



Allegheny County Retirees Association **NEWSLETTER**

March 2015

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The long road to the 2015 COLA:

Over the past year and a half, I addressed the Retirement Board four times requesting a COLA for Allegheny County retirees—in November 2013, April 2014, June 2014 and again in November 2014. Roger Westman did the honors in August, 2014. Because retirees had gone five years without an increase, I asked the Board to approve a raise of \$25.00 a month. When the raise was finally approved—

in February, 2015—it was \$5.00 short of our requested amount.

We were then assured that it was really a \$40.00 package, to be paid out over six years: \$20.00 now, \$10.00 in two years, and another \$10.00 two years after that—assuming certain “benchmarks” were met. The problem, of course, was that nowhere were those

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SAVE THE DATES

April 15

Luncheon Meeting with Joe Negri

May 5

Pittsburgh Botanic Garden Walk

Late May

Place flags to honor Veterans

June 17

Picnic at West Mifflin Park

SUCCESS! COLA EFFECTIVE FEBRUARY 26, 2015

By Ginny Bowman and Roger Westman

The letter from John Weinstein last month brought good news to Allegheny County retirees. The increase of \$20.00 per month in our monthly pension benefits was the first increase in five years. Many thanks go to Pat Cray, ACRA President, for initiating the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) request back in 2013. Pat has attended many meetings of the Retirement Board of Allegheny County (RBAC) and testified several times regarding the COLA. Her leadership and vision are the foundation of our success! Roger Westman, ACRA Sec-

retary, testified twice at the monthly RBAC meetings. Rich Fitzgerald commented that the Retirement Board “heard you”, meaning the testimony Pat and Roger gave on ACRA members’ behalf. The petitions submitted by members were collected and presented to the Retirement Board, conveying persuasive messages. Each individual who submitted a petition deserves credit and thanks. The end result benefited all fellow retirees. Sincere thanks to Pat and Roger and to each retiree who returned a signed petition!

The letter informing retirees of the increase in pension benefits also mentioned the possibility of continuing “to award COLAS if certain benchmarks within the fund are met in the future.” There is reference to working with the Pennsylvania Legislative Delegation to consider bonuses instead of payroll adjustments. To date, ACRA Board members have been unable to obtain additional information about these issues and the minutes of the January Retirement Board meeting when this action was taken have not been posted on the Retirement Board’s website. Stay tuned!

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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"benchmarks" explained. Wouldn't you like to know what they are and what criteria will govern their operation?

John Weinstein's letter goes on to say "[the RBAC] "is working with the Pennsylvania Legislative Delegation" to characterize future COLAs as bonuses. If the Board is using "bonus" to describe a one-time payment, severed from the pension system, that isn't good. A "bonus" is not going to add to the overall value of your pension, as a COLA would.

These are questions that need to be answered before we can assess where we stand. One thing is for sure, however: the pension fund is healthy, and retirees shouldn't have to beg for five years to get a modest cost of living adjustment in their pension checks.

By the way, thanks to Ginny Bowman for presenting the stack of over 1,000 questionnaires to Retirement Board President, John Weinstein, at the November 2014 RBAC meeting. Mr. Weinstein directed that all questionnaires be scanned and each RBAC member receive a complete set. And thank you to retiree Ray Diehl, who attended the November RBAC as a show of support for Ginny and me. Greatly appreciated, Ray.

Programs for 2015:

Based on your feedback, the [ACRA] Board has revamped the luncheon and program schedule for 2015. We will only have one spring luncheon—but it's a good one! **On April 15, we will welcome Pittsburgh musical legend, Joe Negri,** to the Doubletree in Greentree. Joe will share highlights from his musical career and, yes, he will play some tunes. We expect a good turnout for this event, so be sure to get your reservations in early.

Next activity on the calendar will be our now annual visit to the **Pittsburgh Botanic Gardens, on Tuesday, May 5, 10:00 a.m.** Docent and former Allegheny County employee, Lynn Heckman, will lead our walking tour. Plan to join fellow retirees for lunch afterwards (restaurant TBA). Price of the walking tour will be \$10.00.

The end of May, we'll once again partner with a veteran's group and plant flags in honor of Memorial Day at one of our local cemeteries. I suspect many of us have, or have had, a family member who served in the Armed Services. This is a small way for us to pay tribute to those men and women. We'll have lunch locally. Watch for further details closer in time.

In June, we're trying something new—a **picnic!**—in a different part of town. We've reserved Shelter #1 at West Mifflin Park **for Wednesday, June 17**, where we're planning a day of games, good food and fellowship. There is plenty of parking near Shelter #1, it is close to public rest rooms, the ground is level—and made to order for the activities we've planned for your enjoyment.

Skip forward to **September 16, our first fall luncheon back at the Doubletree.** We've invited **Brad Rigby and Paul Halliwell from Cowden Associates**, the actuarial firm that advises the Retirement Board. Brad and Paul will answer your questions about the factors they consider in making their recommendations to the Retirement Board every year.

October is a double-activity month: **On October 14 we'll sponsor a Walk 'n' Talk of Homewood Cemetery**, just in time for Halloween! Then on **Wednesday, October 21, we're back at the Doubletree for our Healthcare 2016 preview.**

The new coverage terms will be available by the time we meet; this is your chance to ask questions of our expert before you have to choose your healthcare plan for the new year. Additionally, nominations for ACRA officers will be entertained from the floor at the October luncheon (term of office—2016-2018).

November 18 is the date of our Annual Meeting; it is also the day when you can take advantage of meeting one-on-one with a healthcare consultant who can advise you on the best medical plan for your particular medical needs. By appointment only. Additional information TBA.

And, finally, **Wednesday, December 9—our annual Christmas Party!** We work hard to make it a special day for you. Got any ideas for its improvement? Let us know. We'd welcome your input.

We've received a number of queries about our membership cards, members wondering why they haven't received theirs, questioning whether theirs got lost in the mail. Your ACRA Board considered the continued usefulness of those cards (there really is none), weighed against the cost of printing them, and decided to discontinue them altogether. So no cause for alarm (but thank you for reminding us to tell you the reason).

That's all the news for now. Hope to see you in April. I've got my fingers crossed for warmer weather. A little sunshine wouldn't hurt either!

In the meantime, a happy St. Patty's Day to you, and a Happy Easter and Happy Passover, too!



KEEPING AN "EYE" ON LONDON

By Roger Westman



Never having been to England before, the first thing I did when visiting London was to go to the "Eye." The London Eye is a giant Ferris wheel, 440 feet tall, with 32 climate-controlled glass enclosed pods situated on the edge and over the Thames River. Each pod could hold up to 25 people for the 30 minute round trip for a bird's eye view of the city; however, I shared my ride with just ten or twelve others. The ride gave me an orientation to the city. From it I could see the Houses of Parliament with Big Ben, Westminster Abbey, Buckingham Palace, St. Paul's Cathedral and numerous museums as well as skyscrapers, some with unusual shapes. Knowing where things were helped me keep my wits about me in this bustling city in which public transportation excels. Also impressive were the number of tall cranes visible in the distance where the building craze is in full swing. This is a city on the move while keeping its traditions well protected.

When on the Eye I asked which way the Thames was flowing, but I was told it flows in either direction depending on if the tide is coming in or going out. At some times of the day there are high stone and concrete walls visible along the

banks; at other times the water is up near the top of them.

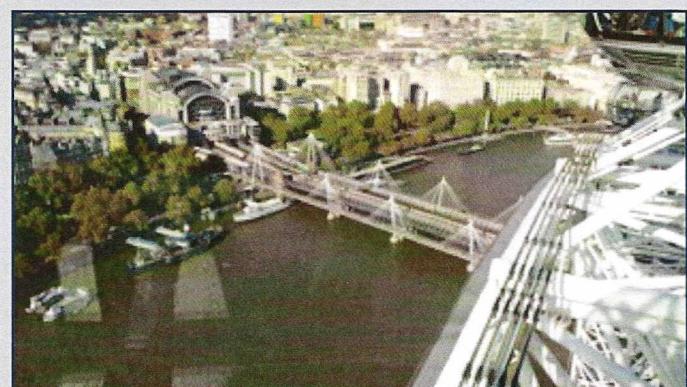
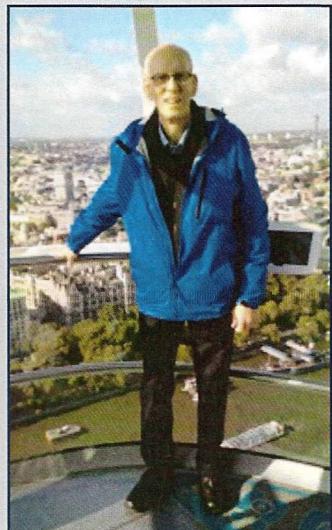
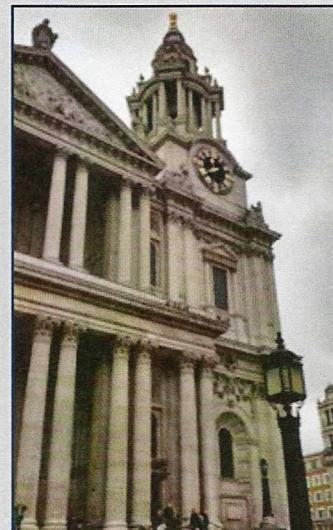
The ride on the Eye was followed by a cruise on the Thames in a boat (one of many) designed to carry tourists. From the boat I could better see some of the fanciful designs of the modern skyscrapers already built. Londoners have nicknames for them like "the Bullet", "the Shard", and "the Cheese Grater." These stand near some very old historic treasures displaying a mix of eras.

After an all too, but deliberately, brief visit to the British Museum to see the Elgin Marbles (many disappointingly corroded) and the Rosetta Stone (black and intriguing), I stepped out of history and walked across the pedestrian Millennium Bridge to the Tate Modern. This museum of modern art is built in a former power house and uses the space well. I searched for a Calder Mobile among other art and finally found a small one in a nondescript passage. The large main hall of the Tate could use a Calder Mobile like that found in our Pittsburgh Airport, but I don't think they care about my opinion.

One thing very nice about London museums is that they are free to the public, except for a few special exhibits inside. Another great museum is the Victoria and Albert Museum (the V+A). True to its name, it takes one back to the great art of the Victorian era.

Against some advice freely given, I insisted on visiting Westminster Abbey because it is so often in the news. The lines could be long but my timing was good and I quickly got in and obtained a self-guided tour recorded on what looked like a large cell phone. Most visitors were walking around gazing at the many monuments with this device held to their ears. It is a bit surreal to be with so many folk and almost nobody talking to each other. I have to say the advice I was given was sound. Although the main sanctuary of this abbey (it is not a church) was beautiful, there is a disadvantage of allowing the royalty a right of burial here for themselves family, friends and supporters. Add to that those who have distinguished themselves for Britain and you have a building overly crowded with graves and memorials—underfoot, on walls and filling side chapels to the point they can't be used due to the many coffins squeezed in.

Far better was St. Paul's Cathedral, where the memorials take second place to worship and the beauty of the religious art.



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In Memoriam

ARNOLD, BETTY	11/07/2014
BAGNATO, JOSEPH	01/30/2015
BARROW, BERNICE	01/13/2015
CHARLIER, DOLORES J.	12/25/2014
COBAN, JOHN A.	01/22/2015
COHEN, HARRIET	01/04/2015
CUMPSTON, FRANCES T.	01/20/2015
DEEP, RAYMOND C.	11/16/2014
DOBSON, MARJORIE L.	01/22/2015
DREVES, WILLIAM C.	01/05/2015
EASSIE, JOSEPH W.	01/12/2015
FIX, ARTHUR H.	12/21/2014
FLAHERTY, JOHN F.	01/24/2015
GRAHAM, CHARLES R.	11/01/2014
HANEY, DELORES L.	11/17/2014
HILINSKI, DANIEL W.	11/04/2014
HIRSCH, JAMES F.	01/24/2015
JENNINGS, MARTHA	12/01/2014
KANCZES, HILDA M.	01/16/2015
KISSEL, GABRIEL J.	11/28/2014
LENTZ, HARRY R.	01/17/2015

LIS, NORBERT S.	01/22/2015
MARX, ALBERT J.	12/26/2014
MAZZENGA, ANTHONY	01/27/2015
MLINAC, MARY LOU	01/03/2015
NALLY, PAUL R.	11/20/2014
NATALE, MARIA V.	12/25/2014
O'KELLY, ANDERSON D.	01/23/2015
ORENYAK, EDWARD	12/28/2014
PENZ, LEO E.	01/17/2015
PETRELLI, RICHARD A.	12/18/2014
PFEIFFER, RICHARD F.	11/09/2014
PICCINNI, NANCY M.	12/21/2014
RITENOUR, EDWARD O.	01/10/2015
SAMPLE, JEAN O.	11/15/2014
SCANLON, JAMES E.	11/05/2014
SHAFFER, CAROLINE D.	11/23/2014
SILVESTER, MILDRED J.	11/17/2014
SMITH, STANFORD	11/03/2014
SOLOMOND, HILDA A.	12/09/2014
WARD, THOMAS J.	12/19/2014
ZILKO, FRANCIS S.	01/10/2015

KEEPING AN "EYE" ON LONDON

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Later in the week I arrived there again via the "under-ground" at the plaza outside on Sunday morning, early enough to enjoy some of the change ringing of the bells that continued on for the longest time. The British know how to do change ringing where the many bells are rung in precise mathematical sequences to the delight of the ear. Truly stunning in its design, St Paul's with its large dome is also steeped in history, but much of it is displayed in the undercroft below. It was refreshing to attend an Anglican service there.

Saturdays are when Westminster Palace is open to the public for tours of the Houses of Parliament. The place is a prime example of respecting and preserving tradition. It was fascinating to visit the grand rooms that I've seen on TV news programs where debates are held. I was overwhelmed by the display of gold that covered and surrounded the throne at one end of the House of Lords chamber where royalty would sit when present. The stunning effect it had will stay with me for a long while.

PERSONAL NOTES

Belated thank yous to ACRA members who helped count ballots for the Board of Directors election last fall. The committee was chaired by vice president Joe Scorpion and included Jackie Deshields, Ray Diehl, David Gerlach, Marge Lubawy, Bob Meussner, Elaine Mycoff, Bill Ortmann and Rosemary Prostko. The help was much appreciated.

Mary Nolan SC was elected in November to the ACRA Board of Directors. She has resigned due to serious health issues. We send our best wishes for her recovery and gratefully acknowledge her contributions to ACRA in the past.

Our condolences to the family of Harry Lentz who passed away early this year. Harry was a strong supporter of ACRA, most recently by providing the music for our "Name That TV Show Theme Song" game last fall.