



The Apple Corps

October 2023

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KNEA-Retired and
KNEA
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Kansas  National
Education Association
Retired

President's Perspective

An open letter to Gov. Laura Kelly and members of the Kansas Legislature:

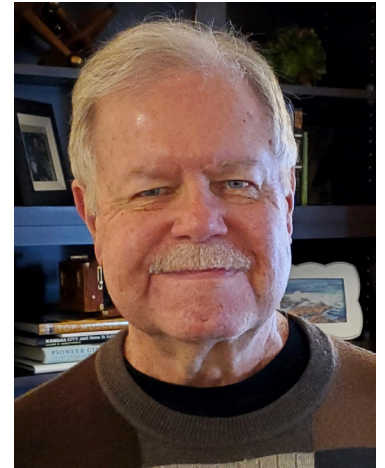
Many of our KNEA-Retired members retired over 20 years ago. During that time, the cost of living has continued to increase. Everything costs more than it did. But those same members are receiving the same KPERS benefits they received the first month they retired. That's what they knew they were signing up for, but since many other benefits received by retired folks have received some kind of increase, it was reasonable to expect that there would be some kind of Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) to our benefits. But for the last 26 years, Kansas retirees have received no COLA. **It's time.**

Only the governor and the legislature can correct this glaring oversight. It must be done by legislative action. KPERS doesn't cover only educators, but also police and firefighters. There is a coalition of these groups called the Kansas Coalition of Public Retirees, KCPR, that has been lobbying for years for this goal. KNEA-Retired is a critical component of this group. They have presented evidence and demonstrated the need and pointed out that any increase in retirement benefits would be spent back in the communities where retirees live. Still, no COLA. **It's time.**

Adjustments to public employee retirement benefits have been made in the past. Seventeen times in fact. But nothing since 1997. **It's time.**

KNEA-R members care about this issue because it affects all of us. But we are especially concerned for some of our older and long retired members. Recently public radio station KCUR in Kansas City presented a profile of Janet Greer from Wichita who is 85 years old. She retired 23 years ago, and her monthly KPERS retirement benefit adds up to roughly \$16,000 a year. The amount, combined with her Social Security income, is what she has to pay all of her bills and living expenses. The state of Kansas is currently sitting on a record budget surplus, while Janet struggles each month. With a COLA of some kind, her situation could improve. **It's time.**

This year, expect a massive effort from KNEA-R members to contact you and encourage you to support a KPERS COLA. A small group of members of KNEA-R will be coming to all local associations this year to present the facts regarding a COLA and will be seeking more stories of those who have been retired for 20 or more years. They need a COLA of some kind. **It's time. It's past time.**



**Representing all 2,100 members of Kansas-NEA Retired,
Bob Thesman, KNEA-Retired President**



During months when there is no printed Apple Corps, look for an email newsletter update. Please be sure we have an updated email address on file for you so that you receive the update.

In the Spotlight

In each issue this year we will be spotlighting one KNEA-R member and one local association. This month the member featured is Pam Taverner, for whom the KNEA-R annual service award is named. The first local featured (see p. 3) is one of the first two local associations that were established in Kansas, the Sunflower West (formerly Sunflower) local. **If you would like to join a local association in your area, please get in touch with us so we can provide you with contact information.**

Member Spotlight **Pamela Johnson Taverner** **KNEA-Retired Distinguished** **Service Award**

The Pamela Johnson Taverner KNEA-Retired Distinguished Service Award was established in 2019 by the KNEA-R board. The purpose is to recognize members who throughout their careers have been outstanding professional educators and outstanding KNEA member leaders. Pam was, and is, exemplary in both endeavors. She grew up in southern Indiana as an avid reader, animal lover, and trained horses to earn money for college. Seeking adventure after high school, Pam chose to attend Friends University in Wichita. Her long term goal was teaching English; in her sophomore year she became involved in drama, and the rest is history. Pam taught for 37 years. After four years teaching in Elk Valley, Kansas, and Summerville, Missouri, she joined the faculty at Clearwater High School. Pam's career always included teaching all levels of English, speech, drama, and forensics. She earned a Master's degree in Communications from Wichita State University. In addition to her day job(s), Pam also taught for Cowley County Community College, Kansas Newman University, and Wichita State.

She was an active participant and leader in professional organizations. Pam was frequently chosen to serve on North Central Evaluation teams for K-12 and NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) visiting teams for colleges and universities across the country. Currently, she also serves on the Kansas Teacher Hall of Fame Board of Directors.

For Kansas-NEA and NEA, Pam was a local, UniServ, state, and national leader. Not a figure head, a real leader. She was always at the head of a charge for improving conditions and outcomes for students, staff, schools, and professional organizations. Pam served 13 years on the KNEA Board of Directors, including six years on the NEA Board of Directors. At the regional NEA level, she chaired the Western States Region. After retiring, Pam worked diligently for KNEA-Retired. She produced the Apple Corps newsletter for 8 years and served as president of KNEA-R from 2011 to 2015.



Debi Ellis, left, former KNEA-R vice president, presented Pam Taverner, right, with the inaugural Pamela Johnson KNEA-Retired Distinguished Service Award in 2019.

Chapter Spotlight Sunflower West (Kansas City area)

One of the first locals founded by a KNEA-R member was the Sunflower local located in the Johnson County area. The current name of that local is "Sunflower West." Betty Morgan, a longtime active and Retired member, was the impetus behind establishing the local. Currently Sunflower West, which is primarily comprised of Retired members from the Wyandotte and western Johnson County areas, meets at Pegah's Restaurant in Shawnee for a breakfast meal at 10 a.m. Attendance averages around 20 members. After orders are taken, a program is presented including any business that needs to be done for the local, reports from state and national NEA Retired, and then a guest speaker from the community. Often after the speaker expresses a need, the local votes to make a donation for that cause from their dues. This local also takes numerous field trips together. Visits have included the Kansas City Zoo, Johnson County Museum, the Toy and Miniature Museum, TWA Museum, and a winery in Parkville, MO. The current president of Sunflower West is Elaine Engle, (913) 593-1474, engleelaine@yahoo.com.

Coordinating Council

The KNEA-R Coordinating Council met for their first of three meetings of this year on Sept. 25 at KNEA HQ. We welcomed 5 new members to the council and noted we still have a vacancy for the Alliance Uniserv District. We held a moment of silence in memory of the Wyandotte representative, Claire Bolton, who passed away recently, and in honor of others we know who have passed or face serious illness. We received two applications for grants from our reserve grant funds. One was from the Santa Fe local who will be attempting to revive their local with a gathering of invited members from a wide area around Great Bend.

If this action works, we will be offering that idea to other locals. That grant was approved. Another grant asked to fund a project to promote the female voice for advocating for a cost of living adjustment (COLA) by visiting locals around the state and providing specific information and encouraging contacts to legislators. After lengthy discussion about both the grant and the need for a COLA after 26 years without one, the grant was partially funded because the total funds were not available. Election nomination dates for KNEA RA delegates on Oct. 15 and NEA RA delegates on Dec. 1 were noted.

The Pamela Johnson Taverner KNEA-Retired Distinguished Service Award guidelines were reviewed, and there was one bylaw changed approved and three others presented for a first reading. Our participatory activity was a Racial Justice/Labor Acknowledgement history which we read in turns, learning much about the history of NEA. Reports from chairs and other closed the meeting. Our next meeting will be Feb. 6 on Zoom.

-Submitted by Sherry Turnbull

KNEA-Retired PAC

Local elections matter! Make sure you are supporting candidates who support public schools, then vote on Nov. 7. Look for candidate information at **Vote411.org**. Shelley Dunham, Chris Huntsman and Ruthe Goff are working to raise the "Female Voice" for a KPERS COLA. Connections are being made to gather research and plans to visit local KNEA-R chapters are a goal. Information will be shared and stories will be collected to support advocating for a COLA. When the "Female Voice" is raised, so are all other voices.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS: The Interim Joint Committee on Insurance and Pensions is supposed to be meeting Nov. 2-3. This is the legislative committee that receives KPERS updates. Stay tuned for updates from KNEA-R and be ready to wear your Proud KNEA Retired apparel! Reach out to Ruthe Goff, ruthe.goff.forkansas@gmail.com, 913-709-2522, with questions or if you wish to be more involved with KPERS COLA advocacy.

2023-24 KNEA-Retired Executive Committee

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Vice President • Sherry Turnbull

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Secretary-Treasurer • Robert Hubbard

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KNEA Board Member • Judy Johnson

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KNEA-Retired Local Presidents

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Sunflower East (Kansas City area):

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Sept 2023 KNEA
Board Update

Member & Local Spotlight
NEA-R Annual Meeting &
NEA-R RA
Wrap Up

Open Letter to
Gov. Laura Kelly and
Kansas Legislators

In This Issue:



Kansas National
Education Association



The Apple Corps

Kansas NEA Retired

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KNEA Board Report

“Busy, busy, busy” and “Important, important, important” were the mind reels of KNEA’s September board of directors’ meeting.

Though the BOD work is always essential to the union, this meeting was especially varied in its business, all of it vital to the health of our professional organization.

Rex Hull, Director of Organizing, reported an increase of 25.7% in membership from last spring’s early enrollment program through the middle of September as compared to that same time last year. Tim Graham, Director of Government Relations and Coalitions, spoke of the work being done during the ‘off session’ on behalf of educators and students. While current retirees have the benefit of KPERS Tiers I and II, those working in education under Tier III don’t have the assurance of a solid and sound benefit. KNEA and its coalition partners are working to correct this injustice. Tim spoke of the tuition raises at all universities and their increase in enrollments from 1.1-1.7%. Interestingly, enrollment in the state’s technical schools is up 8.6%.

Ogden Financial Group and Security Benefit have been strong and steady supporters of KNEA and its members. They have an annual event in October, including a daily drawing for \$100 gift card for KNEA members.

California Casualty, the KNEA endorsed insurance program for members, has announced that, for the strength of its business and the continuation of quality services for customers, coverage will no longer be available nationwide. Kansas is one of seven states that will continue to benefit from California Casualty.

Kevin Reimann has retired as executive director of KNEA. Peggy Cochran, the former executive director of Missouri for 20+ years, has been hired as the interim director for KNEA during the process to seek and hire the best possible person for the position. Ms. Cochran began her duties in Topeka on Oct. 4.

Because of another retirement, the KNEA board had to appoint someone to complete a term on the NEA Board of Directors which expires after the completion of the 2024 NEA RA. Sixteen, yes, 16 active members submitted their application for the

KNEA Board Report

position. After 15-minute interviews of each candidate, the board elected Brian Skinner, a special education teacher from Newton and 2023 Kansas Teacher of the Year, to fill the unexpired term. The board also had an unexpired term opening for the Education Support Professional position; three candidates were interviewed.

Tara Florentin, a 20-year member from Ottawa, was elected to fill that term. Reports of Teaching and Learning Activities, the Racial Justice and Social Justice Committees, Resolutions and Constitution and By-laws. Marcus Baltzell and Angela Deines have been working to revamp the KNEA website with amazing changes.

This meeting had it all! To find out more, get on the new website, www.knea.org.

**-Submitted by Judy Johnson, KNEA-Retired,
KNEA Board of Directors**

Chapter Notes

The **Northwest Prairie Winds Retired Educators** visited Fort Hays State University on Sept. 14. We learned about the impressive innovations in the teacher education programs as we toured classrooms in Rarick Hall. We were also impressed with the many cutting-edge programs offered for students at the Center for Applied Technology. After a catered lunch provided by the university, we elected officers and scheduled events of the organization through 2024.

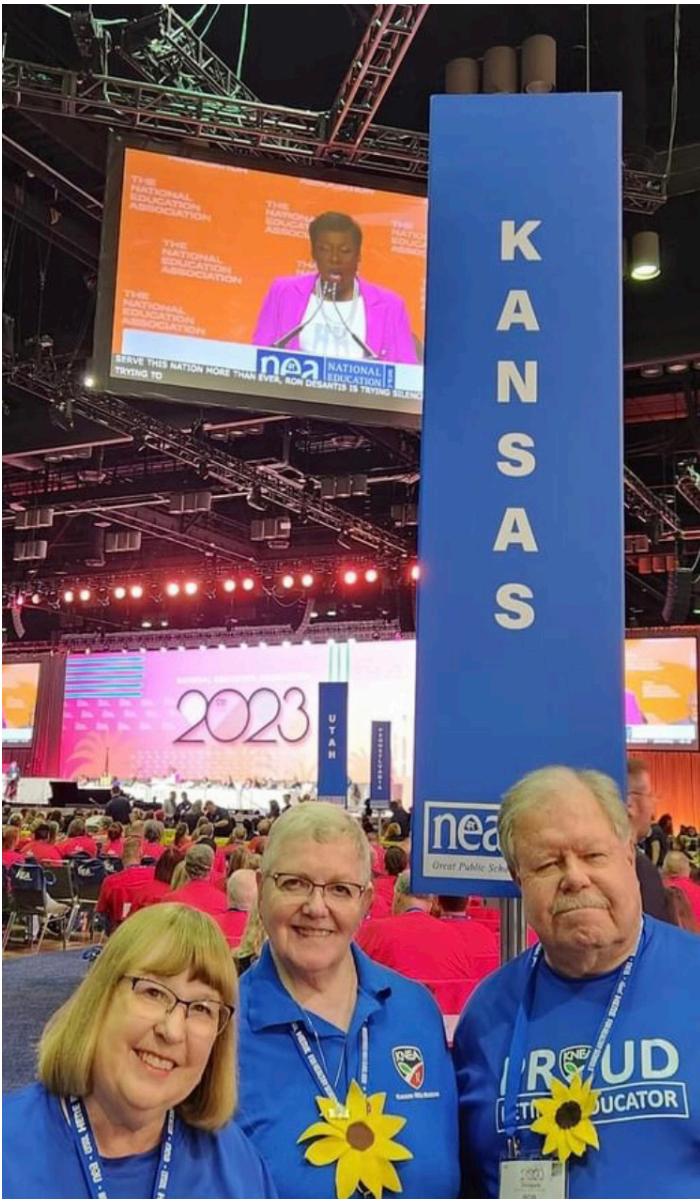
Our next event for retired teachers and their guests was on Oct. 11, at The Elephant Bistro & Bar in Hoxie. Afterwards, a program on Egypt was presented followed with a tour of the Cottonwood Ranch Historic Site at Studley. Contact Mona Coupal, president, to RSVP or to learn more about the organization.

Officers elected on Sept. 14 are: President—Mona Coupal; Vice-President—Jerry Blank; Secretary—Mary Porterfield; Treasurer—Penny Arnoldy. Appointed officers for KNEA-Retired are: Coordinating Council Representative—Carolyn May; Membership—Mona Coupal; Political Action—Mary Porterfield. The officers began their duties after this meeting.

Submitted by Carolyn May

NEA-R Annual Meeting

The first week of July, delegates Bob Thesman, Sherry Turnbull, and Dian Dotts attended the NEA Retired Annual Meeting (RAM) and the NEA-Representative Assembly (RA) in hot and steamy Orlando. The hotels were in the Disney Springs area which made for some fun evening dinners. During the day, we attended meetings usually from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., studying and voting on new business, electing officers, raising money for the NEA-Fund, and listening to inspiring speeches.



Sherry Turnbull, left, Dian Dotts, and Bob Thesman, represented KNEA-Retired at the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting and NEA-Retired Representative Assembly in Orlando, Florida, in early July.

NEA-RA

The 40th Anniversary Celebration was held of NEA-Retired, complete with a fancy cake and greetings from NEA officers Becky Pringle, Princess Moss, and Noel Candelaria. Retired President Sarah Borgman was presented with many accolades as she completed her term of office on Sept. 1. Newly elected NEA-Retired President Anita Gibson from Alabama will now lead our association of more than 323,000 members! Thanks to our own Bob Thesman for serving on the Elections Committee.

Retired members also gave five Jack Kinnaman \$3500 scholarships to Aspiring Educators. If you would like to donate to this fund to support future teachers, the online link is donatekinnaman.com.

Next, we moved hotels for the NEA-RA and attended the 7 a.m. Kansas Caucus each morning as retired delegates, participating in the debate of 94 New Business Items (NBI) and many Resolutions! Approximately 6000 active teachers, ESP and retired members attended the RA with the theme "Freedom to Learn."

Many inspiring speakers addressed the body, including Joe and Jill Biden through video chat, U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, and National Teacher of The Year, Rebecka Peterson, from Tulsa. Helena Donato-Sapp, a 14-year girl who calls herself "fierce and kind" captured the hearts of delegates as she talked to educators about her activism for students with disabilities.

It was also great to learn that NEA Retired members through the year raised \$1.3 million for the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education.

Probably the best part of the week for retired delegates was making connections with friends and colleagues, new and old. There were many new Kansas delegates and it was exciting to see the passion that they have for public education!

**Submitted by Sherry Turnbull,
KNEA-Retired Vice President**