

SEREAM

Newsletter

Fall 2024

President's Message: Barb Hunter

Fall is arriving soon! It seems to come earlier every year and I am never ready for it. Fall brings changes in weather and in routine, but also some annual events. One such annual event is the SEREAM Fall Health and Legislative Conference which will be held on Wednesday October 16 in Rochester at the International Event Center, near the airport. If you have never attended, please join us this year and make it an annual event. It is a great opportunity to learn about your pension and how it is invested. We will have the new MN State Board of Investment Chief Investment Officer, Jill Schurtz explaining what she does. The Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement chair, Representative Vang Her will give an update. We will also have representatives from TRA and PERA providing pension updates. Our morning begins with a representative of the Rochester Police Department sharing with information on driving while impaired. We have a variety of informative speakers and hope you are able to join us.

Each local is asked to bring a door prize to the conference. Please note that you are asked to designate your lunch choice on the registration form.

SEREAM is also going through changes. Some of our board members have served for many years and are simply tiring out. We need other people to step up and take a place on the board. I believe that all current board members would agree that serving on the SEREAM board is informative, fulfilling, and fun. The board meets every 3 months in Rochester. If anyone is interested in serving on our board, PLEASE do not hesitate to call me 507-440-4923 or email me hunterbarb41@gmail.com.

Our next board meeting is to be Wednesday, November 20, 2024. We will try to hold most board meetings on a Thursday.

Minutes of SEREAM Board Meeting on August 22, 2024

SEREAM Board Meeting was held August 22, 2024, at Homestead Village. Members present were Sharon and Ben Barrato, President Barb Hunter, Kay Lastine, Edna Thayer, Al Thon, Margie White.

President Barb Hunter called the meeting to order at 8:58am. Minutes from the May meeting were approved as read. Ednar Thayer moved to approve the minutes and Ben Baratto seconded.

Treasurer, Sharon Baratto reported a balance of \$10,511.59. Ben Baratto mailed dues reminder letters. He received renewals from twenty members. Three members renewed for five years.

Newsletters have been sent to those in arrears for two years. There was a discussion regarding sending newsletters to members and those who are one year in arrears. No decision on this issue was made at this time.

Several chapters have been experiencing difficulty in remaining active. We discussed this decline in active chapters and chapter members. SEREAM is seeking officers for this forthcoming year. We are asking members to consider taking a more active role in SEREAM.

One of the primary purposes of SEREAM is to maintain a vigilant watch on our pensions. The percentage of TRA being fully funded and the percentage of earnings on investments is vital information for our members. It is information that is used in determining the outcome of our pension's health and future, as well as future payments to members. It was suggested that these numbers be more readily available and presented to members, so they are advised of our pension's state. Ben Baratto, Winona's Legislative Chair, asked for percentage numbers from Al Thon, REAM Treasurer.

The Fall Conference will be held in Rochester at the Convention Center on Oct. 16th. The agenda, speakers, and meal choices were discussed. Registration including meal will remain at \$30. Each local will be asked to bring a door prize. A complete agenda and information will be included in the next newsletter.

Winona will host the 2025 Spring Conference.

Our next Board meeting will be held Nov. 20th at Homestead Village in Rochester.

Ben Baratto moved to adjourn the meeting, and Al Thon seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 10:19 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Margie White

SERAM Legislative Report

Fall 2024

by Don Leathers

Because we are between legislative sessions, not much news is coming around concerning the Pension Commission and new information that affects retirees. So, with that in mind, I have decided to review some of the data that TRA staff presented attendees at the SERAM Spring Conference. The presentation referenced here was made by Jay Stoffel, TRA Executive Director, and Holly Dayton, Legislative Liason.

As of the Fiscal Year ending on July 1, 2023 (the most recent data), TRA's funding ratio (assets vs. liabilities) was at 76%, down from 81% in 2022. TRA's most recent Asset Value was targeted at \$26.7 billion with an unpaid liability of \$8.3 billion. The TRA funding projection lists June 2049 when the fund will be 100% funded.

The plan's funding comes from three sources: employee contributions (7.75%), employer contributions (8.91%) and direct state payments (0.58%). The State of Minnesota made a one-time contribution to TRA of \$176.1 million in 2023. In addition, if you recall, in January retirees received a lump sum COLA of 2.9% in addition to the previously scheduled 1.1% COLA. Finally, the Normal Retirement Age (NRA) was reduced from 66 to 65 years. However, further work needs to be done to lower the retirement age to a more realistic 62. That is a heavy lift at the legislature because of the large expenditure it would involve.

The State Board of Investment (SBI) is the entity that manages public pension dollars in the state. Currently, the market value of all SBI investments is \$146 billion. As of July 1, SBI's year-to-date portfolio performance was pegged at 12.3% and its 5-year gains were at an impressive 9.2%. This is encouraging news because market performance during the Pandemic Years was an abysmal -12%. It is this robust investment performance by SBI, coupled with the employee and employer contributions that makes plan solvency by 2049 a distinct possibility.

Fun Facts: 85% of TRA retirees live in Minnesota
\$4.7 million is paid annually to retirees
205,220 retirees receive a pension benefit
648,494 TRA members live in Minnesota
TRA retirees average between \$24K and \$32K in yearly benefits

The SERAM Fall Conference will be held in Rochester on October 16. We have an outstanding group of speakers that day that will cover pensions, law enforcement and state demographics. It will prove to be a "Don't Miss" event. Speakers include:

Jay Stoffel, TRA and Doug Anderson PERA directors. Jill Schurtz, SBI Director, Rep. Kaohly Vang Her, Chair of the Legislative Commission on Pension and Retirement and Jeff Howison, Senior Analyst at the State Demographic Center.

Please mark your calendars for October 16. We need you at SERAM!

SERREAM Fall Health Report Forest Bathing

---Don Leathers

Our daily lives can be hectic affairs. Socializing, shopping, attending concerts, movies and grandkids' school events. Just because we've retired doesn't mean we've slowed down the pace. Ever feel like you're burning the candle at both ends and running yourself ragged? It's more common among us Old Jet Setters than you might think.

Reading a book, pouring yourself a glass of refreshing wine, practicing yoga or lounging on a deck chair in the backyard are all great ways to relieve stress. Now there is another way to combat the tensions that accompany everyday life. It's called "forest bathing." You don't need soap or shampoo or a bath tub to receive the benefits of the classic Japanese stress reliever. What you do need, though, is a good pair of walking shoes (and hiking poles, if you're so inclined), two willing legs and a patch of woods large enough for you to take a stroll in.

Forest bathing, also known as *shinrin-yoku*, is a therapeutic practice whereby a person connects with the simplicity of nature in a woods or natural setting. The practice was developed in the 1990's as a reaction to the technological advances in Japanese society at the time and the ensuing crash that left its people often disconnected and moorless. Its aim is to promote social-emotion health and well-being.

The first component of forest bathing is finding a natural environment, preferably a wooded area or forest large enough to walk through and experience the grandeur of the trees and foliage. Much of forest bathing has to do with sunlight and how it is filtered through leaves of the trees.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, 19th century English poet, captures the essence of this natural light in his poem, **Pied Beauty**, when he writes: "Glory to God for dappled things--." The word "dappled" perfectly captures the forest bathing goal of witnessing the patches of light as they filter through the trees and alight on the forest floor.

Sight is an important aspect of forest bathing, but so, too, are the senses of sound and smell. As you walk the forest path, listen for sounds of life beneath the forest canopy and breath deeply, taking in the special smells that are nature. It can be a sensory delight. Marsha and I recently walked several trails in the Smoky Mountains and received the benefits of forest bathing. The foliage was deep green, dense and redolent with natural fragrances, a wonderful counter to the blue skies and golden sunshine that filtered throughout the dusky forest. We were lucky enough to encounter Wild Turkeys, a couple of white-tail deer and, amazingly, a Black Bear, along with her two precocious, frolicking cubs.

Forest bathing has been proven to have several health benefits. 20-minute walks a few times a week can improve sleep quality and mood, the ability to focus, decrease stress and blood pressure and promote a sense of well-being. To get the most out of your forest adventures, be mindful and turn off your devices. Slow down and look at the small details around you. Perhaps find a place where you can sit quietly and immerse yourself in that "dappled" nature that is so affirming.

Autumn is one of the best times of the year for getting into the woods and enjoying its sights, sounds and smells. Make an appointment today to get out there and take a much-deserved forest bath. And leave the pressures of the world behind.

SEREAM Legislative & Health Conference
Rochester Event Center 7333 Airport View Drive SW
Rochester MN 55902
Wednesday October 16, 2024

Agenda:

8:30-9:00 Registration- coffee, juice, & rolls

9:00 Welcome by SEREAM President Barb Hunter

9:00-9:45 Impaired Driving, Rochester Police Department

9:45-10:30 Representative Vang Her, Legislative Committee Pension Resources Chair

10:30-10:45 Coffee break and Time to Stretch!

10:45-11:45 Jay Stoffel, TRA and Doug Anderson, PERA share pension information

11:45-12:15 Jill Schurtz, State Board of Investment

12:15-1:00 Lasagna Lunch

1:00-1:10 HUMOR THAYER-APY with Edna Thayer

1:10-1:15 REAM Trips- Chuck Hellie

1:15-1:20 REAM Co-President John Huisman

1:20-1:30 Stretch Break

1:30-2:15 Dr. Aaron Komodo, Sr. State Demographer

2:15-2:45 REAM Legislative Representatives- Tim Moynihan and Henry Carbone

2:45 Wrap -up and Door Prizes

We will open with a representative of the Rochester Police Department informing us of how the new marijuana law has changed law enforcement procedures. We have several people in a variety of positions sharing pension news! It's a chance for us to learn more regarding how investment of pensions is done and how it affects us. Edna Thayer will provide us with some humor and Chuck Hellie will show us some trips we can take. Dr. Komodo from the Minnesota State Demographer's office will explain to us how population growth or lack of can affect us. REAM legislative representatives will give views on current legislative items. Remember, this is an election year and it is very important to VOTE.

Each local is asked to bring an item for the door prize. Please remember to designate which lasagna you would like for lunch when you register. Deadline is October 4th! Hope to see many of you there in attendance.

AWARDS

Congratulations to two SEREAM members who will be receiving the REAM Educator Award in St. Cloud on September 30 at the REAM Convention. They are Mark Sybilrud from Elysian and Mary Osborne from Faribault. It is well deserved.

There are many others in SEREAM who are deserving of this award. The nominations for the 2025 SEREAM Educator Award aren't due until January 31, 2025, but may be received any time. Now is a good time to nominate that special educator while you are thinking about it. A quick summary of the criteria is someone who has contributed a lot to education and educational organizations as well as contributing to the community. SEREAM follows the same criteria as REAM. The recipient must be a SEREAM member and the nomination needs to include contact information. Nominations may be submitted to any of the three committee members: Nancy Reynolds from Winona, Jeanette Bergler from Rochester, or Edna Thayer from Elysian. Edna's e-mail address is ednathayer@gmail.com. Her snail mail is: 7 Roots Beach Lane, Elysian, MN 56028.

**We hope you will join us for the
Fall Conference in Rochester MN. Oct. 16th.
It is always great to see old friends and make new friends.**

**Please note that you need to pick a choice of
Meat or Meatless lunch this year.**

PLEASE CHECK YOUR RECORDS!!

**HAVE YOU PAID YOUR DUES FOR
SEPTEMBER 2024 THRU AUGUST 2025?**

**CONGRATULATIONS TO THE NEWLY RETIRED EDUCATORS!
PLEASE ASK THEM TO JOIN YOUR LOCAL AS WELL AS SEREAM
AND REAM. THINK ABOUT GIFTING A MEMBERSHIP!**

Conference Registration Form
REGISTRATION FEE OF \$30 includes lunch.
Please make lunch choice
Register by October 4.

Name _____

Check all that apply

Guest ___ Member: AARP ___ REAM ___ SEREAM ___ Local ___

Meal choice: Meat Lasagna ____, Vegetarian Lasagna _____

Address _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Above contacts needed in the event a storm forces cancellation.

Make checks payable to SEREAM.

Mail registration form and check to: Margie White
705 West Wabasha
Winona, MN 55987

SEREAM Membership Form

Complete and mail this form 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, 2024–August 31, 2025

The newsletters can be found at SEREAM.org.

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