

THE GRE A BULLETIN

JOURNAL OF NEWS AND REFLECTIONS FOR RETIRED EDUCATORS OF GEORGIA

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GRE A Remains Active During the Pandemic

Even during the Pandemic, when most activities ground to a halt, dedicated GRE A members across the state remained extremely active while taking all necessary safety precautions. To celebrate this accomplishment, we are dedicating this issue to local unit news submitted by units across the state. *(Editor's Note: Some submissions were edited for brevity. No photos were included so we could maximize content. All submitted photos have been posted on our Facebook page.)*

Berrien County REA held its meeting at the CASA Center on February 10, 2020. Using a Valentine theme, the banquet room was decorated by Andrea Perry and Pam Williams. Marcia Hughes presented the devotional and blessed the meal provided by Berrien Farm Bureau, Chaparral Rabola Boats, and State Farm Insurance. The sack lunches were prepared by "The Wire Rack." The program presentation was provided by Berrien High School Educator and Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) Advisor, Leigh Johnson. The title of her informative program was "Important Food Safety Rules." Members were informed that Georgia Retired Educators Association's Humanitarian project for the year was for "Walk to End Alzheimer's" and BCREA members have donated a total of \$690 for this project.

Bibb County REA. Past GRE A/BREA President, Myrtice C. Johnson, was sworn into office as one of the four new Bibb County School Board Members on December 17, 2020. Other retired educators who serve on the Bibb County School Board are: Dr. Thelma B. Dillard, Board's Treasurer and member Dr. Lisa W. Garrett.

Bulloch County REA wanted to show their appreciation to all teachers during this COVID-19 Pandemic. President Becky Renfro and Susan Taylor spoke to local farmer Joey Franklin who donated boxes of Satsuma oranges to all of the schools in Bulloch County.

Burke County REA members contributed \$500.00 to American Heart Association in support of its Heart Fund. We donated \$50.00 for GRE Foundation for the scholarship fund. Lonza Henderson, Legislative Chair was selected as Retired Education Supporter for the month of February. Treasurer and Area 12 Director, Emanuel Larkin, Jr. was named Retired Educator of the Month for March. Kudos to our hardworking members.

Chatham REA is meeting virtually as we strive to keep our members and families safe during this pandemic. Because February is Heart Month, GRE A was honored to have Director of Development, Ansley Howze from the American Heart Association as our Guest Speaker. She educates volunteers in our community on taking steps towards longer, healthier lives.

Members continue to be actively engaged in community projects. Members collected food from Second Harvest and redistributed the food items to families in the community, and also assisted with the food giveaway sponsored by Georgia Representative Carl Gilliard. GRE A will award two \$1,000 scholarships at the March 8, 2021 meeting to students from Savannah State University and Georgia Southern University/Armstrong Campus.

Cherokee County REA hosted Cherokee County Sheriff Frank Reynolds at their February 3 Zoom meeting. Sheriff Reynolds emphasized that as an elected official he works for us, the public, and not for city managers, mayors, etc. His platform centers on how to keep moving the Sheriff's Office forward. Building relationships is a key component of his leadership style. Sheriff Reynolds also shared information regarding the various programs he and his staff sponsor to help support the community through fundraisers. The Sheriff's Office Foundation is a branch to support staff and deputies who may have financial needs. Project Lifesaver offers tracking devices for the safety of residents who may wander away such as dementia patients or children with special needs. Cherokee REA donated \$200 to the Sheriff Frank Reynolds Charities to support the office's work. Sheriff Reynolds' wife, Dr. Jennifer Reynolds, is an accomplished educator in the Cherokee County School District (CCSD) and his son is a CCSD graduate while his two daughters attend a CCSD elementary school.

Clayton County REA again held its meeting virtually on January 19 with GRE A President JoAnn Tomlinson as our special guest speaker. Mrs. Tomlinson led the 25 Zoom participants in a cheer for GRE A as well as informing us of GRE A events all the way from her home in South Georgia. Vicki Davis, our Area Director, was also present at this meeting. As the legislature is in session, both Mrs. Tomlinson and Ms. Davis cautioned us to be on the alert and stay informed. Mrs. Tomlinson also reminded members to be kind and courteous when contacting legislators. The meeting ended with our local president, Susan Croft, reading selected quotes from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in honor of the MLK holiday.

Coweta REA has been very active with 8 face-to-face meetings so far. In December, the annual Christmas Bazaar to raise

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scholarship funds for future educators was a resounding success and will enable CARE to continue awarding scholarships to graduating seniors at East Coweta, Newnan, and Northgate High Schools. Finally, we visited the Atlanta Botanical Gardens on one of the coldest nights of the year. However, sharing dinner with friends and viewing the spectacular holiday lights made braving 20-degree weather a worthwhile conclusion to our 2020 agenda.

Cook County REA held their monthly meeting February 23, 2021 at Western Sizzlin' with 20 members in attendance. Our guest and sponsor was Mayor Buddy Duke. Mayor Duke spoke to us about the many things the city is doing to improve both our city and county. It was a very informative meeting. Together we sold 32 Spotlight Ads to raise money for our Scholarship Fund.

Dalton-Whitfield-Murray REA annual Christmas Auction was changed to a Christmas Market for 2020. The event was held at the Dalton Golf and Country Club in December, with over 200 items for sale. The money raised from the Market benefits the scholarship fund. The goal set was \$10,000 and the amount raised exceeded the goal. Thanks to Dorothy Gray and Twinkle Chitwood—Co-Chairs, Susan Ritchie and Ann Compton—Market committee, the local community and Shaw Industries, the event was a success. A boxed lunch was available for take-out, masks were required, and social distancing was practiced. The DWMREA Leadership team has been connecting via emails to keep the unit informed with up-to-date information during the pandemic.

Early-Clay-Calhoun REA member Sybil Pyle Still marked a milestone December 13, 2020. Turning 90 years of age plus being a long-time active member qualified her as a GREA Member Emeritus. Sybil was recognized at the November meeting of ECCREA meeting. She led the local unit as president for four years and served in other leadership roles. Sybil has clearly demonstrated a true passion for working for the welfare of retired educators and supporting the myriad of GREA humanitarian projects. In addition, Sybil continues to be a leader in Zion Free Will Baptist Church, serving as a Sunday School teacher and officer in the Woman's Auxiliary. The Eastern Star is also the beneficiary of her leadership. More importantly, she has time to be the mother of four, grandmother of nine, great-grandmother of twenty-two. ECCREA members were honored to be with Sybil to celebrate her and tell her story...a story that inspires all retired educators to do their part to strengthen GREA influence within the family of educators in Georgia. Sybil expressed her appreciation for the support of each member of ECCREA and emphasized the enjoyment she experiences while fellowshiping with Early, Clay, and Calhoun retirees.

Effingham REA held their first meeting of the new year on January 11, 2021. We were few in attendance because of Covid precautions, but still enjoyed our fellowship and lunch together. Our guest speaker for this meeting was Dr. Yancy Ford, new Superintendent of the Effingham School District. His message was very informational regarding the future plans for the District including building add-ons, new construction, etc. He commended the teaching staff on their untiring efforts of meeting the needs of the students under these difficult circum-

stances. On February 8, a group of members journeyed to the GREA museum in Flowery Branch, Ga. They thoroughly enjoyed looking and reading about the different eras of education in Georgia. The classroom "antiques" brought back many memories, and the brick memorials were awesome! At the end of the tour, we were proud to call the museum "ours" and extended thanks to all who played a part in establishing such a fine memoir of education in Georgia. We will be recognizing the 2021 retirees in May at the BOE reception.

Emanuel County REA continues to have monthly meetings by Zoom, and a news article about each meeting is sent to *The Forest-Blade*, our local newspaper, and is posted on our Facebook page. Thus far, we have had very informative programs: updates by our school superintendent, state legislators, and Mike Zarem of TRS. We have also heard the history of the creation of The Sunshine House Regional Children's Advocacy Center (for abused children), which has been a blessing for five counties in southeast Georgia, including Emanuel, for 27 years. Presently, we look forward to hearing about local crime prevention from our newly elected sheriff and about many aspects of Elder Law from a lawyer certified in that area. Our unit is pleased to share that despite the on-going pandemic, we have met three of our four goals for 2020-2021: increased our GREA membership by 7%, purchased three bricks for the Georgia Retired Educators Museum, and celebrated Georgia Retired Educators Day. We thank our members who have given donations to help our unit give \$250.00 to the Alzheimer's Association (which we have done), to help make our monthly donations to The Sunshine House, and to fund our annual scholarship.

Fayette County REA members have been involved with many activities this year to support current teachers. In September our unit members got together and packaged trays of snacks for each of the 25 schools in the system. Teachers really appreciated getting chocolate! GREA reimbursed us \$100.00 toward that project, so we could let active teachers know that we are cheering them on through these difficult days of teaching! In December, Arbor Terrace in Peachtree City asked us to partner with them to help replenish the pantry at the I58 Mission that serves many people facing hard times in many of the counties around our area. The Arbor Terrace folks really appreciated our partnership, and they delivered to the I58 Mission. Thanks for all your kindness on that project! This year the school system has each school select a person on staff who has gone above and beyond. Each teacher receives a certificate from the superintendent and a mug packed with treats. Our retired educators meet at the Teacher Resource Center each month and "pack the mugs" which are then given to the recipients for each month. We enjoy supporting the recipients who go "above and beyond."

Grady County REA member Barbara (Babs) Walden has been busy sewing during the pandemic. She has made over 22,000 masks for Archbold Medical Center. She drives to the hospital each week & picks up kits containing surgical sheeting, a nose piece, and rubber bands for each mask. She then returns homes and gets busy sewing. She makes about 500 masks each week. Hats off to Barbara Walden!

Greene County REA members have been challenged like everyone else during the pandemic of COVID 19. However, like

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the teachers we are at heart, we know how to move to Plan B if Plan A does not work; we adapt which is second nature to us. So that is what we have done in this new restrictive environment. Our unit has forged ahead and kept the motto of FELLOWSHIP, SERVICE, and SUPPORT. We are truly lifelong learners! We have mastered the art of successfully using Zoom, which was probably not a part of our lives prior to COVID 19. We have "ZOOMED" into meetings to carry on the business of GREA. Our Unit has had excellent speakers via this platform. Dr. Jimmy Stokes and Dr. Montez Carter, both with a wealth of knowledge in their area of expertise, spoke to us on issues of legislative concerns and COVID 19, respectively. Both informative sessions were eye opening and extremely helpful. We MASKED-UP, and socially distanced ourselves to present our REACH Georgia Scholarship recipient, Carmen Miller, an eighth grader at Anita White Carson Middle School, a certificate this fall. Greene County Retired Educators Association is sponsoring Carmen with a \$1,000 scholarship award. In Carmen's REACH scholarship interview she stated, "I don't want to waste this opportunity." Our Unit is one of many community organizations financially supporting REACH, a needs-based mentorship and college scholarship program that Greene County School System has been a part of since 2017. As retired educators we know the value of supporting academically promising students so they can access college and achieve post-secondary success. In collaboration with ATLAS Ministries, members of our unit penned "Thank You" notes to teachers in our county. We expressed thanks to them for their unwavering dedication and service during this stressful time of remote and or in-person learning. Kudos and sincere appreciation to all teachers and support staff for going over and above expectations to support students when they needed them the most!

Gwinnett County REA's fundraising efforts allowed our organization to sponsor the Gwinnett County Public Schools' Book Mobile at Harbins Elementary School on Friday, January 29, 2021. GCREA members Penny Clavijo (President), Tina Duncan (President-elect), and Deloris Mullins volunteered on behalf of GCREA and were able to assist with providing all 902 students present in grades K-5 with a bookmark from GCREA and a free book for them to take home for their personal library. The students and staff at Harbins Elementary School were extremely grateful for this opportunity, and our volunteers were very impressed with the impeccable manners and kindness of the students they met throughout the day.

Houston County REA is very thankful to two Warner Robins churches, First United Methodist Church and Central Baptist Church, for allowing HCREA to hold its March and April meetings, respectfully, on their campuses. The March meeting will be Superintendent Dr. Mark Scott, who will speak on the E-SPLOST vote coming up in March and its positive effect on Houston County Schools if passed. The April meeting will be

a celebration of the county's Valedictorians and Salutatorians where each of these gifted students will tell of their awards and honors, their future plans and goals, and one teacher who has made an impact on their life and why. Unlike previous years, this meeting will not be a luncheon due to COVID-19. Last year, this Val/Sal Celebration was cancelled altogether, so the resurrection of it for 2021 is a celebration of its own. Normally meetings are held at a Senior Citizens Center which has not been available to HCREA for meetings this year, so these churches have come through during this trying time giving a whole new meaning to the phrase, "Praise the Lord."

Jefferson County REA continues to hold a combination of in-person and conference call meetings in order to meet the safety needs of its members during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the obstacles, the unit has been about its mission of service, support, and fun. The month of November was a busy one as the unit sponsored "An Apple for the Teachers & Staff," providing refreshments to the teachers and staff of all the public schools in the county during American Education Week and also presented 144 pounds of nonperishable food items and a monetary donation to the local food pantry in Louisville.

At our February meeting, we had two speakers and greetings from City of Wadley Mayor Harold Moore, who is running for re-election. Board of Commissioners Chairman Mitchell McGraw gave an update, "Jefferson County on the Move," in which he shared a detailed description of the new 230-acre Ogeechee Crossing Park in Louisville. In addition, Jefferson County Board of Tax Assessors appraiser, Doris Parker, provided a summary of various tax exemptions available to citizens and fielded a Q & A session.

Lamar County REA Annual Christmas Luncheon was held in December at the home of Pippa Lee Davis, a LREA Member. Pippa Lee and her mother, Claudine White, prepared a wonderful luncheon for the LREA membership and was gracious enough to hold it at her home. All members who were able to attend had a wonderful time. On Wednesday January 20th and Thursday February 25th, the Lamar Retired Educators provided lunch to the Health Care workers at the Covid-19 testing and vaccination site in Lamar County. Workers had a choice of individually packaged sandwiches, side dishes and a variety of drinks. The Health Care workers appreciated the lunch provided and thanked all members of the LREA. Several LREA Members are in the process of becoming certified to serve as volunteers for the local Health Department. Once certification is complete, they will be able to assist the Health Department at the Testing and Vaccination site.

Laurens/Dublin REA had a Christmas Drive-By at Southland Nursing and Rehab Center located at 606 Simmons Street, Dublin, Georgia Thursday, December 17, 2020. The event was from 12:00 noon to 1:00 p.m. Members of the LDREA organization drove by and dropped off gifts for the residents of



the center. Items collected were body wash, socks, hairbrushes, hair combs, lotion, deodorant, toothpaste, toothbrushes, coloring books, etc. LDREA partnered with Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, Tau Omicron Omega Chapter, Target 3, for the collection of items. Special thanks to Ms. Natasha Lewis, Activities Coordinator, and Ms. Stephanie Haynes, Social Worker, for helping to coordinate this event.

Lumpkin County REA has had an active fall and early winter. Although not meeting in person, to avoid any Covid contagion, we have been meeting via Zoom, which has been set up by our President-elect, Mera Turner, with Erin and David Hall's tech support. As of February, we have had four Zoom meetings, each one with guest speakers. In November, Gina Morgan and Suzanne Anderson provided each LC school employee with a thank you gift, as is done every fall. In December, a number of us assisted at our local library with the gingerbread construction event. We soooo look forward to being able to gather together in person soon.

Madison County REA Supports our Heroes. As a gesture of support to our teachers and all school employees, MCREA members took treats to all of our public schools in our county. We appreciate all that you do for our students. You are our Heroes. We thank you so much for your commitment to education.

Muscogee REA members have been working hard to fulfill the goals of the association during this past year with restrictions on meetings. We held our general meetings in December and February on Zoom. Guest speaker at the February meeting was Warren Steele from FERST Readers of Muscogee County. This organization is the humanitarian project for MREA's President, Dr. Marietta Webb. Mr. Steele updated the members on new books being provided to registered families and of their upcoming fundraising project occurring in March. MREA members continue to be as supportive as possible to teachers and administrators as they navigate providing the best education possible to their students during these times of combination of virtual school and in-person school. Dr. Webb was interviewed on February 18, 2021 by WTVM to express the appreciation retired educators have for today's teachers who have raised the bar of work ethics and professionalism during the past year. MREA is planning meetings in April and June to be held at the Muscogee County School Board meeting room. We are looking forward to meeting in person again.

Newton County REA held its February 4 meeting via Conference Call. The Member Education Program was presented by Membership Chairperson Marie Davis and Membership Committee member Smithie Baccus. A generous donation from Dunkin Donuts, GREa, and NCREA members made it possible to provide Treats for Teachers to three randomly selected schools in Newton County, Rocky Plains Elementary School, Clements Middle School, and Alcovy High School. NCREA in partnership with Golden Link Order of the Eastern Star Chapter 204 provided meals, water, juice, and sodas to the Gardens of Gethsemane Shelter in Covington. Throughout this pandemic, NCREA has continued to uphold our motto of Fellowship, Service, and Support for our members and our community.

Peach County REA members have been busy during the year 2020. At each monthly Zoom meeting the organization received information from different speakers such as the President of Georgia Retired Educators, JoAnn Tomlinson; Dr. Jimmie Smith, administrator of the Macon-Bibb County Health Department; Peach County Sheriff Terry Deese; and the Mayor of Fort Valley, Barbara Williams. The organization shared gifts of kindness to families in need and supplied breakfast treats for teachers at two Elementary schools. PCREA traveled to Atlanta to spend the day at the State Capital with Representative Patty Bentley, supported the Youth Center of Fort Valley and even during a pandemic they were able to celebrate Georgia Retired Educators day with a parade honoring Rev. Dr. Robert Green. Peach County Retired Educators remained busy during the entire year of 2020 serving the community and educators of Peach County.

Richmond County REA members continued with their annual projects—collections for the Golden Harvest Food Bank and gifts for the local Veterans. Monetary donations were accepted, as well as non-perishable food and unwrapped gifts were collected on two separate days at two different places. Members and friends of RCREA drove through and dropped off their contributions. So much fun seeing each other face to face again!

Stephens County REA members judged the Patriots Pen essay contest "What Patriotism Means to Me" for the VFW, and 5th-grade 4-H Projects for UGA Extension in Stephens County. Judy Alexander represented SCREA and participated in the Walk to End Alzheimer's.

Sumter County REA has been giving our members the option to meet by Zoom (thank you Debbie Scarborough, our AMBA representative) and face to face. We have partnered with the Sumter County School System and are thankful to be able to hold our meetings at Sumter County Middle School. We have been trying to stay in communication with some of our members who are not technology savvy or have health concerns about in person attendance. In December we signed Christmas cards and in February we signed valentines for members and sent valentine sheets to residents in nursing homes and retirement centers (over 300). Our February program was presented by Charlene McGowan, a certified Yoga Instructor, on Yoga for Healthy Aging. She presented health information and led us in simple exercise that can improve our health.

Tift County REA members enjoyed a combined December meeting with our Christmas banquet. Thank you to Gary Kincaid (Kincaid Insurance), Mike Davis (Colony Bank), and Debbie Scarborough (AMBA) for sponsoring the banquet. A delicious Christmas feast was prepared by Cynthia's Catering and we were lifted into the Christmas spirit by Gina Lawhon (pianist) along with several of her voice students. We distributed 96 dozen cookies to the Tift County school chorus (who were unable to come sing at our Christmas banquet due to Covid restrictions), the Sheriff's Department, and nurses on the night shift at Southwell Hospital in appreciation of the hard work and dedication during Covid. All retirees in Tifton's three assisted living received Valentine cards from our TCREA members. Members were pro-

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vided a list of those in each assisted living and are encouraged to continue sending cards to lift their spirits. Elisha Williford, with Called to Care, spoke at our February meeting. Called to Care was founded by Tiftonite, Laura Maxwell. Its purpose is to increase awareness of foster care and adoption, help with missions, training for care givers for treatment and support of at-risk children, and supporting teens who age out of foster care. Tift County Retired Educators donated \$150 to help with their needs.

Valdosta Lowndes REA may be socially distanced at this time, but this group of retired educators has not given up. We are

still as active as we can be by attempting to serve others. I know personally of a 96-year-old member who, with a little help from her part-time caretaker, bakes delicious small loaves of bread and shares it with the 'shut-ins' in her church or neighborhood. Another has made many large pots of vegetable soup, chili and the like, and has shared that with folks who sometimes need just a little 'lift' from a friend. I could name several folks who take the time to 'mask up' and carry family members, friends or neighbors to doctor appointments, or pick up medicine and other needed items for them. There are members who share notes and pictures on Facebook of good times had with the group and other folks, or they share beautiful pictures to lift the spirits for those who spend a little, or a lot of, time perusing on Facebook.

Message From the President

An Awesome Adventure the Last Two Years

By Jo Ann Tomlinson, GREA President

There are not enough words to describe how awesome and fabulous the last two years of serving as your GREA President have been. I have had so many memorable experiences that without a doubt has been some of the Best times of my life! No way can words describe how I feel about all that has happened. It has been awesome and rewarding! To be able to go and see different



Jo Ann Tomlinson

places in our wonderful state of Georgia from the mountains, to the ocean, to the flat lands, to the big cities with all the huge concrete superhighways, to the quaint little back dirt roads in the north and in the south. It was all sooooo delightfully refreshing!

I am sooooo grateful to have met YOU GREA Members! Your open arms and hearts with so much warmth and hospitality made me feel so welcome everywhere I traveled. The first year was such a pleasure serving as your GREA State President. I visited lots and lots of your local REAs from south Georgia to north Georgia and all in between.

Your Leadership Teams and REA members were always there ready and willing to do whatever was necessary to make things work for the betterment of GREA. I didn't know what to expect the second year, but it was just as pleasurable! You have given 110% for every item on the Unit of Distinction and Unit of Excellence list to honor your local REA. In the 2019-20 year we gained the most members ever, thanks to You and AMBA! And what a blessing because none of us saw the Pandemic coming last year in March 2020. Many of you have continued to invite and gather new members in the 2020-2021 year just like the year before but it has been hard and difficult having to cope with the rules of Covid-19. Thank you for your time, effort, hard work and passion for GREA in both years! No one could ask for anything better than this year!! You have had face-to-face meetings, Zoom meetings and telephone conference calls for meetings, and continued to meet the requirements of the Unit of Distinction and Unit of Excellence. You have continued your volunteering, serving in your community, preparing great newsletters to keep your members involved and informed, and continued your fund raising for our Humanitarian Project—Alzheimer's Association.

Words cannot express how humbled and blessed I feel having had this Super Great Opportunity. You know if the Lord brings you to it, He will bring you through it! How true this statement is to me.

The new year 2021 will bring hope to many is my wish. My heartfelt sympathy to each person who lost a loved one, family,

friend, neighbor or anyone who was lost due to Covid-19. We are going to look for the good in 2021. Let's look for new and great possibilities for GREA as we give our support to our new Leadership Team of Dr. Henrietta Gray as GREA State President and Joe Boland as GREA President-elect. My only hope is I can be as supportive to Dr. Gray as she has been to me. What a special friendship we have developed through the years. She is going to lead GREA into the future with her theme and plans. We welcome Joe Boland back to the Governing Board. He served four years as an Area Director in prior years.

The Humanitarian Project of Alzheimer's will be due on April 1, 2021, as well as all the Reports due for UOD & UOE will be due April 1 unless the reports are due June 1. This is for 2021 only. Thank you for ALL you have done to donate to this most important project. Each REA is asked to donate \$250. Alzheimer's has affected someone you know in one way or another—either family, friends, neighbors, church family, etc. Please open your heart and donate generously to this worthy cause. Create your GREA Team again for 2021. Then each one of you can donate to that GREA Local REA Team. You can create a fund raiser on Facebook with your family and friends that are not retired educators but can help you by donating to raise your \$250. There are many people that would like to donate to Alzheimer's but don't know where to donate. This is their opportunity and yours! If you know your State and Federal Representative and Senator, please urge them to be an Advocate for Alzheimer's by voting to for monies to be used in research.

A very, very special thank you to Dr. Bill Sloan, GREA Executive Director; Dr. John Upchurch, Treasurer; Dr. Beverly Roberts, Secretary; Dr. Henrietta Gray, President-elect; Mickey Wendel, Past-president; Jesse Hunter, GREM Building Supervisor; AMBA, Membership & Benefits; Rod Chatham, Legislative Liaison; Johnny Smith, Director of Communications; Joy Smith, Membership Services, Office Manager; Linda Wright, Assistant to the Executive Director; Janet Allison, Bookkeeper GREA & GREM; Janet Graham, Photographer, Becky Upchurch, Convention Chairwoman; Patsy Harrell and Karen Chauncey, Traveling Buddies; and GREA Governing Board of ALL Area Directors. You have certainly been my helpmates for the last two years and made my job easy and fun! You are the BEST BEST!!

Thank you for ALL the sweet cards, notes, prayers, and words of encouragement. It has been a pleasure! You are the BEST. Cheering for GREA with ALL GREA Members because GREA is the BEST!! Blessings and HOPE (Hold On Pray Every day)!

Happy New Year

By Dr. Henrietta Gray, President-elect



Henrietta Gray

Greetings GREA! Thank God that we made it to a new year! Yes, we have closed the books on a year like none we have ever seen. I take this means and opportunity to again say thank you. THANK YOU for honoring our shared commitment to GREA. Your commitment is clearly seen in your service and high level membership recruitment. Our membership is increasing daily.

THANK YOU for you for your generosity as exemplified in all the ways you have given charitable support to those in need in communities throughout Georgia. Our communities have been enhanced and enriched by the members of GREA!!

THANK YOU for your creativity orchestrated in the virtual displays of excellence in programs of service and meetings as our locals continued to execute the business of GREA and the local units. I appreciate this platform that has afforded me the realization of attending many of your meetings virtually. Even on the virtual platform the power and presence of your enthusiasm and sincerity was evident. I also greatly appreciate the adherence to the CDC protocols and the care with which Crawford County Local carried out the face to face meeting I attended in December, 2020.

As I finish this delineation of things for which I thank GREA, THANK YOU for your commitment to our country as seen in your tireless efforts to get out the vote through your churches, civic affiliations and various other organizations.

Finally, and perhaps the overarching point of my thanksgiving, THANK YOU for your continued warm fellowship during this difficult time. Many of us went to great lengths to stay connected, have genuine fellowship and continuously checking on each other. We are indeed a great Organization.

Even with our eyes fixed on a new year with renewed hope for a return to some sense of normalcy, be assured that your Executive Board and Area Directors are moving cautiously and with vigilance. We are taking every precaution to ensure the safety and well being of our membership, family members and friends as we live and work through the challenge of this dreadful pandemic. Even so, if GREA has learned anything over the course of the last year, it is that we make a significant impact as a community of educators who share a common goal. We have also learned how to harness and operate the personal attributes and professional acumen of GREA for the greatest good. We are certainly a community force for positive action.

So as we move forward in a New Year filled with promise and possibility, I look forward with renewed anticipation to the new and exciting ways that we can elevate our Fellowship, Service and Support.

Keep Cheering for GREA and undergirding our wonderful, dedicated President Tomlinson. I pray that peace, purpose, prosperity, protection, and good health will be ours in 2021.

Ramblin' Around With the Executive Director

By Bill Sloan, Executive Director



William Sloan

I can see Spring in the near future! After a year of social distancing and staying at home, maybe we can soon enjoy being outside. I hope we never see another year like 2020! It tested our patience and tried our souls and hopefully we will all come out of this pandemic as better people!

I have been amazed by the efforts many local units have made to continue to meet! Zoom was a pleasant alternative to face-to-face meeting but a number of you have continued to meet in-person. However you felt led to meet, our hats are off to you!

In September, we offered each local unit \$100 to spend as you saw fit to say thank you to the active teachers in your county! It obviously did not go far but many of you made an effort to thank as many active teachers as you could! Many of you put your own money with the GREA money to increase the number of teachers you honored. You were creative as you gave away donuts, candy bars, apples, peaches and peanuts! Thank you again for participating in this project!

We have moved our convention from May to October. Additional information will be in the next *Bulletin*. Hopefully all or most of us will have taken advantage of the COVID vaccine and will be able attend the 2021 convention in August.

We have decided to install the 2021-2022 officers at the Spring Governing Board meeting! Your new officers for this coming year will be: President Dr. Henrietta Gray, President-elect Joe Boland, Past-President Jo Ann Tomlinson, Secretary Dr. Beverly Roberts and Treasurer Dr. John Upchurch. New Area Directors will be Area 3—Nancy Taylor, Area 11—Marilyn Moore, and Area 13—Dr. Sallie Mills. We look forward to working with these folks. They will do an excellent job! We will have pictures and resumes

in the next *Bulletin*.

I wish to give a special THANK YOU to current President Tomlinson, Past-president Mickey Wendel and President-elect Gray for stepping up and offering to serve a two-year term due to the pandemic and because we did not have a convention last year to install new officers!

Hopefully 2021-2022 will be a better year! Even with all of our hurdles to jump we still recruited over 2,000 new members! Thank you, presidents and local membership chairs for your efforts!

Stay safe, wear your masks, social distance and get those vaccine shots!



TRS in the News

By L. C. (Buster) Evans, Ed.D
Executive Director, TRS of Georgia



Buster Evans Wow! What a crazy, challenging, and even scary year we have just completed, and from the looks of things thus far, 2021 appears to be bringing us some new challenges as well. As I prepare this article, many of our retirees have begun to receive their first and even second COVID vaccines. This is great news as we are optimistic that this is the beginning of the end of COVID-19. I certainly hope that with the vaccines being in place, many of you can begin to better enjoy retirement compared to the past 12 months!

How Has TRS Fared?

Amazingly, both operationally and asset wise, we have fared very well as we ended up the 2020 calendar year. Though the illness has impacted some of our personnel, and some of our personnel have lost family members to the disease, we have not lost any of our immediate TRS personnel. For that I deeply grateful.

There are, however, three discernible trends that have impacted the TRS family. First, we have seen a noticeable increase in deaths among our TRS beneficiaries. We began tracking the death rates back in April of last year, and every month since that time, we have noticed year over year death increases. I personally have known several friends who were TRS retirees who have fallen to the virus, and this has been a challenging reality to observe.

The second trend that we have noticed has been in our rates of retirement. Through June of last year, we actually noticed a drop in approximately 10 percent of new retirements. Beginning in August of this past year, though, we have seen increases in retirements each month. Conversely, though, we seem to notice that fewer active teachers are leaving their jobs and withdrawing their retirement accounts. We would think this to be good for the profession and hope that these educators can be retained in the teaching field.

The third trend we have seen is that fewer of our retirees are interested in coming back to work as substitutes or otherwise

for local employers. This has left school districts, in some cases, scrambling for substitutes as teachers are quarantined or are out possibly due to being positive for COVID.

One truly amazing and positive thing that we have seen is an outstanding performance in our fund's investments and fund balance. As of the middle of February, our fund had eclipsed \$97 billion dollars in assets with a return of over 20 percent for the fiscal year. How I truly hope that we end our fiscal year in this neighborhood of returns!

Retirement Legislation

We are currently experiencing Georgia's annual legislative session. This is an exciting time for us as we make many trips to the Capitol to represent TRS and our members as we often speak to retirement legislation. You should also know that GREA does a great job representing your interests each year during the legislative session and throughout the year! Perhaps fortunately, the volume of retirement legislation has been somewhat slower this year up until this point. One bill that our retirees will be interested in is House Bill 385 which would allow teachers in critical needs content areas (typically math, science, special education, foreign languages, engineering, etc.) to return to work full-time after a break in service of at least a year and still be able to draw their retirement benefit. The retiree would not accrue additional service time, and the employer would be required to pay the employer and employee contributions to TRS. This bill is a part of Governor Kemp's Teacher Pipeline package, and it appears to have some good support. Being a fiscal bill, it will not be able to be voted on until next year's legislative session, but we will keep you posted on this bill's progress in the event you are one of those retirees who have a strong interest in getting back in the classroom! There is a pretty good chance we will see more legislation introduced this session, and we will continue to share with you our observations regarding legislation that impacts educator retirement in Georgia.

Again, thank you for the privilege of serving you here at TRS! Continue to stay safe, and we look forward to seeing many of you in person hopefully later in 2021.

Bricks—Going, Going...

By Jesse Hunter, Building Manager

The Honor Roll Plaza is rapidly being filled with bricks honoring loved ones, friends, and local units. In fact, after the latest brick order is placed in the plaza, only 167 spaces remain to be filled. The remaining bricks are still \$75 each. Be sure to get your order in quickly. It is a lasting memorial to those placed in the plaza.

Honor educators, friends, family and others with an engraved brick on our HONOR ROLL PLAZA!



Purchaser Name _____ Local Unit _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

☐ Memorial ☐ Honorarium

Information to be engraved on brick: (18 characters and/or spaces long, up to 3 lines tall)

If you wish to order more than one brick, please write the engraving information for the other brick(s) on a separate sheet of paper. Brick will not hold more letters or spaces than the boxes provided.

Send to: Georgia Retired Educators Museum, Inc. P.O. Box 2001, Flowery Branch, GA 30542

Check Enclosed for \$ _____ Acknowledgment Card to be sent to the following address:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Want Expert Benefits Advice? Work with An Expert: An AMBA Agent

Though friends and family can be helpful when you're considering benefits options for what insurance you need, there's no substitute for the expert benefit advice of a field agent through Georgia Retired Educators Association and AMBA.

Why? Because your needs are as unique as you are. Your lifestyle and health issues aren't the same as your friends and family. What's good for them might not necessarily be right—or enough—for you. An AMBA agent knows this and can give recommendations and advice tailored for your specific needs.

Your own health and/or family history should also play a role in what insurance you should consider. And, of course, your peers and loved ones might not know about the need for a Medical Air Services Association (MASA) membership or which of our Dental Plans is right for you.

As your GREA's trusted benefits partner, AMBA provides knowledgeable Customer Service Associates and insightful Field Agents. We are here to help you review options and determine the right coverage for you—whether it's **dental insurance, vision plans, long-term care solutions or other policies**. They're just a phone call away. It's nice to know that anytime you have questions about your insurance benefits, someone is ready to assist.

Request a FREE Benefits Review with an AMBA field agent at www.amba-review.com or call 866-615-4063 Monday-Friday 9 a.m.-6p.m.



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Would you like to get your *GREA Bulletin* by email? Approximately 12,000 of our members are now getting their *GREA Bulletin* by email each quarter. The people who get it by email receive it approximately 2-3 weeks before the print edition is mailed to our members. In addition, the email copy is totally in color where the print edition is only partially in color due to the high cost of printing in color. GREA also saves approximately .50 per copy that is sent by email. You can see GREA is saving approximately \$6,000 per *Bulletin*. If you would like your copy sent by email simply email us at gre3@gre3.org and we will be happy to put you on the email list. Thank you for considering getting your *Bulletin* by email.

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Welfare of Retired Educators of Georgia*

Johnny Smith, Editor

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P. O. Box 1379 • 4311 Falcon Parkway • Flowery Branch, GA 30542

Telephone: 770-287-7721, 800-637-2883

Fax: 770-287-0567

E-mail: gre3@gre3.org

Website: www.garetirededucators.org

Office Hours: Monday–Friday, 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.