

Voices of Experience

Newsletter for OEA-Retired

Omaha Education Association–Retired is an affiliate of NSEA-Retired and NEA-Retired
Roger Rea, Editor – email: rrea68154@yahoo.com www.OEAretired.org December 2024

Tax tips, Estate Planning, and Fraud on Dec. 5th agenda

Tax season will soon be upon us. Bridget O'Malley-Tynan and Andrea Thyfault from Tax Help, founded by Pat O'Malley, will be the speakers at the December 5 meeting for OEA-Retired to inform members about how the tax laws will affect them for 2025. The age at which payments from your IRA are required (called required minimum distributions or RMDs) changed recently. They will discuss some optimum times to start taking your RMD. Beginning January 1, 2024, 100% of your Social Security benefit will not be subject to Nebraska state income tax; and you have the ability to take a charitable deduction even if you do not itemize your deductions.

Many retirees want to leave a charitable legacy,

so Bridget will address how you can set up your own charitable trust to distribute your assets as you wish after you die. Tax efficient ways to make charitable contributions from your IRA instead of taking the taxable required minimum distribution (RMD) will be revealed. There are changes in the Nebraska property tax credit, a higher standard deduction, and federal energy credits that may affect how much tax you owe. They will also give some tips on avoiding identity theft and fraud.

The Thursday, December 5th meeting will be held at the OEA office, 4202 S. 57th Street, starting at 10 a.m. If you need driving directions, call the OEA office at 402-346-0400. See you there!

President's Message

By: Walta Sue Dodd, OEA-Retired President

The election results could impact education policy, with potential changes in funding, regulation, and oversight that could affect everything from early childhood learning to higher education. Specific policy proposals related to education are likely to emerge. We can count on a renewed focus on school choice; educational scholarships for private schools; reform of school funding; and special education open enrollment. Issues such as early literacy, math proficiency, and career readiness are likely to emerge. There is also a push for cell-phone-free schools and better teacher retention strategies. There are discussions about revising accreditation requirements under the Higher Education Act and potentially dismantling the US Department of Education. These proposals reflect a diverse set of priorities and approaches to education reform, indicating a dynamic and evolving landscape for education policy in the United States.

How can educators address these challenges and issues? We can do this by ensuring equitable access to quality education, which will require a comprehensive approach. Strategies include promoting inclusive policies, diversifying the educator workforce, and providing meaningful professional development to support teachers in creating inclusive classrooms. It is also essential to develop equitable school funding models to ensure that all students have access to the resources they need. Engaging students, families, and

communities as full partners in the educational process can help tailor education to meet diverse needs. Additionally, implementing inclusive discipline policies and ensuring access to rigorous, culturally sustaining curricula are vital steps towards equity. Access to health and social services can address barriers to learning that students face outside of school. By combining these efforts, stakeholders can work towards an education system that provides every student with the opportunity to succeed.

Retired educators can play a pivotal role by enhancing literacy skills. Here are some ways to help:

1. **One-on-One Tutoring:**

- Personalized attention can address individual student needs and learning gaps.
- Reading together, discussing stories, and asking comprehension questions can be very effective.

2. **Reading Circles and Clubs:**

- Organizing small group reading sessions encourages peer discussion and builds a community of young readers.
- Retired educators can introduce a variety of genres to broaden students' reading interests.

3. **Writing Workshops:**

- Guiding students through creative writing exercises can improve their writing skills.
- Offering feedback on their writing helps them understand strengths and areas for improvement.

4. Storytime Sessions:

- Reading aloud to students can help develop their listening skills and expose them to new vocabulary.
- Retired educators can use expressive reading techniques to make stories engaging and enjoyable.

5. Mentoring Programs:

- Establishing mentoring relationships can provide students with continuous support and encouragement.
- Mentors can share their love for reading and learning, fostering a positive attitude towards literacy.

6. Volunteer in Schools:

- Helping in classrooms or libraries provides

additional support for teachers and students.

- Assisting with literacy-related activities and events can make a significant impact.

7. Family Literacy Nights:

- Hosting events that involve parents and guardians can reinforce the importance of reading at home.
- Educators can offer strategies and resources for parents to support their children's literacy development.

Retired educators bring a wealth of experience, patience, and passion to these efforts, making them invaluable resources for young learners. Does any of this resonate with your ideas or inspire some new ones? I hope it does.

NSEA-Retired elections coming in 2024

Elections will be held soon for NSEA-Retired representatives in several categories. NSEA-Retired officers up for election include Treasurer and Secretary. There will be an election for one Metro District Director position on the NSEA-Retired Board. Walta Sue Dodd's term is up for election, and she is eligible to run for a third term if she chooses to do so. NSEA-Retired Board members can serve a maximum of three, three-year terms.

Delegates to represent NSEA-Retired at both NSEA Delegate Assembly (in April) and NEA Representative Assembly (in June and July) will also be elected.

Nominations for Officers, Metro District Director, and delegates to NSEA Delegate Assembly and NEA Representative Assembly will be taken through the NSEA-Retired web page, www.nsea.org/retired early next year. Consult the NSEA-Retired website for filing deadlines and procedures. The information will also be printed in upcoming issues of the *Advocate* and *Voices of*

Experience.

OEA-Retired meeting calendar

OEA-Retired will have three more general meetings this year. The meetings will be held at the OEA office, 4202 South 57th Street, from 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. The meeting dates and tentative programs as well as NSEA-Retired meetings of note are:

Dec. 5, Thurs. – Tax Tips and Tips on Wills and Estate Planning (Bridget O'Malley)

Feb. 18, Tues. – NSEA-Retired Lobby Day, Lincoln

March 13, Thurs. – Tour of Museum (Joslyn Museum planned)

April 24, Thurs. – NSEA-Retired Spring Conference

April 24-26, Fri. and Sat. – NSEA Delegate Assembly (Lincoln)

May 8, Thurs. – OEA-Retired elections; Scams perpetrated on seniors

OEA-Retired will not meet in person if OPS schools are closed for inclement weather or health reasons. Notice will be sent out if the session is rescheduled for a later date.

Membership drive update

By: Deb Pauley, OEA-Retired Director At-Large

OEA-Retired President Walta Sue Dodd appointed Deb Pauley and Sherry Brodkey to chair a Membership Committee for OEA-Retired. The goal of the Committee is to increase the number of pre-retired and retired members of OEA-Retired.

We attend the monthly meetings of OEA Association Representatives (ARs). We plan to continue attending those monthly meetings to hand out membership brochures, answer any questions members have about the retired program, and award two \$10 Scooters gift cards to ARs in attendance. We believe that our presence at the meetings helps bring a smile to the teachers at the end of a long day.

Active members can use the OEA-Retired website, www.oearetired.org, to join OEA-Retired. As an added bonus, our website has information about our retirement system, OSERS, including a detailed explanation of the six payment options available and the differences in the four retirement benefit tiers. *[The benefit tier depends on the date that you were hired by OPS.]* It also has a link to a benefit estimator calculator so members can get an idea of what their retirement benefit will be. In addition, the website has information about health insurance options after you retire, including how to make the transition from active-employee insurance to retiree-insurance (including how to make the transition to Medicare).

Many members are not aware that they can join OEA-Retired at any age, and that they do not have to be retired to become a retired member. Our overall

goal is to have more teachers join OEA-Retired early and not wait until they retire. Each year the cost of membership goes up, and we would like to have members join at the current rate.

Be sure to visit our website. Encourage active teachers that you know to join as pre-retired, lifetime subscribers. With increased membership comes increased strength.

Did you have a Cox email account? Give us your new email address!

By: Roger Rea, OEA-Retired Webmaster Pro tem

Cox Cable recently stopped providing email services to its subscribers, and switched all subscribers to Yahoo mail. I sent an email to OEA-Retired members in October, giving details on the upcoming Medicare seminars (including registration links) and the November elections. A total of 145 emails “bounced,” which means that the email address we had was no longer valid. All of them were cox.net accounts. I checked with NSEA-Retired, and more than 300 NSEA-Retired members had cox.net email accounts.

Information on the upcoming Lobby Day as well as NSEA-Retired Spring Conference registration and filing for NSEA-Retired elections is all sent via email now. OEA-Retired uses email to get registrations for our tours and other meetings. We need your corrected, updated email address to keep you fully informed!

NSEA-Retired will be sending a postcard to all members with a Cox email address, including those from OEA-Retired. There are three options to quickly update your email address:

- Send an email to **membership@nsea.org** from your new email address requesting we update the information in our system. Be sure to include your current mailing address.
- Call the NSEA membership department at 1-800-742-0047 and request to update your email address.
- Go online to the NSEA-Retired website, **www.nsea.org/retired**, to update your contact information. A link to update your contact information was under development as this newsletter was sent to the printer.

Email addresses are an important way to contact our members quickly. The link to update your contact information will be a permanent part of the NSEA-Retired website, and it will be included in issues of *The NSEA Voice* and *NSEA-Retired Advocate*. Since NSEA maintains our membership database, correcting your email address with NSEA-Retired will automatically correct it for OEA-Retired.

NSEA-Retired announces LEAD Program training

By: Kristen Sedlacek, NSEA Staff Liaison to NSEA-Retired

NSEA-Retired is starting a new program for NSEA-Retired members who wish to become more active and engaged in the Association. The **Legacy Educators Advocacy Development (LEAD)** program will offer training on Monday, February 17, 2025, at the NSEA building in Lincoln. NSEA-Retired members who wish to become more active and engaged in the Association are encouraged to attend this inaugural event.

Attendees will receive detailed information on NSEA-Retired leadership opportunities and how to get the most out of your NSEA-Retired membership. Travel expenses – including mileage, hotel accommodations, and meals – will be provided.

Additional details will be communicated to NSEA-Retired members via email very soon. Contact Kristen Sedlacek, **kristen.sedlacek@nsea.org** for more information.

OSERS/NPERS Update

By: Roger Rea, *Voices of Experience* Editor

Nebraska Public Employee Retirement Systems, NPERS, is now fully in charge of the OSERS retirement system. OPS started using *Active Directory* in November 2015 to allow employees to receive the monthly statements about their pay electronically from the OPS website. Employees who retired after Nov. 2015 are still able to log into *OPS Anywhere* to view their benefit advice, so NPERS does not send a paper copy of the benefit advice to them. All OSERS members who retired before Nov. 2015 received a monthly paper statement from OSERS with their

pension amount (both gross pension and take-home pension) prior to the transition to NPERS. NPERS will continue to send a paper statement to those members. The October 2024 pay advice statements were delayed because of printing problems at NPERS, but the November 2024 pay advice statements were mailed to arrive close to the Nov. 3rd payment date. NPERS has stated that this practice will continue for those members who retired prior to Nov. 2015.

The NPERS website, **www.npers.ne.gov**, was recently redesigned to provide more security for those members who log into the website for personal information. The redesign has a small glitch! The Uniform Resource Locator, URL, for the NPERS website is: **<https://www.npers.ne.gov>**, and is often

shortened to just: www.npers.ne.gov. For some reason, the new website does not recognize either version of the full URL. Several OEA-Retired members have contacted OEA-Retired about the glitch. The easiest solution (at least for now) is to not use the full URL. Just type the abbreviated URL npers.ne.gov into your browser search bar and you'll get to the NPERS website easily.

All OSERS members who have been retired for a year or more will receive a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) in January. That will increase your take-home pay. NPERS typically sends a notice to members when there is a change in take-home pay, so look for a letter from NPERS in January with your new pension amount. The details on how and when to send that notice are not finalized, so it may not be done in a timely manner this first year. You can

log into the account where your direct-deposit is made to find out the total that was deposited on January 3rd if you don't get the paper copy. The deposit will be made on the January 3rd schedule.

Since OSERS members received payments from OSERS for the first nine months of this year (January thru September), and will receive three

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months of payments from NPERS (October thru December), you will get two 1099-R statements this year for your tax preparation. OSERS will send you a 1099-R for the payments that came from the OSERS account at OPS, and NPERS will send you a 1099-R for the payments that come directly from NPERS. Look for both to arrive in January 2025.

Medicare updates for 2025

Medicare Part D, the prescription drug benefit, will have a maximum out-of-pocket cap of \$2,000 for the 2025 plan year. There is currently a soft cap of \$3,500, so Medicare subscribers with high prescription drug costs will see a savings in 2025. The savings are made possible by a provision enacted in 2022. There is a caution: to gain benefit from the cap, you must select a drug plan that covers all of the medications you take and you must use a pharmacy that accepts your drug plan. If you use non-formulary drugs (ones not covered by your plan), none of the cost of the non-covered drugs will apply to your out-of-pocket maximum! The deadline for selecting a Part D plan for 2025 is December 7, 2024. Go to the Medicare website, www.medicare.gov, to find an appropriate Part D provider and for further information.

If you were not able to attend one of the Medicare seminars hosted by BCBSNE this fall, you can find a link to a recording of the event on the EHA website, www.ehaplan.org/retiree-info.

OSERS COLA payment paid in January

The Omaha School Employees' Retirement

OEA-Retired elections will be held in May 2025 for President, Vice President, and two At-Large Directors.

System, OSERS, provides a cost-of-living adjustment, COLA, to retiree checks each year. The COLA is determined by calculating the change in the consumer price index, CPI, for the previous twelve months (ending August 31) to determine how much to adjust the amount of your retirement pension. The pensions are adjusted in January of the following year based on the August 31 inflation calculation. The annual COLA is capped at 1.5% for Tier 1 retirees (those who became OSERS members on or before July 1, 2013); it is capped at 1.0% for Tier 2, 3 and 4 retirees (those who became OSERS members after July 1, 2013).

General inflation exceeded 1.5% for this past year, so most Tier 1 retirees will get the full 1.5% COLA in January, and most Tier 2, 3 and 4 retirees will get a 1.0% COLA. If you retired less than two years ago, your COLA may be slightly less than the full amounts – the amount of the COLA is outlined in state law. Your “take home” increase will be less than the full COLA if you have income tax withheld from your pension, or if you chose any of the joint-and-survivorship payment forms.

The January COLA adjustment is independent from the Medical COLA benefit. The Medical COLA benefit is paid in October each year to individuals who have been retired for 10 years or more.