

THE GRE A BULLETIN

JOURNAL OF NEWS AND REFLECTIONS FOR RETIRED EDUCATORS OF GEORGIA

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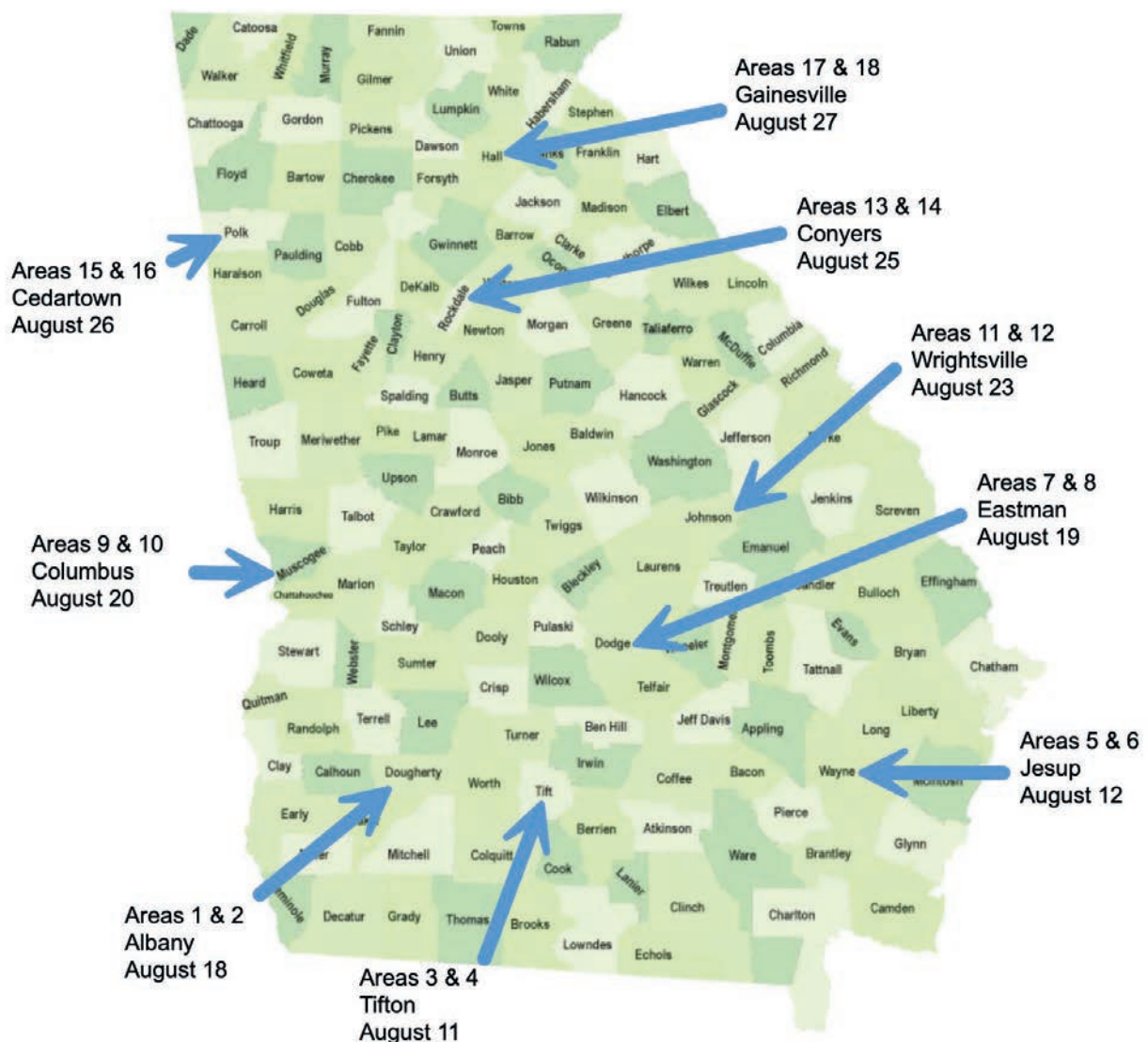
GAINESVILLE, GEORGIA

FALL 2026



Ride, Sallie, Ride!

The GRE A Travel Team, also known as Dr. Sallie and the Singing Saints, which consisted of President Dr. Sallie Mills, President-Elect Liz Bouis, Legislative Liaison Dr. Bill Sloan, and Executive Director Johnny Smith spent three weeks on the road crisscrossing the state for our annual Area Meetings. GRE A Photographers Janet Graham and Joe Moore met us each day at the meeting location. We were joined by TRS Representative Mike Zarem along with AMBA representatives Lisa McKenzie, Debbie Scarborough and LeeAnn Sturtz. We had a GRE A-t time talking with local units and connecting names with faces as we met over 1000 of you. It was wonderful seeing all the areas embracing this year's theme of *"Sound the Trumpet: Fellowship, Service, and Support."*



A Message from the President

by Dr. Sallie Mills, President



Geraldine Reid

Greetings, Georgia Retired Educators Association family!

After a very hot summer, it is a joy to welcome the promise of cooler days ahead and I know we all are looking forward to the changing of the seasons with gratitude and anticipation. We, the "Traveling Saints"—the name given to us by our Executive Director, Mr. Johnny Smith—have completed our Area Meetings. For three weeks, we enjoyed fun, fellowship, and the opportunity to see beautiful parts of Georgia, including places I had never visited.

The Area Meetings were well planned, and I extend sincere thanks to our Area Directors and Local Units. Each meeting beautifully reflected the **Sound the Trumpet** theme through trumpet decorations, blue and gold colors, strong attendance, delicious food, and exceptional hospitality. Trumpet players and a Shofar player helped bring the theme to life, and several of us even joined in by sounding our plastic party trumpets!

I would like to thank the Area Directors and others who gave me cards, beautiful gifts, and other expressions of love. I can truly say that during those three weeks, the trumpet sounded throughout Georgia for Retired Educators. As we continue to sound the trumpet throughout Georgia, let us also remain mindful of our humanitarian project, **the American Diabetes Association**. Together, our collective efforts can help advance education, research, advocacy, and support for individuals and families affected by diabetes.

Who says retirement must be quiet? We may have turned in our classroom keys and left morning bus duty behind, but the Retired Educators Association is still ready to make some serious noise! As we gather for another fantastic year, we are **sounding the trumpet** for the three pillars that keep us going: **fellowship, service, and support**. Whether we are sharing legendary school stories over coffee or lending a hand in our local neighborhoods, we are hitting all the high notes.

To celebrate that spirit, enjoy this playful tribute to fellowship, service, support, and the joyful sound we continue to make together.

Sounding the Trumpet for Fellowship, Service, and Support

Beyond the walls where chalkboards used to slide,
We take our lifelong lessons deep outside.
The school bells might be quiet on the chime,
But now we serve the neighborhood and time!

We're sounding the trumpet—so let the notes fly—
For the three best refrains that money can't buy:

First is the **Fellowship** that keeps us strong,
A grand community where we belong.
We gather close, we laugh, we share the load,
And walk together down this golden road.

Next is our **Service**, a bold, ringing call,
Because "once a teacher," you're a teacher to all.
From food banks to the libraries in town,
We build things up and never let them down.

Then comes **Support**, the steady, guiding hand,
To lift the weary and to help them stand.
Because an educator's heart is true—
We care for everyone, in all we do.

So just blow your horn!
A wonderful era of freedom is born.
With fellowship, service, support on the track,
We're sounding the trumpet—and not looking back!

Thank you for all you do to make GREA great! May the coming season bring renewed hope, joyful moments, and blessings to you and your families.

A Message from the President-Elect

by Liz Bouis



Liz Bouis

In August the GREA "Travel Team" concluded its odyssey around Georgia, visiting Area Meetings in all four corners of the state. This took us only three weeks, unlike Odysseus' ten years, but we did succumb to the Siren call of Buc-ees a few times, we ate BBQ and green beans instead of lotus blossoms, and we saw no giant horse, but we did spy a giant peach in the sky along the way. Also, unlike Odysseus, we had a lot of fun, and it was a pleasure to meet so many new people along the way! "The Odyssey in August" was a great way to start my year as President Elect! I am very excited for a brand-new year.

This year my main duty will be coordinating the annual GREA Convention for Dr. Sallie. The dates are May 4, 5, and 6, 2027, so please mark your calendars. We will be in Augusta again this year. Someone said to me after the last convention, "Have I attended three GREA Conventions, or I have attended the same convention three times?" That really stuck with me, so my goal is to make it a different experience this year. Whether it is your first convention or fifteenth, you deserve a unique experience. With that in mind, please email me with any ideas. We are always looking for unique ideas for Breakout Sessions and entertainment. All ideas are welcome – even if they seem "outside the box!"

Along those lines, please consider entering the T-Shirt contest! Make your shirts early in the year, so you can enjoy them for more than just the state convention. We

hang them in the Display/Game Room during Convention, and folks loved coming in that room and seeing the many shirts featured.

I hope you enjoy your homecomings to your units with renewed energy and enthusiasm. May you find many new members, renew friendships during the coming year, and have a rewarding experience in GREA in 2026-2027.

TRS News

by Dr. Jason L. Branch, Ph.D.

Happy New School Year!



Dr. Jason Branch

In communities across Georgia, yellow school buses are rolling, school bells are ringing, and 1.7 million students are walking the halls of over 2200 public schools in our great state.

To say that the start of school year has a profound impact on the daily lives of families in Georgia is an understatement. In many ways, it marks milestones and opportunities that will be remembered, cherished, and discussed for years to come. It is important work!

Thank you to the active educators who are making a daily impact on young people, and to our retirees who did so for decades. The lives changed and knowledge imparted are truly immeasurable.

What can be measured, however, are the numbers contained within one of the rewards for that service—your TRS retirement benefit.

As a new school year begins, TRS closes out a fiscal one. With that closure comes numbers and stats that tell a story all their own. Let's take a closer look at those numbers and what they mean for your pension system.

6 – The TRS board of trustees has ten members with six of those individuals being active or retired educators.

160,300 – The number of TRS retirees surpassed 160,000 for the first time as of July 1, 2026, reflecting an increase of 60,000 retirees since 2012.

500,000 – Total TRS membership has grown to over 500,000 members with nearly 300,000 active educators within those ranks.

7,277 – Around 3% or 6000 active educators retire each year. In FY26, 7,227 new retirees joined the ranks marking the largest number of retirements in over twenty years.

3,779 – TRS retirees in Georgia have an average monthly benefit of nearly \$3800 a month or \$45,000 a year. Financial experts explain that an individual

would need \$1 million dollars in savings to create this same yearly benefit.

9.3 – The TRS monthly benefit payroll exceeded \$500 million a month and totaled \$6.8 billion a year in FY26, creating an economic impact in Georgia of \$9.3 billion dollars.

134 – The Teachers Retirement System of Georgia is currently the 18 largest pension system in America with \$134.7 billion in total assets. Investment returns for FY26 were 17.9%, marking the fourth consecutive year of double digit returns

85 – The average TRS retiree begins drawing a benefit at age 60 and can expect decades of monthly deposits to come their way. In fact, 8% or over 12,000 TRS retirees are over 85 years of age, and an amazing 97 individuals are over 100 years of age.

Numbers can, indeed, create a story. The numbers above reflect success, sustainability, and service. Proudly share these numbers with others. It is a story worth telling.

From the Executive Director's Desk

by Johnny Smith



Johnny Smith

Thank you to all of you who participated in our recently completed tour across this great state of Georgia. Our "travel team" had a wonderful time visiting with the over 1000 local unit members at the nine locations across the state. Area directors did an outstanding job preparing for and hosting these meetings. There was so much excitement in the air as we promoted the theme of "Sound the Trumpet." We appreciate all of you helping to make these meetings a huge success.

You might be interested in our schedule. We all make our separate ways to our Monday night hotel and meet for dinner. Hotels are selected so that travel to each area meeting is usually 30 minutes or less. We meet in the hotel lobby each morning to caravan to that day's area meeting. After the meeting, we load and caravan to the next hotel which is usually two to three hours away. On arrival, some take a short nap while others catch up on work and then we meet again for dinner. On Thursdays, we all go our separate ways to our respective homes. Over the three weeks we drive over 1500 miles.

As we drive, you realize how large our state is both north to south and east to west. In our travels we see mountains and flat lands, cities and empty country sides, major highways and narrow roads with practically no traffic. We pass vast fields of cotton, corn, peanuts,

blueberry bushes, enormous groves of pecan trees, apple and peach trees, and even tobacco. All of this makes you appreciate just how varied our state is.

Despite the wide variations, the one constant is the people. Wherever we travel we are met with warmth and hospitality. Retired educators always greet us with open arms and wide smiles. Such hospitality is what makes the travel team appreciate and enjoy their journey. Thank you to all of you who made us feel so welcome.

As you read this, I will have completed my first year as your Executive Director. I want to thank each of you for your support this first year. My motto has always been "I'll go anywhere I'm invited and I've shown up at a couple of places where I wasn't!" I've driven over 7000 miles this past year. Visiting your local unit meetings is the absolute best part of this job. I have so enjoyed visiting with and speaking to you as I have traveled the state. Thank you for allowing me to be your Executive Director.

A Word from the Foundation

by Barbara T. Wilcher, GRE Foundation Chair



Barbara Wilcher

On behalf of the Georgia Retired Educators Foundation members and myself, let me first thank you again for your overwhelming support. Your generous donations at the GREA Convention were greatly appreciated. In addition to your contributions, several local units and individuals have made additional donations to the Foundation.

Of the three memorial gifts received, two were in memory of Ms. Zimma Jones, Emeritus. The first was given by her family for \$1,315.00, and the other anonymously for \$355.00. The third memorial gift in memory of Steve Oliver was for \$500.00.

These gifts support the primary goal of the GRE Foundation, Inc., which is to secure funds and provide scholarships to educators and paraprofessionals pursuing a degree or an advanced degree in Education. We desperately need your help in GETTING THE WORD OUT! During January and February 2027, we need each member to contact their principals and superintendent and ask them to forward the scholarship application to their employees, certified and classified. We are also asking each area director to ask all local unit presidents to share the scholarship application with their members, superintendents, and principals in their area. The scholarship application can be found on the GREA website under **FOUNDATION**.

Remember: We need YOU to help get the word out about the available scholarships.

Thank you for your continued support of the GRE Foundation, Inc.

Walking the Halls

Dr. Bill Sloan, Legislative Liaison



Dr. Bill Sloan

The Georgia General Assembly will be convening in January, and it is more important than ever for you to know exactly who represents you in the Georgia General Assembly. While we have been blessed with their continued commitment to fully funding our pension and health insurance, we never know when that might change.

If you aren't sure who currently represents your district, finding out is simple. You can visit the Georgia General Assembly website (<https://www.legis.ga.gov>) and click on "Find Your Legislator?" tool. Please take five minutes today to look up your state legislators, save their office numbers in your phone and be ready to email or call them if GREA needs your help on an issue. This is important because this might change after the General Election in November so stay up to date as to who represents you.

With upcoming elections, we want to take a moment to reaffirm our commitment to maintaining a neutral stance regarding political candidates and parties. As an organization, The Georgia Retired Educators Association does not endorse any political candidates, nor do we allocate member dues to support political campaigns or initiatives.

A Legend Announces His Retirement

Mike Zarem, Outreach Program Manager for TRS, announced his retirement effective October 30, 2026. Mike has attended GREA Area Meetings for thirty-one years. We cannot even begin to count the number of local unit meetings Mike has attended through the years. He was always willing to share the latest facts and figures about TRS along with a never-ending supply of "Little Johnny" jokes with any unit who invited him to attend. Mike is a virtual encyclopedia of restaurants throughout the state of Georgia. Regardless of where we visited, Mike always knows the very best local restaurants to visit. GREA appreciates Mike's commitment to and support of GREA. We wish him the very best in his upcoming retirement. **He will be missed!**



GRE Foundation, Inc. Scholarship Winners

The GRE Foundation is happy to announce the twenty-one winners of this year's \$1000 scholarships. Profiles of the winners are available on the GREA website (<https://www.garetirededucators.org/index.php/foundation>).



*Niesi Ashe
Wilcox County*



*Tomika Campbell,
DeKalb County*



*Pamela Canty,
Colquitt County*



*Jada Castillo,
Spalding County*



*Idelma T. Cecilio,
Gilmer County*



*Nicole Fillman,
Gwinnett County*



*Lakesha Green,
Taylor County*



*Rachael Heffner,
Gwinnett County*



*Kelsie Hicks,
Carroll County*



*Carley Dane Holcomb,
Cherokee County*



*Abigail Hughes,
Fannin County*



*Kimberly Lawson,
Coffee County*



*Kayde McCain,
Madison County*



*Ashley Millsaps,
Franklin County*



*Kristen Murphy,
Evans County*



*Kara Opp,
Dawson County*



*Jeffreia Raines,
Lamar County*



*Katrena L. Ready,
Rockdale County*



*Melinda Sheffield,
Lumpkin County*



*Robert Todd,
McIntosh County*



*Amanda S. Williams,
Mitchell County*

**Congratulations
to all the
scholarship
winners.**



Wall of Honor Awaiting Honorees

By Jesse Hunter

The Wall of Honor is the perfect place to display the names of people that you want to honor. It could be yourself, a fellow educator, a retiree, a relative, or a friend. The plaque already has 150 honorees, and we need to add others to the wall. Each plate is \$50.00, and the information and form are available on the GREA website. Acknowledgement cards are sent to each honoree apprising them of their plate. Thanks to everyone for your attention to this project.

**Honor educators, friends,
family and others with an
engraved plate on our
WALL OF HONOR
PLAQUE**



**Personally Engraved Plates
are \$50.00 Each
and TAX DEDUCTIBLE!**

Purchaser Name _____ Local Unit _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

Information to be engraved on plate: (14 characters and/or spaces long, up to 3 lines tall)

If you wish to order more than one plate, please write the engraving information for the other plate(s) on a separate sheet of paper. Plates 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 _____

A Word from AMBA

Jill Jackson, Relationship Manager

While summer is ending and schools are back in session, GREA members are still enjoying the transition from summer to fall. Now's the time to tell others about ALL the great reasons to join GREA. You know every new retiree asks, "What's In It for Me?" Tell them, "Glad you Asked, it's the ABC's or retirement!" A is for Advocacy- and GREA does a great job speaking up for you at the statehouse and with your elected officials. **B is for Benefits-** GREA partners with AMBA to provides a robust supplemental benefits program endorsed by your association. C is for Community- don't miss out on community connections you gain from getting involved with GREA.



AMBA BENEFITS- Don't miss out on all the benefits that are offered with your GREA Membership.

Need insurance products? AMBA has you covered. Want a complimentary Benefits Review?

AMBA does that too! Want discounts and savings? Use the PASSPORT Discount Program!

Don't hesitate to call AMBA at 1-877-810-6334 to take advantage of special association benefits!

GREA 2026 Area Meetings *Ride, Sallie, Ride!*

Photos courtesy of GREA photographers Janet Graham and Joe Moore

Areas 1-2



Dougherty County



Sumter County



Areas 3-4



Areas 5-6



Areas 7-8



Peach County



Areas 9-10



Area 9 and Area 10 Meeting

Areas 11-12



Johnson County



Areas 13-14



Areas 15-16



Areas 17-18



News From GREA Local Units

Athens Area REA was represented at the GREA Convention in May. Members Alzena and Larry Johnson organized, set up, and hosted the silent auction at the event. At the unit meeting in May, the annual Scholarship Day was held, honoring local students. The unit also held a summer planning session at the Foothills Central Office in Athens to prepare for the 2026-2027 year. Reginald Willis, president, led the meeting.

Bibb County REA started the year off with a breakfast planning meeting hosted by Sharon Homer, president. The agenda items included membership updates in the Bibb and Georgia Retired Educators Association, the 2026-2027 budget proposal, committee reports, and calendar of events. Sharon Homer, Louis Frank Tompkins, Myrtice Johnson, Emma Freeman, Dr. Stephanie Slocumb, and Annie Moore attended the Areas 7 and 8 meeting held at the Terry L. Coleman Conference Center in Eastman, Georgia. It was very informative and well attended. Dr. Sallie Mills gave a stirring president's report, highlighting her "*Sound-the-Trumpet*" theme. Upcoming events include the *New Retirees Reception* (9/9/26) and the *Retired Educators Breakfast* (11/1/26). BREA members are excited and ignited—looking forward to a "**productive**" year—sounding the trumpet.

Burke County REA members participated in the Juneteenth activities in the community. They enjoyed activities and outings with family and friends as well. Our Planning Meeting was held on June 11th, and we hope to remain a Unit of Distinction. Our unit represented well at GREA Area Meeting on August 13th with sixteen members in attendance. The hospitality was wonderful and information shared was very informative. Congratulations to us Emeritus Cynthia B. Mobley who celebrated her 100th Birthday August 22nd. Our speakers on Sept. 3rd were Dr. Angela Williams, Superintendent of Burke County School System and Dr. Justin Durham, Principal of Burke County High School. They spoke of what is being done to prepare students for the future and thanked us for setting the bar. It was stated that students are served from the cradle to the career. They are concerned about the safety, health and welfare of students. Their goal is to Make Burke County the Best It Can Be. We were encouraged to become partners with the schools. Emeritus Hattie F. Outlaw was showered with gifts and surprises with her family members there to support her. She

celebrated her 90th birthday in May. Kudos for all her services rendered. On a sad note, Emeritus Anne H. Patterson transitioned. She will be missed. We offer condolence to the family members. Rest in Peace. It is our plan to "Sound the Trumpet" in 2026-2027.

Chatham REA is preparing for an exciting new program year filled with fellowship, service, advocacy, and community engagement. The 2026–2027 year officially got underway with a Leadership Team meeting on Monday, July 27, 2026. President Dr. Pamela West encouraged members to remain active and engaged throughout the year, emphasizing the importance of sharing our talents, inviting new members, and participating in the organization's many activities and service initiatives. As CREA begins this new chapter, the organization proudly embraces GREA President Dr. Sallie Mills' theme, "Sound the Trumpet." The theme reflects our commitment to using its collective voice to advocate for education, recruit new retirees into GREA, and make a positive difference in the community. An exciting agenda of activities and service projects is planned for the upcoming year. Members will provide school supplies for students, appreciation treats for faculty and staff, and support for community events such as Feed the Hungry. We will also continue its tradition of visiting assisted living facilities and showing appreciation to local first responders by providing treats and expressions of gratitude. Chatham REA will kick off the new program year on Monday, September 14, 2026, at 11:00 a.m. at the Luxe Elite Event Center, 2415 E. DeRenne Avenue, Savannah, Georgia. Members are looking forward to reconnecting, welcoming new retirees, and preparing for another year of service and fellowship. We are ready to "Sound the Trumpet" with purpose, passion, and pride!

Coweta REA bid a fond farewell to "Keeping the Vision" in May 2026 by celebrating their ninth consecutive Unit of Distinction and tying for first place in GREA membership growth in Class AAA. They shared this honor with Columbia REA. Major credit for this surprise award goes to CARE Membership Chair Sherry Warren, who has worked relentlessly in this position since 2022. At the June planning meeting CARE embraced President Dr. Sallie Mills' call to "Sound the Trumpet" in 2026-2027. Five CARE officers—President Marie Estep, President-Elect Lynette Harper, Secretary Jean Cotton, Past President Sherry Warren, and Area Director Sherry Taylor-- supported this new mission by attending an

informative Area Meeting in Columbus that inspired them to an even stronger commitment to “Fellowship, Service, and Support.” Fittingly, the September program focused on membership as an old-fashioned ice cream social welcomed Coweta County’s most recent retirees.

Crawford County REA’s Executive Committee has been working hard over the summer to plan meetings and activities and prepare materials for the 2026-2027 year. Our new president Wendy Tidwell was installed, along with other officers, at our meeting on June 11. Two members attended the Area 8 Local Unit Leaders training session on June 24 in Barnesville. Our Executive Committee met on July 15 to plan for the 2026-2027 year. Seven members attended the GREA meeting for Areas 7 and 8 in Eastman on August 19. Many emails, texts, and phone calls have been made to invite speakers and guests for programs, and to confirm plans. Our Handbook and Newsletter Chair has been hard at work, too. We have also completed our first service project. On July 23, several members of CCREA’s Leadership and Teacher-Student Support Committees attended Crawford County’s New Teacher Orientation and presented gift cards and favor bags to 11 new teachers. We are now looking forward to our first meeting on September 10 when we will honor Crawford County’s 2027 Teacher of the Year.

Dalton Whitfield Murray REA held its May meeting at Whitfield County Schools District Office. A potluck supper was held for members and guests. The meeting featured unit member awards, scholarships presented to college and high school students, a remembrance ceremony, and recognizing recently area retirees. A June leadership meeting was held at the family farm of membership chair, Sonya Planzer. President, Pete Adams, led the group in planning meetings and activities for 2026-2027.

Dawson County REA officers spent the summer planning numerous presentations and activities that focus on educating our members in how to protect themselves against crime and make them more aware of the latest scams designed to take advantage of seniors as well as become more aware of their own health and overall wellbeing. Several of us attended the Area 17-18 meeting in Gainesville and were inspired by the motivational words from our GREA leadership. We left excited about the REA year we have planned and will kick off our new theme with a guest trumpeter at our September

meeting, followed in October by a visit from our mayor with a proclamation signing and a professional storyteller sharing a few spooky tales, celebrating Georgia Retired Educator’s Day in November, and spending time during the holiday season playing bingo with our county’s elderly at our local senior center. All our meetings and activities are sure to encourage and support our members to “Sound the Trumpet” this upcoming year!

Decatur DeKalb REA welcomes past and new members to the Tuesday monthly meetings held at LaVista Piccadilly Restaurant at 1:00 PM. We discuss a wide array of topics from retirement issues to home improvements and positive community involvement. We look forward to your presence.

Dougherty County REA is on the Move! 2026–2027: A New Season. A New Mission. A Continued Commitment. The trumpet is sounding loud and clear, and Dougherty County REA Area 1 is ready to answer the call! With goals established, educators joining us, special guests on the way, and fellowship at the heart of what we do, we are stepping boldly into a new year of service and community connection. Our Marching Orders Are Clear: SERVE • SUPPORT • STAY IN FELLOWSHIP. Sound the Trumpet! Fall Into Action! Let’s Make 2026–2027 a Year to Remember! Together, We Serve. Together, We Support. Together, We Grow.

Emanuel REA members participated in a new member recruitment initiative for newly retired educators at the Emanuel County School District end of the year countywide meeting in May. We provided gifts as well as EREA and GREA information for each retiree. As a result of the recruitment initiative, we gained two local EREA members. On June 17th President Teresa Bright and President-Elect Renae McNeely attended our Area VI planning meeting with Area Director, Dr. Gwendolyn Yarbrough at the Pittman Park United Methodist Church Student Center in Statesboro, Georgia. This meeting geared us up to prepare valuable information for our local unit at our Executive Planning meeting which was held on July 8th at the Franklin Memorial Library at 12:30 PM. Our planning meeting was very positive and most productive as we organized the upcoming 2026-27 calendar of events for our local unit. A delicious lunch was prepared by one of our local restaurants, “All the Fixin’s” and served on a trumpet tablescape with a floral trumpet centerpiece décor. On August 12th, ten of our EREA members

traveled to the Jesup Georgia for the Area V and VI meeting held at the First Baptist Church of Jesup. We had a grand time as we congregated and socialized with other units from Area V and VI as well as meeting GREA President Dr. Sallie Mills personally. Emanuel REA will never lose the “Vision”, and we will definitely “Sound the Trumpet” loud and clear as we come together for our first meeting on September 16, 2026, at Swainsboro Middle School.

Floyd-Rome REA executive committee has been very busy this summer planning for the new year. Securing new members is one of our priorities and we have packed 223 welcome bags for the Floyd County new teachers and 99 bags for the Rome City new teachers. These bags were given to the teachers when they returned to schools this year. We will continue to give four scholarships to college seniors who are training to become teachers. Our community service chair has some new and exciting service projects for the upcoming year. We will work with school administrators to promote the GRE Foundation Scholarship for school system employees who are seeking additional education degrees.

Franklin County REA held their 2026-2027 annual planning meeting June 26, 2026. Newly installed officers and representative members attended. It was a successful meeting with enjoyable fellowship. As we discussed collecting contributions for “The American Diabetes Association,” the group agreed on the slogan, “Dollars for Diabetes.” Therefore, we began collection at our July 8, 2026 meeting. We will continue this process at each of our upcoming meetings. We enjoyed a very informative presentation regarding Diabetes and healthy choices during our July meeting. Our guest speaker is employed as a Diabetic Health Coordinator at St. Mary’s Sacred Heart Hospital- Lavonia, GA. This presentation included member participation and discussion of specific questions or concerns. We are ready to “Sound the Trumpet” for a successful year as our unit strives to make a difference for our school system and community!

Gwinnett County REA members took a meaningful journey through time at the Hooper-Renwick branch of the Gwinnett Library System in Lawrenceville August 18. Built on the site of the Hooper-Renwick School—the only school for African American students in Gwinnett County during segregation—the branch preserves portions of the original school and now houses both the museum and library. It is

also the first themed library in the Southeast. Our GCREA year will officially begin on Friday, September 18, at Sugarloaf Country Club. The opening program, *Voices for Our Schools: Turning Experience into Advocacy*, will feature a distinguished panel prepared to inform, inspire, and empower members to serve as effective community advocates for public education. GCREA members will again support the Ferguson Elementary School Holiday Shop by collecting items students can choose as gifts for their families. Donations may be brought to the first three meetings. We look forward to another full year of Fellowship, Support, and Service.

Habersham REA officers and other members met in late July to make plans for 2026-2027. We have already reached the 7% goal for membership and are well on the way to achieving the 10% goal as well. HREA was well represented at the Area 17/18 meeting held in Gainesville, GA. Our members will help celebrate our nation’s 250th anniversary at our first meeting of the year on September 16th by wearing patriotic colors. We plan to “SOUND THE TRUMPET” for the USA!

Hall/Gainesville REA is looking forward to the new year beginning with our first meeting on September 14. Our new president is Joyce Tharpe, and she has a lot of ideas for upcoming programs. On August 27, about eight of our members helped with registration, table decorations, and door prizes at the Area 17 and Area 18 meeting at the Civic Center in Gainesville. The program was very informative: GREA president Sallie Mills, president-elect Liz Bouis, TRS officer Mike Zarem, executive director Johnny Smith, past director Bill Sloan and AMBA representative Lisa McKenzie all presented on topics of importance. Door prizes were drawn at the end of the meeting. All speakers confirmed that TRS is in great shape.

Henry County REA ended the 2025-2026 year with a meeting at Anthony’s Pizza & Pasta in McDonough. We had a wonderful time. HCREA awarded four scholarships this year. Two scholarships (\$500 each) were awarded to graduating high school seniors who will pursue a career in education. Also, two scholarships for \$750 each were awarded to Henry County educators obtaining advanced degrees in education. Each year, HCREA members raise money for scholarships. This year we received a generous donation of \$2000.00 in honor of Dr. Geraldine Helton. Dr. Helton is a greatly admired and respected teacher and administrator who worked with Henry

County School System for many years. HCREA is very thankful for this donation. All the recipients were very glad to earn the scholarships. HCREA will begin the 2026-2027 year with a meeting on September 8th at the Mercer University Henry County campus. We hope to see you there!

Johnson County REA members under the leadership of Dr. Margaret Hightower, President of Area 11, collected eleven \$25 gift cards from all the Units in Areas 11 & 12. Bloom and Grow, Bloom and Grow and that's just what Areas 11 & 12 Units "gift card" tree did. Thank you, Areas 11 & 12 Units, for the support for this altruistic project of gift cards which are to be given to the Boys and Girls Club, Head Start, and the local Senior Center. These 3 agencies located in Johnson County enrich the projects and activities of the citizens, from children to senior care. Johnson County REA is SOUNDING THE TRUMPET LOUDLY.

Lee County REA members are planning an exciting and informative year! Fellowship time prior to meeting will give members another opportunity to meet and greet! We have planned for presenters on aging, finances, drama class, legislature, school system and community updates, and diabetes awareness! Each month we recognize new members, and those who haven't attended for a while. The local Food Pantry and Little Book house will continue to be priorities. Sound the Trumpet table decorations and theme will surely uplift members. Door prizes and invitation to lunch at local restaurants will complete each meeting.

Madison County REA has been busy this summer preparing for the upcoming year. Officers, committee chairpersons, and members met in June for our annual planning meeting. In July, MCREA representatives participated in the annual Madison Area Resource Team Back to School Rally which includes a school supply giveaway, hot dog dinner, and a resource fair. MCREA members represented Reader Nation, an initiative of the local school system along with other community organizations including MCREA, funded by a grant from the Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy at Georgia College and State University. As local teachers and school staff returned to schools for pre-planning, we provided Treats for Teachers in each of our seven schools to welcome and encourage them. In August, ten of our members attended the Area 17/18 meeting at the Gainesville Civic Center. It was an enjoyable and informative meeting, and the meal was delicious! MCREA is looking forward to the active year we have planned.

Muscogee REA officers and members connected with other GREA members throughout the area and state. Outgoing President Patricia Davis, Aubrey Davis, Incoming President-Elect Kristine Mitchell, and Area 9 Director Dr. Marietta Webb traveled to Augusta, GA in May to attend the GREA State Convention. The outgoing GREA President, Geraldine Reid, led the convention as attendees participated in informative meetings and fun activities. Patricia Davis accepted the Unit of Excellence Award for the Muscogee REA from Area Director Marietta Webb. Dr. Ralph Huling was sworn in as the 2026-2027 MREA President during MREA's June meeting. Leeann Sturtz and Debbie Elliott of AMBA hosted a meeting in July at the Columbus Public Library to share about AMBA benefits and the perks offered to GREA members. President Dr. Ralph Huling and Immediate Past President Patricia Davis attended to encourage retired educators and friends to join both GREA and MREA. In August, the MREA Executive Board helped Area 9 Director Dr. Marietta Webb prepare for the Area 9 and 10 Joint meeting. Bobbie Getz assisted Amelia Hogg with the table decorations and decor for the Joint meeting.

Newton County REA enjoyed a hot, busy summer. In June, President Beth Moore attended the Area 13 Presidents Meeting with Joe O'Neal. We also had a group of members and guests visit Hamby Lane Natives Nursery where we learned about Georgia native plants to place in our yards. We shared beautiful weather, beautiful plants, and interesting information. Afterwards, we shared a tasty meal at Amicis in Covington. Our Executive Board Planning meeting was held to begin our plans for 2026-27. Our **July** activity was our annual outing to Buckner's Family Restaurant in Jackson and the trek to for peaches from Dickey Farms in Musella. As always, there was tasty food, good fellowship and some good ol' rocking on the porch at Dickey's. **August** is picnic time and we held our annual New Retirees Picnic at Alcovy United Methodist Church. We celebrated new retirees with fried chicken and all the fixins'. President Moore and members Hazel Smith-Jackson, Carla Esguerra, and Vita Reed attended the Area 13/14 Meeting in Conyers to learn more about the needs of GREA for this year. We look forward to 2026-27 as we SOUND THE TRUMPET for GREA and NCREA.

North Fulton REA Executive Board has been busy this summer. The first planning meeting was June 15th at Malow's Tavern in Roswell. One agenda item

was to discuss speaker options for meetings. After the formal meeting, we enjoyed lunch. Another board meeting was August 5th at the home of two of our board members. They served a wonderful breakfast. Afterwards the agenda was reviewed and speakers confirmed. A plan for other speakers was shared. Our first meeting is September 16th at Milton Library. Todd Williamson, head librarian will speak about services. We have presentations secured through May 2027. Prior to meetings, snacks are provided at 10:30 for a time of fellowship followed by the meeting beginning at 10:50.

Oglethorpe County REA executive committee held our 2026-2027 planning meeting in June. We held our first 2026-2027 meeting at Countryside Catering on August 11th and heard an update from Representative Trey Rhodes about the new laws passed this year by Georgia's General Assembly, especially about tax cuts, retired educators returning to work, the need for literacy coaches, and the new literacy law. This year we will also hear from Athens Piedmont Regional's Diabetes Education Program, enjoy a visit from GREA's new president Dr. Sallie Mills, learn about Oglethorpe County School System's vision under new superintendent, Dr. Phillip Powell, learn about a local business owner's journey to her dream, and learn from Sheriff David Gabriel how to protect ourselves from scams and other safety needs. President Leslie Jones, Treasurer Barbara Cabaniss, and Membership Chairperson Linda Banks attended the GREA Areas 17 & 18 meeting on August 27th where they heard inspiring messages and great news from Dr. Sallie Mills, GREA President-elect Liz Bouis, TRS Representative Mike Zarem, Legislature Liaison Dr. Bill Sloan, and GREA Executive Director Johnny Smith. In September, OCREA will recognize Oglethorpe County's new teachers with a special gift to help with their classroom needs. Our next meeting will be October 13th at 10:30am at Countryside Catering in Winterville.

Peach County REA members stayed busy during the summer months. The executive board held its annual retreat in June. At the State Area convention, PCREA was recognized as a Unit of Distinction. In July, PCREA's "Healthy Walkers" spent the morning walking to promote healthy lifestyles. Together, they logged more than 140,000 steps in one day. PCREA members attended the Area 7 and 8 district meeting in Eastman, Georgia, where they received key updates on the Teachers Retirement System (TRS) and current Georgia legislative developments

affecting retired educators. Dr. Sallie Mills, President of the Georgia Retired Educators Association (GREA), shared valuable information connected to her theme for the year, "Sound the Trumpet!" PCREA also had the highest attendance at the district meeting. Members of the Peach County Retired Educators Association joined Trinity Baptist Church for a worship service, uniting with the church choir in praise and worship.

Rockdale REA has had a very busy summer. At the June meeting the 2026-27 officers were installed by Rockdale member Sue Troff. Myra Welch became Rockdale's president and Randy Goerner became president-elect. For the installation, Sue used the theme of baking cookies. Individually, the ingredients in cookies are all different, but when combined they create a tasty result. The same is true with a strong slate of officers. Everyone brings different strengths to the leadership team. At the July meeting, Toni Kelecheck from the local Refuge Center gave a presentation. The Refuge Center started forty-one years ago as a crisis pregnancy center. Today the center continues to provide a wide variety of counseling, classes and support to women who are pregnant. At the August meeting, well-known local storyteller Andy Irwin entertained the group with a collection of stories and songs. Rockdale ended the summer quarter by hosting the GREA Area 13-14 meeting. There were a total of seventy-four GREA members attending the meeting. The attendees heard from GREA President Dr. Sallie Mills, President-elect Liz Bouis, Legislative liaison Dr. Bill Sloan and GREA Executive Director Johnny Smith. Probably the highlight from all the speakers came from TRS representative Mike Zarem, who reported on how well TRS investments are at over \$134 billion.

South Fulton REA members Are Ready to Sound the Trumpet for 2026-2027! We are READY! Our Executive Committee met in July and began laying the foundation for an exciting and meaningful year ahead. We are thrilled to welcome our two new co-presidents, Dr. Ruby Jefferson and Dr. Frances Young, who have taken the helm and are ready to Sound the Trumpet as we move forward into 2026-2027! Our meetings have been planned. Our outings have been planned. Fellowship, friendship, service, and fun are all on the agenda! This fall, we will visit the Delta Flight Museum for a special day of fellowship with our members and friends of the association. We are looking forward to a year filled with connection, purpose, fellowship, and fun! We are ready!

Sumter County REA members attended the Area 1 & 2 Meeting on Tuesday, August 18, 2026, held at Albany Technical College. Evelyn Fillingame, Area 1 Director, was assisted by Area 2 Director Jane Butler. Breakfast was served before the meeting. The theme for the meeting was “Sound the Trumpet: Fellowship. Service. Support.” Evelyn Fillingame gave the welcome. Dougherty County REA President Dr. Merita Jones delivered the inspiration. Members heard from Dr. Sallie Mills, GREA President; Liz Bouis, GREA President-Elect; TRS Representative Mike Zarem; AMBA Representative Debbie Scarborough; and GREA Executive Director Johnny Smith.

Terrell-Lee REA members attended the Area I and Area II meeting held at Albany Technical College on August 18. Our theme for the 2026-2027 year is “Sound the Trumpet: Fellowship, Service, and Support.” Members also participated in welcoming Terrell County students back to school on August 3, 2026. The educators also supplied gift bags for all new teachers to make sure their first day was great. From an Educator to an Educator.

White County REA held its annual planning meeting in June and is prepared for a successful and rewarding 2026–2027 year. Our leadership team—President Debbie Truelove-Petty, Secretary Marcianne Burroughs, Treasurer Rachel Ficklin, and President-Elect Valerie Mateen—attended the Area 17/18 meeting on August 27, 2026, in Gainesville, Georgia. The meeting provided a valuable opportunity to connect with fellow retired educators, exchange ideas, and prepare for the year ahead. Our first White County REA meeting of the year will be held on Tuesday, September 15, 2026. We are pleased to welcome White County School Superintendent Dr. Jonathan Stribling as our guest speaker. As we begin the new year, our primary goals are to achieve our **7% membership growth goal** and continue supporting the students of White County through scholarships. We plan to award a scholarship to a graduating senior at **White County High School** and a student at **Mountain Education High School**. We are also looking forward to preparing for and participating in the **GREA Annual Convention in May 2027**. With renewed enthusiasm, dedication, and purpose, White County REA is ready to “**Sound the Trumpet!**” We look forward to a wonderful year filled with Fellowship, Service, and Support as we continue to make a positive difference in the lives of our members, students, and community. **Here’s to a fantastic and successful 2026–2027 year!**

Retired Educators Day in Georgia

It has become a tradition in Georgia for the first Sunday in November to be designated Retired Educators Day. Thanks so much to Governor Brian Kemp for continuing the tradition. He has declared November 1, 2026, as a day to recognize the 161,000+ retirees across Georgia for their lasting contributions to our state.

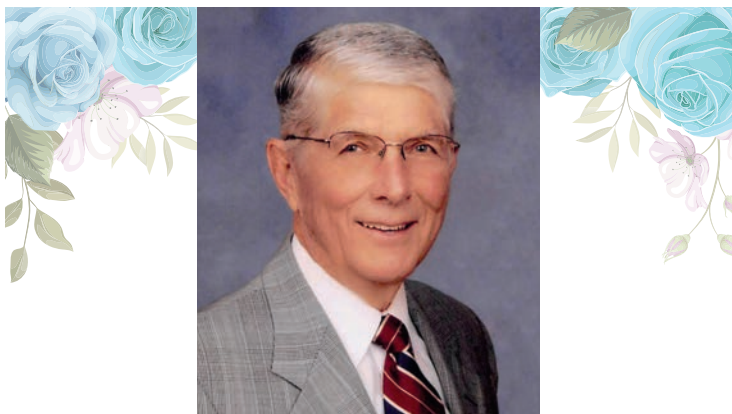


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GREA Loses a Great Leader

Former GREA Executive Director William "Bill" D. Gardner, age 85, passed away on Friday, September 11, 2026.

Bill began teaching in 1968 in Jacksonville, FL. He received his master's degree from the University of Florida in 1970 and his doctorate in educational leadership in 1974. He subsequently served 20 years as superintendent of schools in Okeechobee, FL and Baldwin and Dougherty counties in Georgia. While superintendent of schools in Dougherty County he served as the Southwest Georgia United Way campaign chairman, and on the board of directors for Albany Rotary Club, Salvation Army, Red Cross and the Albany Art Museum. While in Baldwin County he served as president of the Milledgeville Kiwanis Club.

Dr. Gardner served as GREA Executive Director from 2002 to 2005. In addition, he was Treasurer for the GRE Foundation for several years before recently stepping down.



GREA

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