle Olson, Gayle Goetzman, and Katherine Lastine. The mileage sheet and breakfast envelope were passed around. Health issues kept several away. Edna Thayer fell on an escalator on the return home from a speaking engagement in Virginia. Both legs were badly injured.

**Secretary's Report: (Sylvia Swede)** A storm cancelled the February meeting. In a brief statement in the last newsletter I neglected to mention two easily approved motions done by email: nominating Phoebe Praxl for SERIAM educator award and keeping the annual dues at \$10. Kay Morcomb

**Treasurer's Report: (Sharon Baratto)** Our total assets are \$10,562.92.

**President's Report: (Kay Morcomb)** See page 1.

**Committee Reports:**

- a. **Membership: (Ben Baratto)** No report, just starting a new membership year.
- b. **Legislative: (Don Leathers)** Legislative session not over, no report but will write an article
- c. **Health: (Don Leathers)** See newsletter article.
- d. **Newsletter/Web: (Open position)** Send articles to kmor.nkamp2@gmail.com.

Meeting date	Articles due	Newsletter published
May 15, 2019	May 22, 2019	June 12, 2019
August 21, 2019	August 28, 2019	September 18, 2019
November 20, 2019	November 27, 2019	December 18, 2019

- e. **Educator Awards: (Edna Thayer)** Tribute poem for Phoebe.
- f. **REAM: (Don Zwach)** Don was absent.

**Continuing Business:**

- a. Follow-up report on Winona conference: Well received, over 80 attended, compliments on informative speakers, everything on schedule. The cost for a venue increases each year. Don Leathers made a motion to increase the registration cost to \$25 for the fall conference, seconded by Lyle Olson and Keith Larson. Everyone voted in favor.
- b. Fall conference planning: Chair Barb Hunter was absent due to illness. We reviewed the plans made at our March planning meeting. Don Leathers has already made some contacts for speakers. Kay Morcomb is just starting. At the August board meeting plans must be finalized for publishing in the Fall Newsletter.
- c. A president-elect is needed by the April Annual Meeting to serve one year then move into the presidency for a two-year term followed by a year as past president.

**New Business:**

- a. Look for changes as REAM revises their web site. We need to explore activating a link there.

**Announcements:** Next board meeting Wednesday, August 21, 2019 8:45 at  
The Homestead

REAM conference Mon. & Tues, Sept. 30 & Oct. 1 Granite Falls, Prairie's Edge Casino  
SERIAM conference Wednesday, October 16, 2019 Rochester International Event  
Center

**Adjournment:** Meeting adjourned at 11:00 AM.

## Tribute to Phoebe Praxl, 2019 SEREAM Educator Award Winner

Congratulations to Phoebe Praxl, the 2019--  
Educator Award Winner from SEREAM.

Phoebe graduated from Red Wing High School in 1958,  
And earned her B.S. in English and math from Winona State.  
She continued with summer classes at Stevens Point State,  
& continuing education + summer classes through Mankato State.

Her first 11 years of teaching were in Westlake, Ohio; Dodge Center, MN;  
Stevens Point & Lakeland Union High School in Minoqua, Wisconsin.  
Then she taught senior high English & math in Waseca, MN for 29 years,  
Before retiring in 2000 with a 38 year total teaching career.  
While teaching, she served as H.S. rep to the local unit & vice president.  
She worked part time for 14 years as a sales clerk for Touch of Country Class  
after retirement.

At Grace Lutheran Church, she's served as circle secretary for many years,  
& Care and Share Committee member for funerals & Grace food shelf volunteer.  
For a new minister, she also served as a member of a transition team.  
At the Art Center, volunteering to answer the phone, she was seen.  
She was a trustee at the Waseca-LeSueur Regional Library for 8 years,  
& serves as election judge for both primary & general elections over the years.  
She's still a pen pal for a Waseca 5th grade student.  
As a welcome lady for Waseca Welcome Services, volunteer time was spent.

She has been most valuable to her local WARE;  
From 2003 to present she is treasurer and membership chair.  
She helped organize the last 2 spring conferences sponsored by WARE.  
She has served SEREAM for many years as local rep from Waseca there.

**CONGRATULATIONS, PHOEBE, ON A WELL DESERVED AWARD!**

**Legislative Report**  
**SERAM Summer 2019**  
**Newsletter**

---Don Leathers

After months of posturing, finger pointing, and closed-door behind-the-scenes negotiations, Minnesota legislative leaders and the governor reached a deal on a \$48 billion, two-year budget during a short Special Session over Memorial Day Weekend.

The only state with a divided government, Minnesota's Governor Tim Walz (D), Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka (R) and House Speaker Melissa Hortman (D), worked overtime to reach compromises that, arguably, make the lives of all Minnesotans better. Neither party received everything it sought, but the bipartisan agreement undoubtedly makes Minnesota a better place in which to work and live and shows gridlocked states (and Washington, DC) what good governance can look like. Leaders from each party praised 2019's bipartisan approach.

Because SERAM members are retired educators, let me first write about some of the key accomplishments made on the education side of the 20/21 and 22/23 budget:

- \*Education Bill Expenditures: \$543 million (FY 20/21) / \$720 million (FY 22/23)
- \*Formula: 2% and 2% in year. DFL wanted 2% & 3% / GOP wanted 0.5% & 0.5%
- \*Special Education: \$90 million in Year 1 / \$142 million in Year 2. Very significant increase in that it “freezes” the educational cross-subsidy which means districts won't have to dip into their General Fund to pay for Special Education overruns.
- \*Voluntary pre-k: Assigns \$46 million to fund scholarships for disadvantaged students which will contribute to lessening Minnesota's Achievement Gap
- \*School Safety: provides \$30 million in one-time funding for School Safety Grants. Districts apply for the dollars and receive grants according to needs

Over past decades, the legislature has failed to provide funding for our public schools to keep up with inflation and operating costs. The total increase in school funding for the biennium comes in at roughly \$1.2 billion, or a 6.7% boost in overall education funding.

DFLers were also successful in beating back Republicans' cherished goal of providing tax credits to people and institutions that provide scholarships for students attending private schools. Republican lawmakers see the policy as one of “choice”; their Democratic counterparts see it as a “back-door voucher” program. At least for the next two years, scholarships for private school attendance is out of the picture.

In other news from the 2019 session, Governor Walz' 20-cent per gallon gas tax hike never received any traction in the Republican Senate. Other legislative policy compromises included lowering the health care tax (which was set to expire at the end of the year) from 2.0% to 1.8%. The hundreds of millions of dollars the tax will continue to raise is crucial to the Health and Human Services budget and, as passed, has no sunset date. Republicans sought, and achieved, a lowering of income tax on some middle class earners. The tax cut comes to 0.25% and, coupled with the 0.20% decrease in the health care tax means less money will be flowing into the state coffers over the next two years. Hopefully, a robust economy will offset those losses.

## SERIAM Health Report Summer 2019

---Don Leathers

### **“With an active ingredient found in jellyfish.”**

Have you ever heard that utterance in a television commercial touting the effectiveness of a dietary supplement that supposedly enhances memory in seniors? I have, and it kind of drives me crazy because they never really tell the viewer what the “active ingredient” is and how it helps ageing minds retain memory, although it's clinically proven.

So, being the persistent skeptic, I decided to do a little digging and found some interesting information about the supplement and its supposed origin. First of all, a jellyfish is not a fish. Its scientific name is Medusozoa, and, further, cnidarian, which qualifies it as being an invertebrate while a fish is defined by its skeletal backbone, which makes it a vertebrate. The jellyfish is a free-swimming, bell-shaped sort of blob with several tentacles that hang from its gelatinous mass transparently so it can sting its prey into submission. With what, you might ask? A lethal toxin. Similar to that found in the highly poisonous Portuguese Man 'o War. Let's all hope that isn't the “active ingredient” that boosts senior memory.

The supplement, Prevagen, purportedly helps aid in sleep, mental function and memory. Some of the product's side effects include anxiety, nausea, headaches and sleep disorders. A current FTC lawsuit is suing the company for making false claims about Prevagen being clinically studied. A month's supply of the pill is \$39.95, discounted from \$59.95 per bottle. I prefer to get by on the cheap. Such as...

Maybe a better strategy for seniors to keep their memory thriving is to live life fully. Regularly exercise, eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, chicken and fish. Read a book, play cards with friends or take a brisk walk or bike ride with family or friends (or your dog). Cultivate a special relationship with a grandchild, volunteer in a local school, attend concerts, plays or sporting events. I'm sure you can think of additional mind-stimulating things to do.

In my humble opinion, those are the “active ingredients” that will enhance memory in seniors.

Have a Great Summer!

Members of SEREAM have seen some heartfelt letters from teachers who loved their work but felt they must protest to get public attention for education and some teachers feel they must leave the profession for the good of their family and their own future. A good pension plan as well as higher pay and better working conditions for students are part of their demands.

**From the Winona Daily News:** The Economic Policy Institute in a recent analysis found that teachers weekly wages were 21.4% less in 2018 compared to similar college graduates. Adjusted for inflation average weekly wages of public school teachers decreased \$21 from 1996 to 2018. Weekly wages of all other college graduates rose by \$323 over this period.

Teacher protests have been happening in several of the states with higher gaps to demand higher pay.

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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, 2019–August 31, 2020

**The newsletters can be found at [SEREAM.org](http://SEREAM.org).**

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