



Allegheny County
Retirees Association

MARCH 2014

Newsletter

P.O. Box 5335 • Pittsburgh, PA 15206-0335 • 412-539-9307

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

A LOT OF INFORMATION TO CONVEY TODAY.

Our COLA request. In my last Report, I told of my intention to appear at the November Retirement Board Meeting and ask the Board to grant retirees a \$25.00 a month cost-of-living increase in their monthly pension payouts. My heartfelt thanks to those nine members who attended the November RBAC meeting in a show of support.

Because of the timing of the last Newsletter (it came out too late for the November Retirement Board meeting), I asked for all those who supported this initiative—the \$25.00 a month raise—to attend the December RBAC meeting, when the Board's decision would be announced. I told you how important it was for retirees to fill the room, to send a message to the RBAC that our constituency mattered. Well, fourteen of our members attended—not forty, or fifty, or 100. FOURTEEN. As it turned out, the Board did NOT announce a COLA. All I could do under the circumstances was go to the microphone and express retirees' disappointment over their denial of a raise. But the absence of a substantial coalition spoke volumes.

But I intend to carry on the fight. For Phase II of the campaign, I'm asking for anyone who receives a monthly pension payment of \$600.00 or less to send me your contact information (P.O. Box 5335, Pittsburgh, PA 15206, my attention), and I'll get in touch.

And to those fourteen retirees who did attend the December RBAC meeting—I was unable to get everyone's name, but you know who you are—we, all of us, owe you a debt of gratitude for taking the time and making the effort to go downtown when you could have been doing other things. Thank you!

An increase in the contribution rate: At the December RBAC meeting the Board did announce an increased contribution into the Pension Fund of 1/2% [of salary] for active employees, matched

HAVE YOU CHECKED OUT ACRA'S WEBSITE?

Enter **ACRetirees.org** into your browser to find the latest information about luncheons and the walk 'n talks. See the ACRA logo in color and explore past issues of the newsletter, read the fascinating history of ACRA, and how to contact us.

Save the Dates

LUNCHEONS

Wednesday, March 19

Mildred Morrison, Director

Allegheny County Department on Aging
Services and programs for Seniors

Wednesday, April 16

Timothy Johnson, Executive Director

Allegheny County Employees'
Retirement System
Life Insurance Coverage

Wednesday, May 21

AC Dept. of General Investigations
Preying on the Elderly: Identity Theft &
Consumer Fraud

WALK 'N TALKS

Tuesday, April 22

Pittsburgh Glass Center

Tuesday, May 6

Pittsburgh Botanic Garden

by 1/2% by the County. This is a crucial first step if the retirees are ever to receive a COLA. Why? That contribution rate determines, in part, how well-funded the pension fund is; the other component is the behavior of the stock market, which, of course, is beyond our control. So giving credit where credit is due, a shout-out to the RBAC for this move in the right direction.

The life insurance dust-up. You've received my Memorandum by now, so you know the course of action ACRA followed. Because union-represented employees decided to pursue their own remedy, our attention focused on people who took advantage of buy-out offers, or those whose earnings qualified them for higher levels of coverage. We collected as much of the original data as was immediately available—documents people were given when they retired that spelled out their levels of life insurance coverage—and forwarded those to our law firm. (Thanks to everyone who responded to our request for your retirement information!) The law firm researched the legal issues, then sent a letter to the RBAC demanding that original life insurance policies be honored. The last information I received indicated that the Retirement Board favored restoring original levels of coverage; but because the money would have to come from County coffers, Human Resources had to sign on. Unfortunately, my deadline for this article falls before we are likely to receive word of their resolution; but you should receive notification—not from us, but from the Retirement Board or HR—once a decision is reached.

Our new Administrative Assistants. Last edition we asked for anyone interested in this part-time position to contact us. I asked Vice President, Joe Scorpion, to chair an Interview Committee, comprised of Acting Treasurer, Angela Conte, and Board member, Diane Welsh. The Committee was so impressed with both candidates, that they recommended both be hired! And we did just that.

Katherine (Cassie) Barton will handle traditional office tasks—helping with mailings, simple bookkeeping, preparing information for Board meetings—while Matthew Neimeyer's computer and technology skills will be used to maintain and improve our Web site.

So welcome, Cassie and Matt—and thanks to Joe, Angela and Diane for their service.

Upcoming programs. Our spring luncheon series will kick off on March 19, when our speaker will be Mildred Morrison, Director of the Allegheny County Department on Aging. We circulated a questionnaire to luncheon

guests last fall asking for speaker suggestions, and Ms. Morrison was one of the top vote-getters. In addition to being a source of information on Allegheny County-provided services and programs, the Department on Aging publishes an annual Directory of services. I've asked Ms. Morrison, to bring along a supply of those for audience members, so be sure to reserve your spot. Vice President Joe Scorpion will be handling introductions that day in my absence, so thanks in advance to Joe for his always-great job.

Then in April (April 16), Timothy Johnson will appear to address Allegheny County life insurance coverage. Hopefully, this whole controversy will be behind us by April, but Mr. Johnson is certainly the person best able to answer your questions.

On May 21, two detectives from the Allegheny County Department of General Investigations will speak on the subject, "Preying on the Elderly: Identity Theft and Consumer Fraud." If you listen to the news, you know the damage this crime imposes on its victims. Don't be one of them! Get the right information and protect yourself.

Our first walk 'n' talk of the season will take place on April 22, with a tour of the Pittsburgh Glass Center and a glass-blowing demonstration. Right now we're looking for a luncheon spot where we can meet afterwards. The cost of the tour is \$10.00, and there is an attendance requirement, so reservations are necessary. You will be receiving more information on this activity in our April postcard.

And I've saved the best for last. The price of lunches at the Doubletree will remain the same through spring--\$17/\$20 with reservations, \$20/\$23 without. The increased price structure I warned you of last edition will not go into effect until fall—one more reason to make your reservations now, and join your fellow Allegheny County colleagues for good food and stimulating presentations.

Good-bye for now. Keep yourself warm in this very challenging weather. I look forward to seeing you soon.



ADVENTURES IN SOUTH AFRICA

I think most people have a list of things they would like to do. The modern- day term is Bucket List. This could be anything from hang gliding, para sailing, deep sea diving or traveling to distant places. Like most people I have my list of things I would like to do but because of fear, time, finances or other constraints I really never thought I would be able to.

One thing on my list was a trip to South Africa. Surprise, surprise. About a year ago my niece announced that she was being transferred to South Africa. Immediately my mind started to make plans and I asked her for a reservation (staying at her apartment would save a considerable amount of money). So last October my sister and I packed our bags and headed to South Africa. This is a 16 hour flight out of Atlanta. So you better like flying. To avoid any mishaps and insure we were both on the same flight, I first flew to Florida, where my sister lives, and then we both flew to Atlanta and on to South Africa.

When we arrived in South Africa, I was surprised. It was not at all what I had pictured in my mind. My niece is living in Sandton, which is outside of Johannesburg. Since she was working, we had the advantage of having her husband to take us around and she would join us on the weekends. Johannesburg and Sandton are just like any major city in the States. They are bustling with people working, shopping and going about their daily lives. We were able to take the commuter train into Johannesburg and pick up a bus for touring the city and surroundings. The area is made up of the extremely wealthy and extremely poor with some in the middle. Part of the tour took us to Soweto, which is a little outside of Johannesburg. This is the site of the Student Uprising in 1976, the memorial to Hector Pieterse, and also where Nelson Mandela had lived. My sister and I also went to Lesotho Cultural Village. Everyone asks “weren’t you afraid to be out wandering around by yourselves”. The answer is no. The people are friendly and helpful. When we ventured out on our own, we could always stop and ask for directions or information and they were always willing to help. There are 11 official languages in South Africa; luckily English is one so there was no language barrier. One evening my niece took us to an authentic African Market, which was quite an experience.

On our first weekend trip, we flew down to Cape Town which has a very well developed waterfront area for

shopping and eating. We took a tram up to the top of Table Mountain for some hiking and great views. From there we rented a car and drove down to Boulder’s Beach to see the penguins and then drove to Cape Point, Cape of Good Hope and up along the Atlantic coast. The coast is absolutely beautiful. We were forever stopping to take pictures.

Our second weekend we drove to Sun City, a resort near the Pilanesberg National Park where we picked up a safari to see the wild animals. We also took an elephant safari; you actually ride the elephant on the safari. At the resort where we were staying, we came face-to-face with some baboons. They were just walking up the sidewalk looking in the trash cans for food.

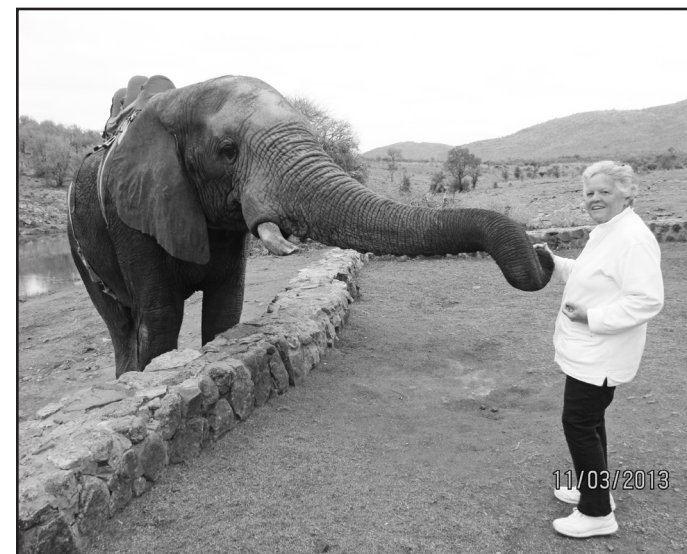
The last weekend we headed north through farming and mining industries on our way to Graskop. One of the road hazards we encountered were monkeys who were crossing the road. We also encountered some potholes that would put those in Pittsburgh to shame. You could lose a car in some of them. Even the 18 wheeler trucks were zig zagging along the road to try to avoid them. Here we found some of the most spectacular views, waterfalls and Blyde River Canyon.

On our way back to Sandton we encountered a severe hail storm which destroyed the windshield and damaged the rest of the car. That evening we also had a severe lightning storm. Otherwise the weather was great. It never was too hot or too cold. They were just coming out of winter into spring.

Our last trip was into Pretoria for the Voortrekker Monument which commemorates the Pioneer history of Southern Africa and the history of the Afrikaner and Fort Schanskop, then to the airport for another 16 hour trip back to Atlanta.

By Diane Welsh

Editor’s Note: Have you completed something on your “bucket list”? We’d love to hear about it! Have you celebrated a special birthday or anniversary? Do you want to brag about your grandchildren? Send the information to me at gbowman3150@gmail.com or to ACRA, P.O. Box 5335, Pittsburgh, PA 15206-0335. We’ll include an article you write, or I’ll write it for you.



The Allegheny County Pension Preservation Bill

The good news is the Allegheny County Pension Preservation Bill, also known as the anti-spiking bill, has passed the legislation process and was signed by the Governor on December 23, 2013. The bill had bipartisan support and was sponsored by house majority leader Mike Turzai and house minority leader Frank Dermody. This legislation only affects future employees hired after February 21, 2014.

The changes are as follows:

- Eliminates overtime in excess of 10% of base pay.
- Changes the final formula to the highest 48 months compensation of the last 8 years of service.
- Increases vesting from 8 years to 10 years.
- Reduces annual accruals to 2% by increasing the number of years of service from 20 years to 25 years for all new employees.

The estimated reduction in future plan liability by Cowden Associates in \$1.113 billion over 50 years.

Thanks to all the ACRA members who wrote to their legislators in support of this bill. It took an effort from so many people to have the bill pass. Special thanks to Mr. David Mayernick who was the Retirement Board lobbyist. Harrisburg bureaucracy is not an easy place to work.

By Ted Puzak

Have you paid your ACRA dues for 2014?

If not, look for another notice in your mailbox soon. The membership rolls will be updated and those who haven't paid will be dropped in the near future. We hope you'll continue to be a member of our Association.

2014 Pension Dates

Plan to receive your monthly pension on the following dates this year. All are the fourth Thursday of each month, except November and December which are Wednesdays.

March 27	August 28
April 24	September 25
May 22	October 23
June 26	November 26
July 24	December 24

Always keep several get-well cards on the mantle...so if unexpected guests arrive, they will think you've been sick and unable to clean.

- Author unknown

We could certainly slow the aging process down if it had to work its way through Congress.

- Will Rogers

My luck is so bad that if I bought a cemetery, people would stop dying.

- Rodney Dangerfield



It is with sadness that we report the passing of **Bill Gallagher**, former Vice President of ACRA and elected representative to the Retirement Board of Allegheny County. He served diligently on the Board where he fought to get pension increases for our retirees and to protect the pension plan. He retired in 1990 from the Plumbing Division,; Allegheny County Health Department, where he worked as Grants Manager.

Bill was a 1945 graduate of Central Catholic High School and he served three and a half years in the U. S. Navy. He was a loyal member of ACRA for over twelve years and will be missed by his fellow retirees. May he rest in peace.

By Joe Scorpion

In Memoriam

AGOSTINELLI, GUIDO11/14/2013
BRYANT, GLADYS11/22/2013
CLARK, MARGARET.....11/11/2013
CONRAD, MARTHA.....09/24/2013
CONTE, JUDITH11/17/2013
CURTIS, JEAN03/05/2013
DANSEVICH, ANNA.....09/11/2013
DAVIDSON, DONALD10/16/2013
DENK, ANDREW03/15/2013
DEROSS, IRENE12/22/2013
DITTMAN, HELEN.....12/04/2013
DONAHOE, MARY12/12/2013
DORN, FLORENCE11/04/2013
FISCHETTI, DONALD12/14/2013
GALLAGHER, WILLIAM12/06/2013
GIORDANO, LOUIS.....10/09/2013
KASAK, MARGARET.....09/19/2013
KETTER, LOIS.....01/05/2014
KINDLER, MARY12/25/2013
KONESKY, MARIE.....12/11/2013

LAND, VIRGINIA.....12/07/2013
LONG, JOYCE09/18/2013
MCNAMEE, JOSEPH12/25/2013
MOELLER, MARION.....10/09/2013
MONTELEONE, BARBARA...12/27/2013
MOULIS, JAMES.....12/12/2013
MULL, CATHERINE10/18/2013
NATOLI, JOE11/13/2013
NAVALINSKAS, VIOLET12/06/2013
PUGNE, ELVIA10/26/2013
REDERER, RONALD.....09/10/2013
REGAN, JOAN.....10/12/2013
RICHARDS, TREVOR.....10/05/2013
SCHOLZE, KRYSTYNA11/06/2013
STALWORTH, SANDRA.....10/29/2013
TOTH, SAMUEL10/09/2013
VILLANI, WILLIAM11/25/2013
WOREK, LEONA.....10/18/2013
ZAGORSKI, RUTH.....12/02/2013