

# SCRTA NEWS

Summit County Retired Teachers Association

THE SUMMIT COUNTY AFFILIATE OF Ohio Retired Teachers Association March -April 2022

## President's Corner



Dear SCRTA Colleagues,

As I drove away from our first Management Board meeting of 2022, I felt a refreshing joy in my heart. Was it the fact that the snow was beginning to melt or the fact that our SCRTA BOARD MEMBERS were full of some new ideas and suggestions? Yes, that was it! New ideas that seem so workable and positive. So, watch out SCRTA members, the snow is melting faster and we have awakened from the long winter solace.

Our meeting on April 5, 2022, will feature a program to delight all members and guests. One of our most loyal members will be performing. Make sure you read the inside pages to see who it is!

I would like to invite anyone who is interested in attending our Management Board Meetings to feel free to come and observe. We meet at the Akron Education Association Building at 681 North Main Street! Our meetings start at 9:30 A.M. and usually end before noon. The summer hours are different because the AEA Staff members come in later to work. The next Management Board meeting will be April 19, 2022! Coffee is always available thanks to the AEA Staff!

There is one position open at this time which we would like to fill. It is the Information/Protective Services Position. This is not an elected position but an important one to all seniors. If you love to read

and write about keeping yourself healthy, where the best vacations are for seniors, or for warnings about anything that could be harmful for us...etc., this could be for you. Maybe you would like to write an article for our newsletter? Please contact me at [mlswartz129@gmail.com](mailto:mlswartz129@gmail.com) and let me know if you are interested.

I would like to thank Vicky Shaw, Carolyn Vogenitz, Chris Bean, Joan Frase, and our Past President Paul DiMascio for stepping up and helping us prepare for our next General Meeting. Yes... we are missing our Hostess and Faithful Member, Ruby Winter, who is still needing to heal from health issues. Can you believe that we needed so many volunteers to cover all the "small things" that Ruby would do for us for a General Meeting? Ruby has been the ultimate hostess for our Guy's Luncheon Meetings for years. Please keep her in your prayers as she is recovering.

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## President Continued from Page 1

I have been in contact with Guy's Restaurant for Ruby, and we will keep our tables six feet apart and only 6 people at a table. I would advise all members to wear their masks if they are walking around the restaurant. If you are being alert to the medical news ... less people are getting covid. Life is surely getting back to normal...but still too slow for most of us.

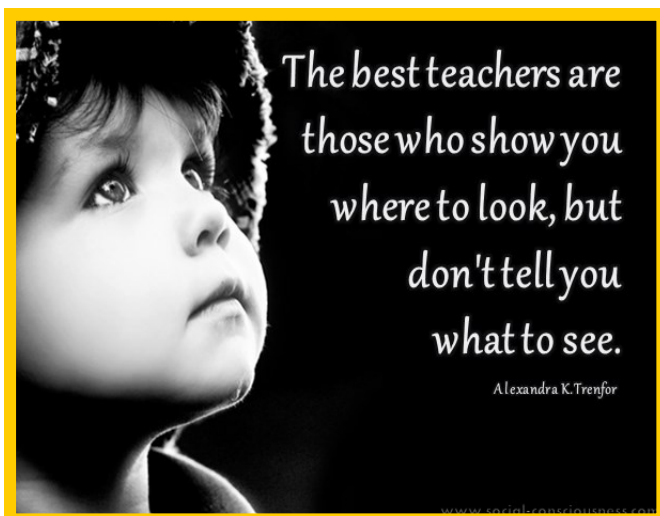
We will not have ticket numbers called for prizes, but Carolyn will have your name in a basket. If you bring donations for our charities, ask her for another piece of paper so you can write your name on it.

Please have your reservations in early and try not to have to pay at the door. We are really wanting some new members from our many school districts in Summit County! Don't forget to bring a guest to check out our organization. There will be a special gift for the member who brings the most guests.

Since you have an Irish President with a German Surname ... I must remind you that on March 12, 2022, the St. Patrick's Day Parade will be stepping off in downtown Akron at 12:00 P.M. Then, on St. Patrick's Day (March 17) ...don't forget to wear some green or else a leprechaun might pinch you.

As always,

*Mary Lou O'Swartz from the Coyle, Finnin, Kelly Families in Ireland*



Come and bring a friend to the next SCRTA General Meeting and Luncheon on April 5th, 2022. This program has been planned to include a very special guest. Akron's own Lennie Green will be performing in concert, some of the most beautiful selections ever. He is a retired Akron Public School teacher who has thrilled audiences throughout the United States and beyond. If you have never heard this incredible voice, then you are in for a special treat. You don't want to miss this experience.

Also included during the brief general business session will be an important informational update from 2nd Vice President Bill Siegfert. He will share the latest information coming from Columbus on changes that could impact the future of our retirement.

Mark your calendar for **April 5th**, at Guy's Party Center on Waterloo Rd, beginning at 12:00 noon. Don't forget to send in your reservation soon. Looking forward to seeing you.

*Johnnette S. Curry*



## APRIL 5th SCRТА PROGRAM PRESENTERS



**Lennie and Maxine Green**

Lennie Green is a native of Akron, Ohio. He is the fifth of twelve children. A graduate of Akron Central High School, Lennie attended Akron University where he received his BA in Music Education, and later his Master's degree in vocal performance. He taught vocal music for 7 years and Elementary Education for 25 years. He retired from full time instruction after 32 years from Akron Public Schools. Lennie tutored for 8 years after retirement at Boys Safe Landing, through Project RISE. He also tutored children in Math and Reading at three Akron Elementary Schools, fully retiring after 40 years in education. Now he enjoys golfing, singing in various choirs, and writing music and children's books.

Maxine was born in Dothan, Alabama, the oldest of 7 children. A graduate of Akron South High School she also received her BA in English from Akron University, and taught English and Language Arts in Akron Public Schools. After 32 years, she retired then tutored 11 years at Battered Women Shelter Step 2 through Project RISE. She enjoys sewing, crafts and sending cards.

Prior to the covid pandemic, Lennie and Maxine enjoyed traveling, entertaining, and serving at the Arlington Church of God. They are the proud, thankful parents of 4 wonderful children and 6 lovely grandchildren. This November, Lennie and Maxine will celebrate 52 years of marriage.



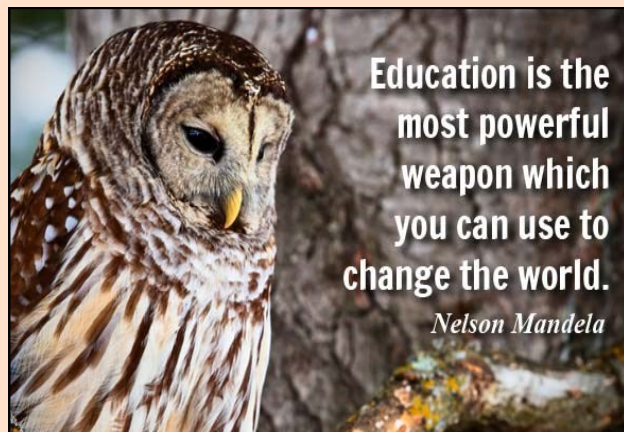
I would like to acknowledge the new members since I have taken over as Membership/ Assistant Treasurer. They are as follows:

Mary Ann Donatelli  
Janette Scott  
Judith Dimego  
Nancy Rossi  
Marie Yu Lam  
Roberta Rogers  
Larry Butler  
Richard Willis  
Karen Patella

At this time, we have 407 members. Please contact me if you are not sure if you are up-to-date with your dues or if you know of a potential new member.

***Jackie Hovey***

*Membership/Assistant Treasurer*  
*jhoveysue@gmail.com*







## Bill Requiring Cost of Living Increases Introduced in Ohio Senate

Sen. Teresa Fedor (D – Toledo, Lucas County) introduced **S.B. 280** on January 12, 2022. If passed, the bill will amend Section 3307.67 of the Ohio Revised Code which is the current law covering cost of living increases for retired STRS members. As now written, the law states that STRS shall pay a 2% annual increase. The same law, however, allows STRS to increase or decrease the 2% payment. It was under this provision that STRS reduced the COLA to 0% in 2017.

Under Fedor's bill, STRS would be required to pay the annual 2% COLA beginning July 1, 2022. The big difference between the current law and the proposed changes in S.B. 280 is that the annual 2% payment could be adjusted upward, but in no case could it be reduced to less than 2%. There is no provision in the proposed amendment to allow a reduction regardless of how dire the System's financial condition may become. The bill has been referred to the Senate Insurance Committee.

It is reasonable to be concerned about the consequences a mandated COLA payment may have on other benefits paid for by the System, or contribution percentages paid to the System by active members and employers. For that reason, we have submitted several questions to Sen. Fedor about her bill and are eagerly awaiting her response.

At this point, there does not appear to be bi-partisan support for the bill. While every senate Democrat is a co-sponsor, no Republicans are, although a few have expressed interest in the bill and are planning "to find out more" or "look further into it."

Additionally, legislative leaders of the state's two teacher unions—the Ohio Education Association and

the Ohio Federation of Teachers—were lukewarm at best when asked by Robin Rayfield at a recent ORTA town hall meeting if they support the bill. OFT's Darold Johnson said his organization has supported the introduction of S.B. 280 because "we need to have that conversation" (about a COLA). "While we support the conversation and we want to push the fund to figure out how to implement this, we think there are lots of different ways to get the revenues to do it. Board members need to talk to staff and figure out how to do it." When pressed by the host for a "yes" or "no," Johnson was interrupted as he began to answer the question. He nevertheless went on to stress that his organization represents active teachers as well as retired, and that active teachers want retirement plan improvements as well.

OEA's Robert Davis estimated the cost of a permanent COLA at \$13 billion. He noted that, "As we all know, if it wasn't expensive, if it was easy, STRS would be paying a COLA. We're for a COLA, but we think there has to be a way to pay for it." Davis emphasized increasing employer contributions to the pension fund, stating that there was "no other place to get the money other than from employers." He, too, was pressed by the host for a "yes" or "no" on OEA support for S.B. 280. His reply: "As currently written, we are not in support of 280 because there isn't funding to go with it to support the benefit."

To hear the complete comments of both gentlemen as well as those of others participating in the Town Hall, search "ORTA Town Hall" and follow the link.

### ***About that COLA Lawsuit...***

We have exhaustively covered the COLA class action lawsuit that was filed in 2019 by a pair of retired Cincinnati teachers. The suit was filed in U.S. District Court. In July, 2020, Magistrate Judge Bowman recommended that the motion to dismiss filed by the STRS and STRS Board members "be GRANTED IN FULL and that all claims be dismissed, with this case to be terminated from the docket of this Court." A year later, Judge Timothy S. Black adopted those

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recommendations.

The plaintiffs then filed suit in Franklin County Common Pleas Court on October 26, 2021, demanding a jury trial. The relief sought in the case includes (1) a declaration that the STRS Board has violated the U.S. Constitution, the Ohio Constitution and federal and state laws, (2) prohibiting and preventing STRS from continuing to ignore its obligation to pay the annual two percent COLA, (3) damages/restitution representing the amount of retirement benefits lost as a result of STRS's unlawful actions, (4) interest on lost benefits, (5) attorney fees and costs incurred.

As of this date and according to court records, the case is scheduled to be heard on August 14, 2023.

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### **My Opinion**

### **STRS Ohio Watchdogs?? How about STRS Ohio Mad Dogs.**

*Bill Siegfert, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President, SCRTA*

At the risk of drawing more attention to them than I'd prefer, I am driven to share my opinion of a group calling themselves the STRS Ohio Watchdogs. They have created a three-pronged presence on social media...Twitter, Facebook and a website. They list nine members of the "pack," all of whom are retired with the exception of Julie Sellers who is president of the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers. The pack includes retirees who belonged as teachers/administrators to the Ohio Education Association or the Ohio Federation of Teachers. Three of its most notable members are the plaintiffs in the COLA lawsuit (Bob Buerkle and Dean Dennis, both retired Cincinnati teachers) and Robin Rayfield, Executive Director of ORTA.

It strikes me that the COLA has become such a personal issue for the "pack" that it is virtually their sole focus despite the broader mission posted on their website. STRS management and Board members are relentlessly criticized. So is the Ohio Retirement Study Council (ORSC) which oversees all of the state's public pension systems. The Watchdogs

feed off a report for which ORTA paid \$75,000. The report's author, Ted Siedle, has frequently attacked STRS and ORSC as well. In the course of airing their grievances and complaints, Siedle and the Watchdogs have made claims or statements which are inaccurate, claims where they don't tell "the rest of the story" or claims for which they have no proof whatsoever.

A few examples will serve to make my point. During a recent public television interview by Karen Kasler, Mr. Siedle stated, "One of the key problems that STRS has is that they've lost the trust of their participants. School teachers don't trust them anymore." Siedle offered no evidence to support this claim; I'm comfortable betting that he has no more evidence supporting it than I have proving that the moon is made of green cheese. Watchdogs have made similar statements and have attributed certain "demands" to thousands of teachers and retirees without supporting evidence. To my knowledge, the only evidence that exists about members' attitudes toward STRS is reflected in the independent surveys STRS has commissioned over time, the results of which show high confidence in the system.

Watchdogs are constantly reminding their audience that STRS is the only pension system not paying a COLA. They don't tell you, however, what benefit cuts have been made by other Ohio pension plans in terms of COLA reductions and eligibility changes, or reductions in health care coverage provided by some of the other plans. And, in blatant disregard for the transparency and accuracy they so loudly demand from STRS, their webmaster continues to post the amounts of COLAs being paid by other systems for 2022, listing STRS alongside of them as an unqualified 0%. No such claim can be made responsibly insofar as STRS has yet to determine whether there will be a COLA in 2022. That determination will be made soon (as STRS promised it would do in 2017), and the prospects for a reinstatement of part or all of the COLA and other potential benefit improvements are encouraging, in

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# Scholarship News

It's scholarship time again! The Scholarship Committee intends to award a scholarship in Spring 2022. Applications are always available in the first newsletter of the year, as well as, on the website in February. If you know of a qualified graduating Summit County senior, with at least a 3.0 grade point average and intended major of education; or a college student already in the College of Education, please have them apply **before the April 1, 2022**, deadline. Please read below for an update from a thankful recipient.

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*Dear SCRTA,*

*I hope everyone is well. I just wanted to provide an update. I completed my last semester of classes this past fall and received all As and Bs. Cumulatively, I have a 3.7 GPA! I am currently student teaching in the Revere School District. I work with the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade bands in the morning, and the high school band in the afternoon. I am having a great time so far and I am really enjoying the experience. I will graduate in May. Thank you so much for your continued support these past four years. It means the world to me! Best wishes to everyone!*

*Sincerely,*

*Nicholas Ratay*

*2018 and 2021 Scholarship recipient*

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So, please realize the contributions to the SCRTA Scholarship Fund are definitely making a difference for the next generation of educators. The Scholarship Committee thanks you!



## **SCRTA MANAGEMENT BOARD**

**President** - Mary Lou Swartz (234-678-0747)

**1st VP/ Prog.** - Johnnette Curry (330-699-4123)

**2nd VP/Legislative Chair** - Bill Siegfert  
(330-819-4123)

**Past President** - Paul Dimascio (330-882-4738)

**Administrative Assistant** - Judy Mervine  
(330-745-7587)

**Treasurer** - Paul Green (330-733-7311)

**Asst. Treasurer/Membership** - Jackie Hovey  
(330-940-9147)

**Public Relations** - Ruby Winter (330-644-6886)

**Newsletter Editor** - Elaine Jarvis (330-607-0226)

**Travel** - Carolyn Vogenitz (330-645-9928)

**Web Master** - Leroy Martin (330-666-3984)

**Nominating Committee: 3 elected members**

Carol Caughron (330-745-1776), Micki Lavis (330-854-3054) and Phyllis Lewis (330-342-3550); **2**

**Members at Large** Informative and Protective Services—**OPEN; Community Service** - Christine Bean (330-784-4575)

**Scholarship Committee** - Vicky Shaw (330-773-5862) and Judi Hill (330-688-2512) Co-Chair

**Bulk Mailing** - Rozanne Emich (330-603-7660)

**Chaplain** - Rebecca Moore (330-497-9362)

**THE BEST WAY TO FIND YOURSELF  
IS TO LOSE YOURSELF  
IN THE SERVICE OF OTHERS.**

**GANDHI**

In my opinion.

Watchdogs have regurgitated ad nauseam Siedle's branding of the ORSC as a "failure" in providing the legislative oversight of the state's systems primarily because of a 2016 audit the Committee was supposed to conduct, but did not. The Watchdogs don't trouble themselves to explain to their followers why the audit didn't take place, although each of them surely knows why. As a result of the pension reform legislation passed in 2013, STRS began phasing in benefit changes over time (retirement eligibility changes, COLA changes, retirement contribution changes, etc.). Many of the changes occurred before and after the audit was scheduled to take place, and because STRS's financial condition was changing as each change became effective, it was decided that the audit should be delayed. (It is interesting to note that all of the changes STRS made in the name of pension reform, including the law applicable to the COLA adjustment, were supported by OEA, OFT and ORTA and approved by the Ohio House and Senate.)

Allow me to share just one more example. After the COLA lawsuit was dismissed by the U.S. District Court in August of 2021, the plaintiffs wrote, "Our COLA lawsuit against STRS Ohio is now filed in Franklin, (sic) County Ohio. Two months ago, Federal Judge Miller ruled that the case was best argued in Ohio." Now, we're all human and we all make mistakes, but Judge Miller didn't rule on anything. In fact, there is no Judge Miller in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Ohio. It was Judge Timothy S. Black who ruled, and he really didn't just rule that the case should be argued in Ohio. He dismissed the plaintiff's claims in their entirety and stated that with respect to one of the claims, his dismissal did not prevent the plaintiffs from pursuing the claim in the proper forum as legislated under ORC 3307.131, i.e., in Franklin County. I might be wrong, but it seems to me Judge Black may have been telling the plaintiffs they filed their case in the wrong court, at least as it applied to certain claims.

Finally, it appears to me that the Watchdogs group has become a forum for attacks against OEA by OFT affiliates in the group, and maybe OFT itself. ORTA appears to be siding with OFT. The evidence is not so subtle. During ORTA's February 2<sup>nd</sup> Town Hall, Dean Dennis, the COLA plaintiff, OFT retiree and ORTA Legislative Committee member, called for the ouster of the current STRS

administration and certain Board members, stating that he was "very upset with OEA's dominance on the Board and putting us in this position." All of that in the presence of an OEA legislative official who was invited and agreed to participate in the panel discussion! There have been other barbs directed at OEA-endorsed Board members over time, but nothing underscores the rift more than last year's STRS election. OFT-endorsed three candidates who were frequently mentioned on the Watchdogs web page while OEA-endorsed candidates were ignored. Of the three, only Rudy Fichtenbaum won election to the Board as a retired member. In my view, he was the Watchdogs' hero, the guy with an investment "plan" to restore the COLA, increase benefits, reduce contributions and blah, blah, blah. As it turns out, Fichtenbaum's plan was slammed by the STRS Board when it was submitted to them last November. And no wonder. It called for investing two-thirds of STRS's funds (\$65 billion) with a company that has, according to the chairman of the STRS Board, no investing track record, no staff, no clients and no money under management. A complaint or two appeared on the Watchdog page claiming the plan, when presented to the Board, was not given a fair hearing. Never mind that the Watchdogs didn't tell us about the total lack of experience of the company in question, or about the fact that STRS had passed previously on the plan as too risky, or that the company tried to get buy in from Ohio's pension funds more than two years ago, and that OPERS, the largest of Ohio's funds, passed on the proposal back then.

Again this year, the Watchdogs page is pushing petitions for three STRS Board candidates, two active and one retired. The retired candidate is one of last year's unsuccessful candidates, Elizabeth Jones from Cincinnati (where else?). The active candidates are Julie Sellers, Cincinnati Federation of Teachers president and Steve Foreman, Assistant Superintendent in the Zanesville school district. OFT has endorsed Sellers and Jones. As was the case last year, there has been no mention of any OEA endorsed candidates on the Watchdog website.

The point of this opinion column is to demonstrate that like other social media outlets, there is no assurance that posted information is fact versus opinion, or truth versus deception on the Watchdogs page. We urge all SCRTA members to keep this in mind, regardless of the source of the information they may find on the internet.

**Bill Siegerferth, SCRTA Legislation Chairman**

Summit County Retired Teachers Association  
452 Herbert Rd.  
Akron, Ohio 44312

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION  
U. S. POSTAGE PAID  
AKRON, OHIO 44309  
Permit No. 418

ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED

*March - April*



**2021**

SCRTA Website  
[www.summitcountyrta.org](http://www.summitcountyrta.org)

Leroy Martin - Webmaster  
[lmartin561@gmail.com](mailto:lmartin561@gmail.com)

### COMMUNITY SERVICE

At last November's luncheon, your donations totaled over 130 items. Due to your generosity, I was able to give to the Haven of Rest, Battered Women's Shelter and Safe Landing. Safe Landing was able to accomplish the following:

- Served 151 boys and 133 girls residentially and non-residentially
- 93% of youth exited to positive placement
- 93% of youth report satisfaction with programming, and 95% of parents reported satisfaction as well
- 723 counseling sessions were provided to youth, and 50 drop-in-residential counseling sessions were provided to non-residential youth and their families.

We do help to make a difference with our donations. Continue to do so, and thank you!

*Chris Bean, Community Service Chairman*



**April 19, 2022 ... SCRTA Management Board Meeting ... 9:30 am at AEA Bldg.**

**June 7, 2022... SCRTA /ORTA General Luncheon Meeting ... 12 noon at Guy's Party Center**

**July 12, 2022 ... SCRTA Management Board Meeting ... 9:30 am at AEA Bldg.**

*"A Teacher's Heart Never Retires"*



**SUMMIT COUNTY RETIRED TEACHERS'  
ASSOCIATION  
Scholarship**



The scholarship candidate must meet the following criteria:

1. Must have graduated or will graduate with at least a 3.0 GPA from an accredited high school (transcript with State Testing results required).
2. If a post high school student attending college, must have a 3.0 GPA (transcript required).
3. Must be pursuing an education degree.
4. Evidence of college enrollment must be submitted with the SCRTA application form (using format guidelines) to be considered for a scholarship.
5. The Scholarship Co-Chairman must receive the scholarship application no later than **April 1st** of the year of the application.
6. The Scholarship Committee will inform the winner no later than **April 30th** of the year of the application.
7. The scholarship winner will be notified and invited to be a guest at a Summit County Retired Teachers luncheon if held this year.
8. The applicant must be sponsored by a past or present educator.

The completed application must be submitted by **April 1, 2022**, to:

Vicky Shaw  
SCRTA Scholarship Co-Chairman  
At: 1372 Hammel St.  
Akron, OH 44306  
Or: vlps2657@sbcglobal.net

**SUMMIT COUNTY RETIRED TEACHERS  
ASSOCIATION  
Scholarship  
Application Format Guidelines**

1. Must be typed.
2. Must be double-spaced.
3. All sections of application must be complete.

Date of application \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant's full name \_\_\_\_\_

Street address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

High School \_\_\_\_\_ Graduation Year \_\_\_\_\_

GPA \_\_\_\_\_ (Enclose transcript, high school students only)

College/University to attend \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_

College University \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_  
(Enclose transcript)

Sponsor's Name and Phone Number:

\_\_\_\_\_

**Please include a typed document totaling 100 - 1000 words for the following four prompts:**

- A. Why are you pursuing a career in the field of education?
- B. Describe how your favorite teacher, or mentor, inspired you.
- C. Describe specific leadership experiences you have had.
- D. Explain any work experiences or community service activities in which you have participated.

**SCRTA / ORTA GENERAL LUNCHEON MEETING**

**Tuesday, April 5, 2022**

**Guy's Party Center**

**500 East Waterloo Road, Akron, OH 44319**

**12 Noon**

**Price: \$20.00**

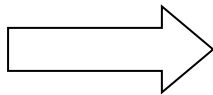
**DOOR PRIZES AND A SPECIAL PRIZE**

**Bring 5 or more items for the Community Service Project and receive an extra door prize ticket. There will be a special prize for the person who brings the most guests to this meeting.**

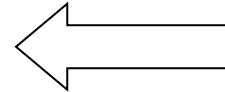
The meal entrées are Beef Tips, Chicken Paradise, and Rigatoni with Meat Balls. Along with the entrées, they will be serving potatoes, green beans, salad, rolls/butter, and desert. Coffee, tea or lemonade are included with your meal. Tax & tip are included.

**Clip this reservation form and send to: Carolyn Vogenitz, 3326 Waterside Drive Akron, OH 44319**

**Phone: (330-645-9928)**

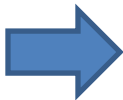


**LUNCHEON RESERVATION**



NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE # \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks **payable to SCRTA** and send to **Carolyn Vogenitz**. She must receive this reservation form and your check by **Friday, April 1, 2022**



**Our luncheon meetings are on Tuesdays!!**



**DUAL-MEMBERSHIP FORM FOR SCRTA & ORTA DUES**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_  
Street City Zip

SCRTA / ORTA DUAL-MEMBERSHP DUES \$40\_\_ (SCRTA \$10 / ORTA \$30)  
(Dual-membership required) YEAR YOU RETIRED \_\_\_\_\_

I am a SCRTA LIFE member \_\_\_\_\_  
I pay ORTA directly \_\_\_\_\_

I am an ORTA LIFE member \_\_\_\_\_  
School District \_\_\_\_\_

BRING THIS FORM WHEN PAYING DUES **MAKE ALL CHECKS PAYABLE TO SCRTA.**  
Check # \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**BY MAIL SEND TO: JACKIE HOVEY 1085 COOKHILL CIRCLE, AKRON, OH 44312**