

SCRТА NEWS

Summit County Retired Teachers Association

THE SUMMIT COUNTY AFFILIATE OF Ohio Retired Teachers Association March - April 2024

SCRТА AWARDS TWELVE TEACHER GRANTS

For the first time ever, SCRТА has awarded grants to active Summit County teachers. The twelve grants, in the amount of \$300 each, were made possible through member contributions, SCRТА operating funds and a very generous donation of \$1,000 from the Acme Fresh Market Foundation. We thank **Katie Albrecht Swartz** who serves as a Foundation Trustee and Administrator for her role in bringing about the support.



Grant applications were sent to every Summit County public school district last October with a mid-December application deadline. A committee of SCRТА members reviewed the applications. Members assigned a point value to each. The winning applications were the twelve with the highest cumulative point scores. Many thanks to committee members **Christina Haas, Leroy Martin, Mary Austin, Jean Dickey** and **Sandy Baer**; we hope they agree to serve again next year!

This year's winners and their districts are: **Bren Sheaffer**, Copley High School (Copley-Fairlawn), **Hallie Eland, Theresa Hochberg** and **Amanda Wojtusik** (3rd grade team), Northfield Elementary (Nordonia), **Kim Strebler** and **Karen Morse**, DeWitt Elementary (Cuyahoga Falls), **Mark Jamison**, Coventry High School (Coventry), **Amy Owens-Hartman**, Springfield High School (Springfield), **Rebekah Rethmel**, Coventry Elementary (Coventry), **Kim Zeiner**, Woodridge Elementary (Woodridge), **Tina Hartong**, Springfield Junior High School (Springfield), **Adam Virgei**, Copley-Fairlawn Middle School (Copley-Fairlawn), **Kat Skoff**, DeWitt Elementary (Cuyahoga Falls) and **Josh Harris** (2 grants), Copley-Fairlawn Middle School (Copley-Fairlawn). Congratulations to all!



SCRТА member Jean Dickey, center, a Cuyahoga Falls retiree, congratulates Dewitt Elementary grant winners Karen Morse (l) and Kim Strebler. Strebler and Morse work with 17 4th and 5th grade students with a reading disability. They are using their grant monies to purchase books to create a Decodable Readers Library.



Springfield Jr. High Teacher Tina Hartong is congratulated by SCRТА member Christina Haas. Hartong will use her grant to furnish "Hartong Lit Lounge with decorative pillows, seating pillows, a carpet, curtain lighting and a magazine shelf.



Springfield High teacher Amy Owens-Hartman, shown here with SCRТА'S Christina Haas, will use her grant to enable nearly 40 9th-12th grade students to participate in a field trip to Stan Hewitt Hall for a "Digital Photography Experience" in the Manor House and gardens.

President's Message



I truly hope that this newsletter finds you in good health and that 2024 has been good so far. The SCRTA team has been busy since our last general meeting in November 2023. First of all, I must send many thanks to all of the people who worked so well to make that meeting such a success. Secondly, I welcome aboard the new members who joined: Connie and Michelle Hathorn and Carla Schertz.

Summit County Retired Teachers Association (SCRTA) invites any educator who is retired from a public school system located in Summit County as well as any retired educator receiving benefits from any state teachers' retirement system. Membership in SCRTA provides the opportunity to join fellow retirees in local activities, community events, projects, fellowship at regular luncheon meetings, maintain professional contacts, make new friends, see former colleagues, and receive the latest information on what impacts your retirement. For more membership details please contact Jackie Hovey (jhoveysue@gmail.com).

Special thanks to Bill Siegfert and his committee for working on the new teacher grants program. Bill introduced this project last year and it was overwhelmingly accepted by the Management Board. Other members have shared enthusiastic remarks as well. Committee members, who selected the current grant winners, include Mary Austin, Sandy Baer, Jean Dickey, Christina Haas and Leroy Martin.

Well wishes are sent to Paul DiMascio, Paul Green, Judy Mervine, and Mary Lou Swartz, who were recognized in November 2023 for their many years of service on the SCRTA Management Board. They worked well, as a dedicated team, and will always be

greatly appreciated.

Don't forget to send in your RSVP for the next general luncheon and meeting on April 2nd, 2024, 12:00pm at Guy's Party Center on Waterloo Rd. Come and hear what's up and coming for SCRTA in 2024. I look forward to seeing you and please consider bringing a friend.

Stay healthy and safe.

Johnnette S. Curry, SCRTA President

Basile to Speak on Property Taxes, Reappraisal at April Luncheon



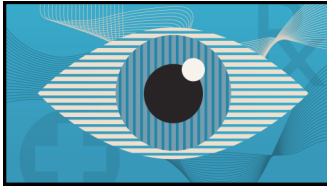
Dominic Basile, Director of Real Estate and Appraisal at the Summit County Fiscal Office, will be the guest speaker at SCRTA's April 2nd luncheon.

Following the 2023 reappraisal, Basile and his team hosted a series of meetings across the community to answer taxpayers' questions about the significant increase in home values and the effect of those increases on property taxes. There will be a question and answer period following Mr. Basile's remarks.

Members interested in attending the April 2nd luncheon at Guy's Party Center may complete and return the reservation form included in this newsletter.

"Every person can make a difference, and every person should try." – John F. Kennedy

"CATCH THE SCRTA VISION"



SCRTA leadership has been working in recent months to develop a mission statement which will include, in part, sponsoring programs we can fund in support of students and active teachers. For years, we have been awarding scholarships to public school students. This year was our first to offer classroom grants (see front page article) to active Summit County teachers.

Our ability to do both is limited, to a great extent, by the amount of operating income we collect from membership dues. With well below 100 annual dues paying members (the vast majority of our members opted to pay a one-time lifetime membership fee years ago), we collect less than \$2,000.00 annually.

We raise a relatively small amount of scholarship money each year through luncheon collection cups and very limited fundraising sales. Our goal is two \$1,000.00 scholarships per year. With respect to the grant program, we are deeply appreciative of the Acme Fresh Market Foundation for supporting this year's program with a \$1,000.00 gift. At a total cost of \$3,600, we needed to find \$2,600.00 to fund the balance of the program's cost. Out of that duty came an amazing discovery! The balance we needed to raise comfortably exceeded our annual dues income, so we decided to petition members to help personally sponsor the program. At last November's luncheon, we placed a small announcement at each table, asking members to make a contribution to the cost of the grants. The number of members who responded was disappointing—only nine—but the sum of their gifts—over \$1,000—was incredible.

What we've learned from this experience, we

believe, is that entities in our community will support our programs just as our own members will. We believe we need to be more consistent and informative in seeking financial support for both the scholarship and grant programs. We plan to be just that throughout this year.

Please consider supporting teachers and scholars when the organization seeks your support.

Bill Siegfert



2024 SCRTA MANAGEMENT BOARD

- President** - Johnnette Curry (330-699-4123)
- 1st VP/ Prog.** - Elaine Jarvis (330-607-0226)
- 2nd VP/Legislative** - Bill Siegfert (330-819-4123)
- Administrative Assistant** - Rebecca Moore (330-497-9362)
- Treasurer** - Bill Siegfert (330-819-4123)
- Asst. Treasurer/Membership** - Jackie Hovey (330-940-9147)
- Past President** - Mary Lou Swartz (234-755-1490)
- Membership Luncheons** - Micki Lavis (330-854-3054) and Phyllis Lewis (330-342-3550)
- Newsletter Editor** - Elaine Jarvis (330-607-0226)
- Web Master** - Leroy Martin (330-666-3984)
- Nominating Committee: 3 elected members**
Carol Caughron (330-606-6900), Micki Lavis (330-854-3054) and Phyllis Lewis (330-342-3550); **2 Members at Large: Community Service** - Christine Bean (330-784-4575) **Chaplain** - Open;
- Scholarship Committee** - Vicky Shaw (330-773-5862) and Judi Hill (330-805-5550) **Co-Chair**
- Bulk Mailing** - Rozanne Emich (330-603-7660)
- Travel** - Carolyn Vogenitz (330-645-9928)

Legislative and Legal Updates



The following is the latest news—as of the time this publication was printed—on a number of legal and legislative issues in which STRS is involved.

COLA Lawsuit: Well before becoming ORTA’s current president, **Dean Dennis** filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court along with fellow Cincinnati retiree **Bob Buerkle** challenging STRS’s decisions to eliminate the COLA. The case was thrown out of federal court after which Dennis and Buerkle filed a similar suit in Franklin County Common Pleas Court, circa October, 2021. Since that time, the court has been asked and has agreed to delay scheduling dates, including the date for the start of a jury trial, on three occasions. The current trial date is set for April 28, 2025.

A post on the “Members Only Facebook Page,” one of ORTA’s social media “partners” along with the “STRS Watchdogs,” pointed the finger at STRS as the villain responsible for the latest delay. ***In fact, all three date modifications have been the result of joint requests made by STRS attorneys and attorneys for the plaintiffs.*** This is public information available on the Franklin County Clerk of Courts website. **Judge Sheryl K. Munson** approved the latest joint motion on September 19, 2023.

Judge Munson, by the way, recused herself from this case on January 12, 2024. She did so because her stepfather is a retired Ohio teacher. The Judge stated that she felt she could remain fair, unbiased and impartial, but wished to avoid even the appearance of partiality.

Steen Removal: Last May, Governor **Mike DeWine** replaced **Wade Steen** as his appointment to the

STRS Board. Steen, counted by ORTA as among the “reform minded” board members needed to make STRS something other than the worst retirement system in the country, filed a lawsuit in the Ohio 10th District Court of Appeals claiming his removal was against the law. In early February, the court Magistrate hearing the case sided with Steen’s argument, largely because the threshold for removing an appointee from office for any type of misconduct was not reached.

In spite of ORTA’s suggestion that Steen’s removal violated Ohio law, the Magistrate’s ruling represents a recommendation to the court and does not become an official court ruling unless and until it is adopted by a panel of three judges.

HCR 6: Ohio House Concurrent Resolution 6 urges the U.S. Congress to repeal the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP). The Resolution was introduced March 14, 2023 and passed unanimously by the Ohio House on December 6, 2023. The Resolution is now before the Ohio Senate. It urges federal lawmakers to pass legislation (HR 82 and S. 597) eliminating GPO and WEP.

It would be helpful for members to write, email or call their State Senator and urge him or her to vote FOR HCR 6.

Neville Status: STRS Executive Director Bill Neville was placed on administrative leave in November after being accused of harassment, violence and other types of misconduct. The allegations were made in an anonymous letter, supposedly from an STRS staff member.

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost appointed an outside law firm to investigate the charges. Two experienced employment law attorneys have issued a five page report characterizing the claims as “largely without merit” and concluding that the anonymous letter contained multiple untrue allegations. Their investigation included interviews with more than 20 STRS employees who work with Neville and two former employees. The author of the anonymous

See Legislative, page 6

*Get Involved in this “Fun Fair”
Volunteer Opportunity!*



We've been approached by the Nolley Elementary School PTA (Manchester Local Schools) about volunteers for the school's annual fundraiser, "Fun Fair at Nolley." Nolley teachers and the school's principal are heavily involved, but additional help is needed. The Fair will be held on May 3 from 5:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Volunteers are needed to help Manchester High School students who will be in charge of the Fair's carnival-like games (ring toss, etc.) and activities.

This is a great opportunity to involve our group in a school activity that includes teachers, PTA members and, best of all, students! Those interested in volunteering should contact **Laura Strader** at laurac0509@yahoo.com.

Ronald McDonald House Charities



2024 SCRТА Pull Tab Project

Sign-up ... At a General Luncheon Meeting for plastic **zipper** bags and more details.

Full bags: Return them to a General Luncheon meeting for a small incentive prize and chances to win a larger prize this year.

Want to help but can't attend any General meetings? Call Chris (330-784-4575), Elaine (330-607-0226), or Rozanne (330-603-7660).

"Pull for the House!"

Membership

We welcome our new members: Carla Schertz, and Connie and Michelle Hathorn. It was great to see them and so many familiar faces at the luncheon. Attending our luncheons is only one way to become involved with our worthy causes. There is always room for members to be involved with awarding scholarship, grants and currently, SCRТА supports two community organizations ... Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC) and Shelter Care ... primarily by giving them toiletries, cleaning and paper products that are donated by our members at our General Luncheon meetings. We welcome help, a little or a lot!

Three fourths of our membership are Lifetime Members so when we get contributions from our Lifetime Members, it is greatly appreciated.

Your dues and contributions will help us achieve our goals, benefit current and future educators and ensure that you will continue getting our newsletter.

If there is an *asterisk by your name on this newsletter, your dues are due!

If you have any questions about your membership status, contact me.

Jackie Hovey, Membership Chairperson

jhoveysue@gmail.com

330- 940-9147

**VOLUNTEER
GET INVOLVED**



Legislative continued from page 4
letter remains unknown.

After reviewing the executive summary of the report, the STRS Board voted to keep Mr. Neville on leave through mid-May and offer him professional development in the meantime. We are not aware of any public record or information explaining the Board's reaction, or how individual Board members voted.

We can only hope that the investigators' conclusion are accurate and that the anonymous complaint filed against Neville is not merely another strategy by the disgruntled group of retirees using social media to spread misinformation about the Retirement System and many of its staff.

Employer Contribution: We reported in the last newsletter about a mutual, but to that point unsuccessful, effort by STRS, OEA and OFT to find a sponsor for a bill to increase the employer pension fund contribution which stands now at 14%. We mentioned that at the time, no one in the legislature seemed too anxious to get behind such an effort. Fortunately, STRS recently announced that it "has been meeting with legislators and stakeholder groups to generate support for this initiative," and that a bill may be introduced "as early as April." STRS plans to inform members how they can help bring about this much needed legislation.

Meanwhile, ORTA, which has repeatedly suggested that benefits could be restored and retirement service lowered with a "progressive board majority," index investing, and nearly fee-less investment guidance, has published a somewhat ironic and transparency-lacking statement on the employer contribution subject:

"ORTA is working with one state elected official to gain support for the employer increase at STRS. This is a tough argument to make as on one hand we are stating what ORTA perceives to be problems with the STRS system, and on the other hand we are asking for legislative help to bring in more money."

ORTA claims the "elected official" is "sympathetic to our plight regarding the loss of promised benefits ..." but "is reluctant to support more money unless reforms are made at STRS."

Somewhat odd for an organization constantly touting transparency to not disclose its mystery sponsor, much less his/her prerequisite reforms ...

Bill Siegfert, Legislative Chairman

SCRTA COMMUNITY SERVICE



RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE - AKRON

Kitchen and Pantry

Granola Bars, Microwave Popcorn, Mac N Cheese Cups, Peanut Butter Cups, Jelly Cups, Fruit Cups, Applesauce Cups, Individually Packaged Goldfish, Individually Packaged Chips.

House Supplies

Body Wash, Disinfecting Wipes, Snack-Size Zip Lock Bags, White Paper Reams, Scrubbin' Bubbles, Laundry Detergent HE (low sudsing), Dryer Sheets, Hand Soap Pumps, Hand Sanitizer Pumps, Paper Towels.

SHELTER CARE HOME PROGRAMS

Soaps, Shower gels, Shampoos, Conditioners, Deodorants, Toothbrushes, Toothpaste, Lotions, Tissues.

SAFE LANDING YOUTH SHELTER (new items)

Personal Hygiene items (same as Shelter Home), **Treats** for birthdays and special occasions ... (watches, jewelry, games); **Clothing** (NEW) (socks, underwear, sweat outfits, t-shirts, flip flops); **Activity Supplies** (card games, sports equipment, craft supplies), **Household items** (wash cloths, towels, pillows, blankets, storage bowls, twin sheets, etc.



An Ad Hoc SCRTA MARKETING TEAM was established in 2022 by the Management Board to help facilitate the rebranding of the Association. **Core team members** are Jackie Hovey, Bill Siegfert, Rebecca Moore, Leroy Martin, and Elaine Jarvis. **Direct advisory support** is currently provided by **Johnnette Curry, Rozanne Emich and Carol Caughron**. The Marketing Team will continue to work on the rebranding of SCRTA in 2024.

Plans are to continue to move forward to find ways to continue to reach more Summit County retired teachers. We will be continuing to focus in the areas of better communication (via Facebook, website, emails, and local newspapers) and by working to create a vibrant and active public relations team. Support for other specific nonprofit organizations in our community, and support for retired and active teachers, educators, and college students will continue to be a priority. Transparency and protocol, such as using Robert’s Rules of Order for the Management Board and General Membership Business Meetings will be encouraged and fully supported by the Marketing team.


The entire SCRTA Management Board has been invited to embrace the work of the Marketing Team. All SCRTA members are encouraged to join in taking active roles in the rebranding of our Summit County Retired Teachers Association by attending membership meetings, joining the Management Team, helping with Community projects, etc. We all know that "A Teacher's Heart Never Retires".

While the 2024 Marketing team projects will not be as intense as last year, we nevertheless will continue to strive to be creative and innovative. We also will be reviewing and further implementing some of the documentation that was distributed as hard copies to board members in 2023.

Elaine Jarvis, SCRTA Marketing Chairperson

Scholarship News


IT’S SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION TIME AGAIN!!



The Scholarship Committee thanks you for your generous contributions that enables SCRTA to fund scholarships to deserving students each year. This year’s application has been sent out to the various high schools in Summit County, posted on our website, and is enclosed in this newsletter.

Because of your participation in the **donation cups, 50-50 raffle, Double Good Popcorn Sale and the ACME Fresh Market Community Cashback Program**, we can fund two scholarships again this year. Congratulations SCRTA members for your dedication to our next generation of Educators!

Vicky Shaw and Judi Hill
Scholarship Co-Chairpersons



SCRTA GENERAL LUNCHEON MEETING

Tuesday, April 2, 2024

Guy's Party Center

500 East Waterloo Road, Akron, OH 44319

12 Noon

Price: *\$23.00

**The rise in cost is due to the increase in food prices for the restaurant.*

DOOR PRIZES AND A SPECIAL PRIZE

Bring 5 or more items for the Community Service Project and receive an extra chance to receive a gift card.

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: Micki Lavis 6106 Akron Ave., NW Canal Fulton, OH 44614
Phone: (330-854-3054)**



NAME _____ PHONE # _____

Please make checks payable to **SCRTA** and send to **Micki Lavis**. She must receive this reservation form and your check by **Friday, March 29, 2024**.



**MEMBERSHIP FORM for
SUMMIT COUNTY RETIRED TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION**

NAME _____ PHONE # _____

ADDRESS _____ / _____ / _____
Street City Zip

SCRTA MEMBERSHP DUES **\$20** _____ YEAR YOU RETIRED _____

SCHOOL DISTRICT _____ EMAIL _____

**MAKE ALL CHECKS PAYABLE TO SCRTA. CHECK # _____
BRING OR SEND THIS FORM WHEN PAYING SCRТА DUES.**

FOR ORTA MEMBERSHIP: VISIT <https://www.orta.org/plans-pricing>

I would like to volunteer: Scholarship _____ Luncheon _____ Leadership _____

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

Summit County Retired Teachers Association
82 Cedar Woods Dr.
Cuyahoga Falls, OH 44223

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

ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED

MARCH - APRIL



2024

SCRTA Website
www.summitcountyrta.org

Leroy Martin - Webmaster
lmartin561@gmail.com



Your donations from November 2023 were very abundant and generous. Following are portions of thank you letters from Ronald McDonald House and Shelter Care, Safe Landing for Boys and Girls.

Your gift of toiletries and wish-list items helps every family we serve find moments to relax and recharge during their child's medical journey. Thank You. **Ronald Mc Donald House.**

We are so grateful for your donation of various toiletries and paper products. Because of you, our kids know they are cared for. Thank you for your kindness and willingness to help our youth. **Shelter Care**

Christine Bean, Community Service Chairperson



April 2, 2024 (Tuesday) ... SCRTA General Luncheon Meeting ... 12 noon at Guy's Party Center.

April 16, 2024 (Tuesday) ... SCRTA Management Board Meeting ... 10 am at the AEA Building.

June 4, 2024 (Tuesday) ... SCRTA General Luncheon Meeting ... 12 noon at Guy's Party Center.

"A Teacher's Heart Never Retires"