

November is Foundation Month
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DONATE TODAY!

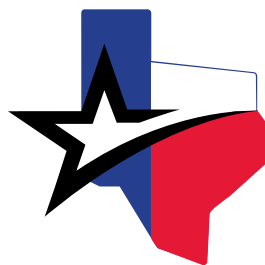
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The VOICE

THE OFFICIAL NEWS BULLETIN OF THE TEXAS RETIRED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

THE TEXAS RETIRED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION ADVOCATES IMPROVED BENEFITS FOR
ALL PUBLIC EDUCATION RETIREES AND PROMOTES THE WELL-BEING OF ITS MEMBERS.

NOVEMBER IS FOUNDATION MONTH

Texas Retired Teachers Foundation

RESTORING HOPE

& SUPPORTING EDUCATORS

Since 1988, the Texas Retired Teachers Foundation (TRTF) has been dedicated to improving the lives of educators across the state. What began as a small effort to give back to those who devoted their lives to teaching has grown into a powerful philanthropic organization that supports both active and retired educators in meaningful and life-changing ways.

Through its core programs — the First-Year Teacher Scholarship, Classroom Assistance Grant, and “A Helping Hand” — as well as the newly created Dr. Kate Bell and E.L. Galyean Assistance Fund, TRTF embodies the spirit of kindness and community that defines the teaching profession.



Bill Barnes

TRTF PRESIDENT

“Supporting TRTF gives retirees and active teachers HOPE! ‘A Helping Hand’ gives retirees HOPE that someone is there in their time of need. Imagine how grateful — and hopeful — teachers feel to receive funds for their classroom projects. Knowing you gave someone hope feels good and makes a difference!”

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

The Lasting Impact of Texas Educators



Texas educators show their commitment every day by enriching students' lives and inspiring a love of learning. Yet many lack the resources to turn their innovative ideas into reality.

TRTF's Grant and Scholarship programs celebrate their dedication by providing the funding needed to bring those ideas to life.



Investing in the Next Generation

For many aspiring teachers, entering the classroom comes with significant personal expense. A first-year teacher in Texas spends hundreds of dollars outfitting their classroom with the supplies and resources necessary to foster learning. TRTF eases this burden through its First-Year Teacher Scholarships, which provide financial assistance to those at the start of their teaching careers.

These scholarships not only give new educators a head start but also signal that they are not alone in their journey. By reducing financial stress, TRTF enables young teachers to focus on their students, laying the foundation for strong, innovative classrooms across Texas.

Bringing Classrooms to Life

TRTF also supports active educators through its Classroom Assistance Grants, which provide direct funding for projects that enrich student learning. These grants have sparked creativity in classrooms statewide, allowing teachers to transform ideas into impactful programs.

One example is a horticulture project in Buda, started nearly a decade ago with TRTF support. Designed as a hands-on learning space for

students facing disciplinary challenges, the program used gardening to teach responsibility, teamwork, and personal growth. The project was so successful that the school continued to expand it, and even years later, the garden still thrives—serving as a living symbol of how a small grant can have long-lasting impact.

Stories like this are at the heart of TRTF's mission. By funding educators' visions, the Foundation ensures that Texas classrooms remain places of inspiration, even when budgets fall short.

Extending a Helping Hand

While scholarships and grants strengthen schools, the Texas Retired Teachers Foundation also recognizes that many retired educators face urgent, personal challenges. The Foundation's "A Helping Hand" program provides emergency financial assistance to retirees who find themselves in crisis.

Since its inception in 2010, over \$315,000 in assistance has been awarded for needs such as medical and utility bills, auto repair, dental work, and groceries. This year, one "A Helping Hand" grant made it possible for a retired teacher to have a lift installed in his car, giving him the independence to move safely from his scooter into the seat.

Honoring Legacies Through the Dr. Kate Bell and E.L. Galyean Assistance Fund

In 2025, TRTF launched the Dr. Kate Bell and E.L. Galyean Assistance Fund, its newest initiative made possible by an inaugural gift generously provided by David Morgan, founder of United Teachers Insurance Company (UTA) and co-founder of Association Member Benefits Advisors (AMBA), in honor of two influential mentors—Dr. Kate Bell and Mr. E.L. Galyean. Their guidance and belief in serving retired educators left a lasting impact on Morgan, who chose to honor their legacy through a fund dedicated to supporting TRTA retirees facing financial hardship.



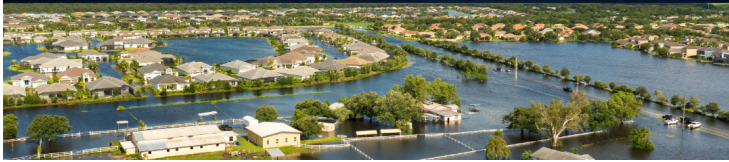
Disaster Relief

*Helping Public Education Retirees
Rebuild After Disaster.*



Assists public education retirees who require emergency financial assistance due to a disaster. Grant seekers are not required to be members of TRTA, but must be receiving benefits from the Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS).

Learn more at www.trtf.org/initiatives.



This gift ensures that Bell and Galyean's contributions to the association will continue impacting lives for generations. TRTA members will benefit, not only through tangible support but through the renewed hope that such generosity inspires.

Pictured on page 2 is TRTF supporter David Morgan with the Board of Trustees and Executive Director Tim Lee after signing the donor agreement to establish the Dr. Kate Bell and E.L. Galyean Assistance Fund.

Voices of Service

TRTF's impact is also deeply felt by those who guide its mission. Trustees describe their work as both humbling and inspiring. "I most value service on the TRTF Board the opportunity it gives me to be of service to TRTA current and future members," said Maridell Fryar. Patricia Macias emphasized the joy of "working with a great TRTF Board of Trustees and programs" that help both retirees and active teachers. For Gwen Craig, the reward is "touching the future of children" through teacher support. And Jesse Ramos noted the value of collaboration to broaden perspectives and meet the needs of those less fortunate.

A Foundation Built on Care

The heart of TRTF lies in its ability to

projects, and ensuring that retirees in crisis are never left without options.

Over the years, TRTF has grown not only in size but also in trust. Donors know that their contributions go straight to helping educators. And as more people see the direct impact of the Foundation's work, support continues to grow.

Yet even as it grows, TRTF remains rooted in its simple mission: to improve the lives of those who have devoted their lives to education.

Join Us During Foundation Month

Every November, TRTF celebrates Foundation Month, a time dedicated to raising awareness and funds for its life-changing programs. It is the single most

connect donors' generosity with educators' needs. Unlike many foundations where gifts may feel abstract, TRTF ensures that every dollar goes directly to programs that make a personal difference.

TRTF's work demonstrates care in its purest form: helping young teachers succeed, supporting creative classroom

important opportunity each year for members, retirees, and supporters to contribute to scholarships, grants, and emergency assistance that directly impact educators across Texas.

A gift during Foundation Month—whether large or small—helps TRTF continue its mission of restoring hope. By donating, you become part of a legacy of generosity that uplifts teachers beginning their careers, supports creativity in classrooms, and ensures retired educators in crisis are never left behind.

You can make your donation using the card included at the back of this issue of *The VOICE*. Your support this November will change lives and carry forward the legacy of Texas educators for generations to come. ★

First-Year Teacher Scholarship



Mary Nell Short & Ashlynn Gamblin

Ashlynn Gamblin receives a First-Year Teacher Scholarship from TRTF Past-President Mary Nell Short, using it to create a welcoming classroom with manipulatives, flexible seating, and light covers.

TRTA Initiatives Shine a Spotlight on Educators and Retirees

The Texas Retired Teachers Association (TRTA) is committed to celebrating the people who make public education in Texas extraordinary—both active educators still in the classroom and the retirees who continue to inspire and serve their communities. To bring these stories to life, TRTA has launched two ongoing series: Chalkboard Champion and TRTA & ME. Together, they are helping shine a light on the dedication, creativity, and impact of teachers, principals, and retired members across the state.

Celebrating Today's Educators: Chalkboard Champion

TRTA has launched Chalkboard Champion, a series designed to highlight the accomplishments of active public-school educators. At a time when much of the public conversation about education focuses on challenges, TRTA is working to ensure that the positive contributions of teachers and school leaders are recognized.

So far, the series has shared three inspiring stories. One featured RyAnn VanCleave (pictured above), the new principal at J.L. Boren Elementary in Mansfield, who is leading her campus with vision and enthusiasm. Another spotlighted Beth Ann Woodard, principal of J.B. Little Elementary, who introduced a “game on” theme to kick off the school year, inspiring students and staff with a sense of teamwork and energy. The most recent story highlighted the EMS Academy at the Parker County Hospital District, which partners with local high schools to train future emergency medical technicians. This program not only equips students with life-saving skills but also demonstrates the power of schools working hand-in-hand with community organizations. You can read this story on page 5.

Through Chalkboard Champion, TRTA is amplifying the stories that remind us of the incredible work happening every day in Texas classrooms. All published Chalkboard Champion stories are available at www.trta.org/chalkboard-champion. To nominate an active educator for this series, members can use the online form at www.trta.org/champion-form.

Honoring Our Members: TRTA & ME

In February, TRTA launched TRTA & ME, which highlights the stories of our own members. Each week, we feature narratives that showcase how retirees are continuing to make a difference in their communities, advocating for positive change, and prioritizing health and wellness.

The stories so far have been as diverse as they are heartwarming. We featured a retiree who dedicated an astonishing 52 years to teaching, inspiring generations of Texas students. TRTA member La Verne Redman was celebrated for crafting 250 quilts every year (pictured to the right), which she donates to middle school students as a gesture of care and encouragement. One especially fun feature introduced a member whose mission is to find the best chicken-fried steak across Texas.

A special story highlighted Zeke Castro (pictured below), revered as Austin’s “El Rey” of mariachi, who was honored at the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum for his lifelong contributions to mariachi music and education.

These stories reflect the rich tapestry of experiences and passions within TRTA, demonstrating that retirement does not mark an end, but a new chapter of service, creativity, and joy. All published TRTA & ME stories are available at www.trta.org/trta-and-me. Members who would like to share their own journey—or nominate a fellow retiree—can do so by visiting www.trta.org/submit-a-story.

A Common Goal

Though they highlight different groups, both Chalkboard Champion and TRTA & ME share a common goal: to spread positivity and celebrate the people who shape education in Texas. Whether it's a principal motivating students, a retiree quilting with purpose, or a program training the next generation of first responders, these stories show that Texas educators—past and present—are still changing lives every day. ★



Chalkboard Champion: EMS Academy Gains Traction in North-Central Texas

Building the Next Generation of First Responders: EMS Academy Prepares Texas High Schoolers for the Workforce

When the pandemic left emergency medical services (EMS) across Texas struggling with staffing shortages, Jim Backus, Department Director of Parker County Hospital District EMS, saw both a challenge and an opportunity.

Backus had long partnered with local Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs in Aledo and Weatherford, allowing high school students to shadow medics and observe ambulance ride-outs. But he wondered: What if students could do more than observe? What if they could graduate high school with real-world certifications and a head start on a career in medicine?

That idea became the foundation for the Parker County EMS Academy, a program training high school seniors to become certified Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) or dispatchers before graduation.

From Idea to Impact

“When COVID hit, EMS took a big hit,” Backus explained. “Many retired, others left the field, and we knew we had to rebuild our numbers. At the same time, I looked at these high school kids and thought—this could be a great opportunity for them.”

Accepted students spend their senior year balancing classroom instruction with ambulance ride-outs and hands-on training at Parker County’s EMS headquarters in Weatherford. By the end of the year, they are eligible to

sit for the national EMT exam. Those who pass graduate with a certification that can lead directly to jobs starting at about \$60,000 per year.

“Compare that to fast food or retail jobs,” Backus said. “This program gives them a real career path—many of our graduates use it to pay for college and come out debt-free, just like I did.”

A School’s Perspective

At Mineral Wells High School, the EMS Academy has become a key addition to its health science pathway. Deann Hampton, the school’s CTE Director, explained that students must already be enrolled in health science courses to apply.

“We don’t open it up to everyone, only because it is hard,” Hampton said. “Having some background in medical terminology helps them be more successful.”

Mineral Wells was among the first schools to join when the academy launched during the pandemic. Hampton credits Backus and his team for making the model sustainable. “Most schools only had a handful of interested students, so it made sense to centralize the program at their facility. Now, it’s grown so much they run two sessions a day.”

For her students, the experience has been transformative. One graduate passed the EMT exam on her first try and immediately found weekend work while attending college full time. Another entered paramedic school. Others have taken flexible event and sports assignments to earn money while pursuing degrees.

“At first, they’re stressed out because it is adult-level content,” Hampton said. “But once they find their rhythm, they start to shine. You just watch them grow as individuals.”

More Than a Job

The academy prepares students not just for paychecks but for responsibility.



They learn medical terminology, patient care, and professional communication while gaining confidence alongside seasoned medics.

“They learn to interview patients, communicate with families, and handle stressful situations,” Backus said. “By the end of the year, they’ve grown tremendously in confidence and maturity.”

Some graduates pursue nursing or paramedic school, while others enter the workforce immediately - filling critical EMS roles in rural communities that struggle with staffing shortages.

Expanding Opportunities

While the EMS Academy started small, it has grown rapidly. The program began with just seven students three years ago. Nearly 40 students are expected next year, representing Mineral Wells, Springtown, Aledo, Weatherford, private schools, and others.

In addition to EMT training, the academy now offers a dispatch program. Juniors practice with a simulated console powered by AI, while seniors can earn certification and handle low-acuity 911 calls under supervision. Many step into full-time dispatcher roles starting at \$50,000 annually.

“Our dispatch department used to struggle with vacancies,” Backus said. “Now, we’ve got a steady pipeline of trained, motivated young people.”



Continued on next page.

Member Dental & Vision: TRTA Members Provide Insight On Options

This article provides members with helpful information regarding their TRTA dental/vision benefits as some members expressed confusion with new programs launched by TRS.

Today's TRTA dental/vision programs provide important benefits to tens of thousands of members.



Key Highlights

- TRTA's Dental Platinum Plan continues to offer the richest benefit option with substantial dental rewards rollover benefits, a larger network, and flexible benefits in and out of network
- TRTA's Dental Gold Plan offers solid benefits at an economical rate even below the offering from the Teachers Retirement System (TRS)
- TRTA's Vision program through VSP has an extensive network, important lens enhancement options, and a **\$5,000 Accidental Death benefit**.



Members Provide Insight

This was the first year TRTA members had an option for dental and vision benefits through TRS. Over the past year, AMBA has received member feedback on the unique value TRTA Dental and Vision plans hold:

- **Enrollment flexibility** – TRTA programs provide enrollment flexibility to modify your enrollment mid-year.
- **Dental Rewards** – Member's indicated that if they leave their TRTA program they will lose their banked Dental Rewards rollover benefits. Many TRTA members have over \$1,000 of additional benefit banked in their Dental Rewards Rollover. These are added to your annual maximum of \$1,500. These rewards are easy to qualify for.
- **Out of Network Claims** – the TRTA Platinum program is designed to pay a high benefit in and out of network providing flexibility to choose a network dentist or the provider you are most comfortable with regardless of network.
- **Price and Value** – Members searching for a strong benefit in or out of network with substantial dental rewards rollover can choose the Platinum plan. Members looking for the lowest cost TRTA plan (and lower than the TRS rate) have the TRTA Dental Gold Plan Available.

Making an informed choice

Enrollment in the AMBA plans endorsed by TRTA is straightforward and benefits begin quickly. For more information, visit www.trta.org or call AMBA at **1.800.258.7041**. As healthcare options expand, it's important for retirees to consider their coverage holistically. Evaluating benefits like the dental rewards rollover benefits, network flexibility, and available discounts will help you make informed decisions that best suit your needs.

Chalkboard Champion: EMS Academy Gains Traction in North-Central Texas continued from page 5.

Powered by Partnerships

The academy thrives thanks to partnerships with local school districts and federal grant support. A Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) grant reduced what could have been a \$3,000 college-level course to just \$500 per student.

At Mineral Wells, Hampton said families contribute that fee as a "buy-in." "We've found they're more successful when they have a little skin in the game," she said. Because Parker County Hospital District is a public entity rather than a for-profit college, the program focuses on accessibility rather than revenue. Students learn from active paramedics and physicians, ensuring practical, real-world instruction.

Preparing for the Future

The EMS Academy has proven to be a win-win: communities gain skilled first responders, and students graduate with career-ready credentials. "Every town needs EMS," Backus said. "With this program, students can graduate high school, start good-paying careers, or use it as a steppingstone to nursing, paramedicine, or even medical school. It's exciting to see how far they can go."

Hampton agreed. "They're walking out at 18 years old with a job where they can make a living, while other kids their age still don't know what they want to do," she said. "It's just an amazing opportunity." ★

TRTA: CELEBRATING OUR CONNECTION TO YOU!

**SAVE
THE
DATE**

TRTA House of
Delegates Live!
Coming to a city
near you.

**March 25
2026**

Stay tuned this fall for more information!

TRTA Member Updates: Office Candidacy, Award Nominations, and Bylaws Submissions

TRTA encourages members to participate in upcoming opportunities for leadership, recognition, and governance. Members can apply to run for office, nominate a colleague for the E.L. Galyean Service Award, or submit proposed bylaws amendments by the listed deadlines. These initiatives reflect TRTA's ongoing commitment to member involvement and organizational growth.

Running for TRTA Office

The filing form can be accessed on the TRTA website or by contacting the TRTA office directly. To be included in the first quarter issue of *The VOICE*, applicants must submit a completed form along with a printable color photo to info@trta.org no later than January 15, 2026.

E.L. Galyean Service Award Nominations: Due November 1

New guidelines! The Board of Directors recently approved a new policy: Applications for nomination may be kept on file and reviewed again for up to two years.

If you submitted a nomination in 2024 and would like it to be reconsidered, please email us at info@trta.org. You can find the guidelines and application under the Member Resources tab within your member profile on the TRTA website.

Proposed Bylaws Amendments: Due November 7

All proposed bylaws amendments to be considered by the House of Delegates must be submitted to the TRTA office no later than November 7, 2025. The amendment form and additional information are available on the TRTA website. Completed forms should be sent to info@trta.org.



SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO:
TEXAS RETIRED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION • 313 E. 12TH STREET, SUITE 200 • AUSTIN, TX 78701-1957
1.800.880.1650 • WWW.TRTA.ORG



*Help Us Reach Our
Goal of \$100,000!*

Since 2008, the Texas Retired Teachers Foundation (TRTF) has awarded more than \$1 million in aid to retired TRS annuitants and active school personnel.

Your gift does more than fund programs—it changes lives.

Your generosity provides financial assistance to retirees in need, supports teachers with resources and innovative ideas, helps first-year teachers build well-supplied classrooms, and offers relief to retirees affected by natural disasters.

This giving season, please consider making your end-of-year, tax-deductible donation to TRTF. Use the donation card (to the right) or give securely online at www.trtf.org/donate.

TEXAS RETIRED TEACHERS FOUNDATION

MAKE A DIFFERENCE TODAY!

Visit www.trtf.org to donate,
use the QR code, or fill out this
donation card.



Mail in donation: Your donation provides resources for retired TRS annuitants, as well as active and beginning teachers!

Please accept my gift of \$_____

Donor's Name _____

Donor's Address _____

Please check the following if you would like to designate your donation to a specific Foundation program:

- ☐ "A Helping Hand"
- ☐ Disaster Relief
- ☐ Classroom Assistance Grants
- ☐ First-Year Teacher Scholarships
- ☐ Lehr-Pritchard Endowment Fund
- ☐ Dr. Kate Bell & E.L. Galyean Assistance Fund

This is in *memory of* or in *honor of* (circle one):

Please notify their family of my donation at this address:

Save TRTF a stamp and email acknowledgement to:

Donations are tax deductible. Please detach this card and mail to: Texas Retired Teachers Foundation (TRTF)
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