

SERREAM

Newsletter

Winter 2022

President's Message: Barb Hunter

Hello SERREAM Members!

I hope you all are doing well. This has been a busy time. I attended the REAM conference in Red Wing in September. It was fun and I learned a lot. If you aren't a REAM member, please consider doing so. REAM is our parent organization. We help inform our members on legislative issues, particularly as they pertain to our pension plans. Did you know that AAARP was started by a teacher after she had begun the National Retired Teacher Association? She did this due to her concern of retired teachers.

We held the SERREAM Fall Health and Legislative conference in October. It was very informative with updates on our pensions and legislative updates. We heard from a Bosnian refugee, very timely with what's happening in Ukraine. There is a lot going on in our country and the world that we should be aware of and concerned about.

I would like to welcome Don Leathers, from Austin, back to the SERREAM board. Don took some time off and is willing to step back into his former role as Legislative and Health person. Welcome back, Don!

We are still looking for people to serve as a vice president and as a secretary of SERREAM. The vice president assists the president and then would assume the role of President in 2024. Secretary mainly writes up the minute notes from the SERREAM board meetings and then they are printed in the newsletter.

I would like to visit as many local units as I am able. I am willing to attend your meeting as my schedule allows. Please feel free to extend an invitation to me.

On behalf of myself and the SERREAM board, we wish you and your families a very happy holiday!

SERREAM Fall Legislative and Health Conference

October 19, 2022

The SERREAM Fall Conference was held at the Rochester International Event Center. Registration began at 8:30 AM. Coffee, juice, pastries, and also fruit were provided before the meeting. At 9:00 President Barb Hunter opened the meeting with a warm welcome. 9:05 Dr. Kent Pekel, Superintendent of Rochester Public Schools addressed the topic, " Strengthening Students' Mental Health". A Minnesota native, he became a high school teacher in his home state. His first wife had cancer and he soon found himself a single Dad with three young children. Interest in researched based practices to help young people thrive led him to develop various programs while at the University of Minnesota and at the SEARCH INSTITUTE, an international research organization. He seeks to bridge research, practice, and policy.

10:05 REAM President Anita Hellie spoke of the changes in education forced by the pandemic. Zoom will not go away. Consider how we can change willingly, revise local units, get younger retirees involved, get our name out, and invite community. Chuck Hellie spoke of the changes in AMBA especially changes as they offer trips again.

10:15 A break with more coffee and fruit, then we heard from legislative candidates Gene Pelowski and Carla Nelson. Carla expressed a need for early learning scholarships and teacher recruitment and retention. Gene was concerned about faculty and programs lost in high schools. Every high needs classes in employment skills such as electrical and carpentry. Carla was disappointed the tax bill did not pass. Gene said conference committees could have gotten the work done. Both agreed to elimination of the tax on Social Security.

After an 11:30 lunch we reconvened at 12:20 for TRA and PERA (has a new name) updates and handouts given by Jay Stoffel and Amy Strenge respectively.

A 1:15 break was followed by Humor THAYER-apy by Edna Thayer.

1:30 Curt Hutchens has been following closely our pension plan from its establishment through the efforts of Ethel Percy Andrus. The NRTA (National Retired Teachers Association) was started in 1947. In 1954 Minnesota joined. In 1954 with the with the help of Illinois and California she started AARP. Curt is passionate about the sustainability of our organization. This cannot be done on the cheap with just volunteers. We need a full time office staff, and upgraded technology and a more attractive newsletter.

2:15 REAM Legislative committee members, Tim Moynihan and Lonnie Duberstein had virtual meetings at the Capitol during the pandemic. They will do in person meetings again at the Capitol but could have virtual meetings involving REAM members.

2:45 Fatima Said told her story of becoming a Bosnian refugee. She hated to leave her country, but it was becoming too dangerous. Her son was already in Winona on a study visa and insisted, "Come to America". Fatima did not know English, was afraid of religious discrimination and wanted to stay closer to Bosnia, but came with her husband and daughter. She found many helpful people and loves America and is proud to be a citizen. She founded Project Fine to help others.

SERAM November 23 Meeting Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 8:50am by President Barb Hunter. Members in attendance were: Barb Hunter, Kay Morcomb, Kathryn Lastine, Keith Larson, Lyle Olson, Don Leathers, Ben Baratto, and Margie White. Sharon Baratto, Don Zwach, Phoebe Praxl and Edna Thayer were absent.

Minutes were printed in the newsletter and approved as printed. Ben Baratto distributed the treasurer's report in Sharon's absence. The total Balance is \$13,332.55.

Local meeting format change was discussed. There was concern about holding meetings on Zoom versus in person or hybrid. It was noted that SE Co-op has a hybrid meeting and is successful. Ben Baratto noted that 23 of Winona's members ask to be called for meeting reminders. It was also mentioned that email is not always a reliable method for meeting notifications. Democrats' control of The House and Senate is a positive and helpful for our pension support. Mike Nelson, pro-pension, was elected. Tim Moynihan will keep us up to date.

A newsletter editor is needed. There is a stipend of \$100 per newsletter. The articles do not need to be formatted. They are sent to Deb. She will have the paper newsletter printed. She will also do the web site. A vice-president is an open position as well. Please reply to Barb Hunter if interested or want more information. Don Leathers has agreed to chairing the health and legislative committees.

REAM is considering Zoom meetings and exploring executive direction. (Curt Hutchins is retiring.) A part time executive director, and a part time secretary may be hired. The executive director must be knowledgeable in pension aspects, AMBA, and will arrange meeting agendas, conduct Zoom meetings when necessary, help plan conferences and work behind the scenes on conferences. (The 2023 REAM conference will be hosted by the Willmar unit). The executive director should be a metro person, making it easy to travel to meetings. The Executive director would be hired prior to the secretary. The full REAM board will meet until decisions are made to hire an executive director. It was suggested to keep the paper newsletter.

The SERAM Fall conference is looking into a new venue due to rising rental costs. There was a loss of \$815.30 this year. A SERAM board member donated \$350.00, which brings our loss down to \$465.31 Food prices have gone up as well, thus registration may be increased in 2023. Several speakers were suggested. An increase in dues was also suggested and will be discussed to vote on at a later meeting. It was suggested that AARP members spouses are eligible as potential members Teachers nearing retirement need to be informed of the importance of joining REAM and how it protects pensions. Meeting with teachers in a group setting was suggested. Also suggested was informing the public that the government is not paying our pension, we, the school district, and investments fund it.

Lyle Olson made a motion to adjourn. Keith Larson seconded it. The meeting was adjourned at 10:25am. The next board meeting will be Feb. 15th.

Margie White Respectfully Submitted

Fall 2022 SEREAM Legislative Report

Jay Stoffel, TRA Executive Director, and Tim Maurer, Deputy Executive Director for TRA, spoke to SEREAM members at the Health and Legislative Conference held at the International Events Center in Rochester on October 19. Assets, ratios, assumptions, accrued liabilities and benefit analysis were part of their presentation that used PowerPoint slides to drive home the point that our pensions, and the systems that support them, are in good hands. My role as SEREAM's newly-appointed Legislative Chair is to break down the above "pensionomics" into language we can all understand.

First off, financially speaking, TRA did extremely well in fiscal year 2021 with a 30% return on investment. However, as anyone with a portfolio knows, 2022 has not been quite as kind to investors. TRA's return thus far is coming in at roughly -6.4% for the fiscal year. Signs suggest that the downturn might be easing a bit, but this has been a disappointing year so far for the State Board of Investment (SBI). However, its 10 and 30-year investment returns continue to hover around 8.5%, a figure higher than the expected rate of return of 7.5%. The investors at SBI continue to outperform their colleagues in other states.

In October, Mansco Perry III retired as ED/CIO of the State Board of Investment after serving in that role since 2013. During Mr. Perry's tenure at SBI, its portfolio has increased to more than \$130 billion. His steady hand working for Minnesota's public pensions will be missed. Mr. Perry was replaced by Jill Schurtz, who previously directed the St. Paul Teachers Retirement Fund Association. Ms. Sturtz formally began her duties at SBI on October 3 of this year. All of us who support public pensions in Minnesota are confident in her abilities and extend our best wishes to her as she launches a new career as CIO of the State Board.

Directors Stoffel and Maurer also presented findings on a study, and associated issues, that directly affects actives and retirees in Minnesota. The discussion centered around the preparatory work done last session concerning possibly re-establishing the Rule of 90.

TRA received hundreds of emails from around the state inquiring about the rule. Its directors are currently reviewing the rule's history, data on its usage, trends in neighboring states and other benefit improvements including lower retirement age, higher benefit formula and other early retirement options. Many human resource directors in Minnesota public schools feel that re-establishing the Rule of 90 could be a powerful recruitment tool for attracting new teachers. It, and other related issues, promise to be a heavily discussed topics in the upcoming legislative, budget-setting session.

Finally, a tasty potpourri of interesting pension facts from the fall conference: 85% of TRA retirees live in Minnesota. Annual pension benefits in our state are at \$4.7 billion. 205,220 retirees receive a pension benefit in Minnesota. And a total of 648,494 pension members, active and retired, live in Minnesota. Those are significant numbers for our state's wellbeing.

So,... next time someone you know "raises an eyebrow" about how public pensions are a drain on Minnesota's economy, tell 'em the facts. "We worked for them, we paid for them, we deserve them." And they're GOOD for Minnesota and our fellow Minnesotans.

Don Leathers

Health Report “Please Pass the Oregano”

-Don Leathers

In today's health-crazed environment of youth-preserving nutrients, weight-loss supplements, receding hair-line remedies and all sorts of products boasting (or masking, take your pick) man-made, artificial ingredients, it's comforting to know that there are natural products out there that can make us feel good and live a more healthy life.

One such natural ingredient is a mainstay of the Mediterranean cuisines of Greece and Italy. More precisely, you may have some of this versatile item--oregano-- packed away in your kitchen's spice drawer. You might sprinkle oregano flakes on chicken, use it in marinades or stuffings, or garnish a salad with some fresh oregano leaves. Pizza, lasagna and other Italian dishes are frequently enhanced by more than a small pinch of oregano. Oregano packs a whole lot of flavorful punch into foods we all enjoy daily.

A lesser-known form of oregano that can be included in your diet is Essential Oregano Oil. From a scientific standpoint, oregano oil contains carvacrol, a plant compound that breaks down protein layers in a virus to destroy it. Oregano oil also contains other compounds that are both antifungal and powerful antioxidants. These elements fight to remove harmful toxins from our bodies.

Oregano oil has been purported to have multiple health benefits. It has high levels of antioxidants, helps build immunity, has been shown to lower cholesterol and can help to ease an upset stomach. Oregano oil is a proven antibiotic when it comes to fighting bacteria. The oil can also be applied topically as an effective pain reliever.

I frequently use oregano oil to promote daily oral hygiene. A single drop of the oil on a dab of toothpaste has the power to fight plaque buildup and improve gum health. A mild caution: too much oregano oil can cause a burning sensation, so go easy on the drops and have a small amount of mouth rinse available, if needed. Oregano oil mouthwash is also available to ensure fresh breath and clean teeth.

Oregano oil is a natural ingredient with many positive qualities. Relatively inexpensive, it's worth trying if you want to maintain a healthy lifestyle. And don't we all?

Oh, and yes, definitely keep eating pizza, lasagna...

2023 SEREAM EDUCATOR AWARD

Although the deadline for nominations and resume information for the 2023 SEREAM Educator Award isn't until January 31, 2023, now is a great time to decide whom you wish to nominate and start the process. The SEREAM award follows the REAM criteria and is based on the following four main points:

1. Personal endeavors as a school educator while employed.
2. Promotion of the causes of education within the community.
3. Service to schools and communities as a volunteer.
4. Service to retired or other educator groups at the local, division and/or state level.

The nominee must be a member of SEREAM.

Letters of nomination should include the following information:

1. Name, address, E-Mail, and phone number.
2. Education (place, dates, degrees)
3. Teaching or school related (places, level of work, dates)
4. Date retired.
5. Honors received, Organizations, Offices held, etc.
6. Volunteer activities (church, community, education related, etc.)
7. Experience other than school related.
8. Service to retired and other educator groups at local, division, state and National levels.

Nominations may be emailed or mailed to the educator award committee chairperson, Edna Thayer at ednathayer@gmail.com or Edna Thayer at 7 Roots Beach Lane, Elysian, MN 56028. Nominations may also be given to one of the other committee members: Nancy Reynolds, and Jeanette Bergler.

There is an old saying that the course of civilization is a race between catastrophe and education. In a democracy such as ours, we must make sure that education wins the race.

John F. Kennedy

All opinions are not equal.

Some are a very great deal more robust, sophisticated and well supported in logic and argument than others.

Douglas Adams

Learning is like rowing upstream,
not to advance is to drop back.

Chinese Saying

GIFTS AND MEMORIALS

Save the Date

SERIAM Spring Conference Wednesday, April 19th
Hosted by RARE (Rochester Area Retired Educators)
at the Rochester International Event Center near the airport
Details and registration form will be in the Spring Newsletter.

NEW AT THIS CONFERENCE

Invite your AARP friends to this conference.

Jay Haapala from AARP Minnesota will be one of our speakers.
He has a presentation on the relationship between AARP, REAM, and SERIAM.

Other speakers are not committed yet, but as always there will be updates on TRA and PERA is now affiliated with the PUBLIC EMPLOYEES PENSION COMMITTEE and called PEPC.

Someone knowledgeable on the topic will explain Ranked Choice Voting and answer questions about its use in Minnesota.

There is always an opportunity to join SERIAM. New members joining now will be on the mailing list to receive the Spring Newsletter that will have details about the conference and a registration form.

SERIAM 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 SERIAM.

Membership year: September 1, 2022–August 31, 2023

The newsletters can be found at SERIAM.org.

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EDUCATORS ASSOC. OF MN
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