

RENY
RETIRED EDUCATORS OF NY

WESTERN CURRENTS

NEWSLETTER of the WESTERN ZONE of the NEW YORK STATE RETIRED TEACHERS'ASSOCIATION, INC.

Volume 24, Number 1

www.wzretiredteachers.org

Winter 2025

Greetings from Your President

When I was invited to serve on the Board of Directors of Western Zone, I was asked to submit a resume. All I could think of is that it was over 40 years since I had to write about myself. What was I going to say? For this article, I looked at that document to help me. I want you to get to know me as one of your teammates. My goal is to be in service to our professional community in any capacity where my skill set matches the needs of the Western Zone and aligns with the mission of WZ.

Being elected as the new President of WZ has been such a grace. I have such deep affection and appreciation for the leadership that inspire achievement and mission alignment. Western Zone is THE largest group in RENY! Our leaders and the deep commitment of the units within the Zone have created this. Thank you. We have a strong foundation to build upon.

How did I arrive at WZ? Michelle Claus came to an ENCRTA meeting and happened to sit next to me. We became fast friends.

What is my background and what skills have I acquired to be in service to this group? I taught elementary and high school levels over a 39-year career. As a coach I was blessed to work with hundreds of student athletes at all levels for 20 plus years. As a union member, I had a few leadership

roles as co-chair of health and safety for both the district and the union. I served on the negotiating team from 1985 until retirement in 2019. In 2016, I received the NYSUT Leadership award for our zone. I was invited to be the elementary math council facilitator for member schools in Niagara Orleans BOCES for five years.

One of my most wonderful professional experiences was when I had the opportunity, as one of 43 teachers from the US, to be ambassadors to the Educators of Barcelona, Spain for their first International Education Symposium. What a gift that was! It was humbling and inspiring!

I had the opportunity to take the Dale Carnegie Class and then serve as a graduate assistant to help others to develop their communication skills. From this, I had the opportunity to coach young people for interviewing for scholarships and to assist our academic leaders in delivering the valedictory speeches. On Saturdays, I worked with trainers to co-teach the Junior Achievement group.

In 1990, I bought a flower and gift shop, Rainbow Connection. I had wonderful employees, gifted designers and for 10 years a wonderful team to support our community through the highs and lows of life (weddings, proms, graduations, holidays and funerals, etc.). It was my team of people that were the heart and soul of our business. We played and worked together for 10 years.



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I married John Thompson in 2019. We live in Getzville where we have a Cavapoo dog named Arizona. John retired as an investigator for the Food and Drug Administration specializing in prescription drugs and medical devices. He has saved many lives through his thorough work. He could write a book!

Currently, I serve as the Unitarian Universalist Church of Amherst representative to the Board of Governors to the multi-faith organization, The Network of Religious Communities, in Buffalo. It is the oldest such organization in the country. During these challenging times, with varying beliefs, it is so amazing when differences are put aside for the betterment of all.

I am a licensed Avatar Master since 2003. I work with an international team delivering a nine-day personal empowerment course. Avatar awakens you to a natural ability you already have to create and discreate beliefs. With this skill, you can restructure your life according to the blueprint that you determine.

For fun, I love to play games, cook, entertain, travel, fly ultralights, and be with my friends. I have visited 12 countries. I love other cultures and the richness they bring to those whose lives they touch.

The most important thing you need to know is how inspired I am by the WZ leadership team. Did you know we have members who are also on the

State's leadership team? Michelle Claus, our past president, is now the Membership Vice President for RENY. Judy Farmer is the Senior Vice President of RENY after serving as the state Nominations VP and past Secretary of RENY. Anne Flansburg is our dynamic leader of the De Cormier Fund. (Please talk to Anne, her passion for the mission of this fund is unparalleled). Carol Cascio, our current 1st VP, is now RENY's new secretary. John Carderella was appointed as Nominations and Credentials Chair for RENY. I hope I didn't miss anyone. WZ is well represented at the state level. How lucky are we to have these inspirational, committed leaders as teammates in the Western Zone! I know that I have a lot to learn from these incredible people and I look forward to the opportunity to learn and grow.

Those of you not on the Board of Directors, please know you are always welcome to become involved on any level you are comfortable with. There are many service projects, social opportunities and future possibilities. If there is something you would like to see happen in WZ, we value you and want to hear your ideas. This is your organization and your teammates are here for you! Thank you for the honor of being Western Zone President.

In appreciation,
Karen Thompson
Western Zone, President

Spotlight on Marie Zafron



Western Zone Officers

President

Karen Thompson

1st Vice President

Carol Cascio

2nd Vice President

Richard Siegel

Treasurer

Don E. Lawrence

Recording Secretary

Amy Graves-DeMario

Corresponding Secretary

Audrey Seidel

VP for Membership

Michelle Claus

Past President

Michelle Claus

Zone Unit Presidents

Buffalo RTA

Tom Giambra

Genesee RTA

Marcia Riley

Kenmore RTA

Joan Costello

Lackawanna RTA

Tina Gambino

Lancaster/Depew RTA

Karen Gembar

Eastern Niagara RTA

Sandy Kelley

Springville/West Valley RTA

Sharon Barley

West Seneca RTA

Patricia Miceli

The 2025 WZ Annual meeting was dedicated to Marie Zafron. If a descriptive label was to be given to our 2025 Honoree, it would be “Old School”. This label would be applied with the greatest amount of sincere affection and admiration. “Old School” conjures up qualities such as dedication, commitment, accountability, perseverance, compassion, loyal friendship and ethical behavior. It’s pride in one’s own work and worth. Marie Gerace Zafron is the epitome of all of these traits, whether it be in her professional, personal, or social life.

Marie’s educational career was as a Social Studies teacher in the Buffalo Parochial and Public Schools. She was also a substitute teacher in the Amherst School District. Her teaching experience began early when as child she and her sister played school. Marie was the teacher. Perhaps her love of history got an early boost when George V and Queen Elizabeth visited her childhood New Jersey hometown as part of their US tour. Marie and her kindergarten classmates made paper Union Jacks to welcome the visiting royalty. Marie constantly promoted her love of history even outside of the classroom. Summer vacations were occupied with family trips to historical/cultural places around the Buffalo area. Many places of historic heritage were enjoyed with her beloved husband, Leo. While encouraging the knowledge of the past, Marie is equally an advocate for keeping up with the present. She reads the newspaper on a daily basis and is constantly reminding others that they need to stay informed of current events (pensions, Social Security, scams targeting Seniors...). She’s very “Old School” in promoting learning as a life-long activity.

When Marie retired from teaching. She became an active and knowledgeable participant in her Local, Zone and State Retired teachers’ organizations. She always carried Membership Applications with her, encouraging others to join. She has been a member of the WZ Board of Directors

(continued from page 3)

since 2001 and served as Corresponding Secretary (2003-2005). She faithfully served on several committees (particularly Bylaws) and attended the NYSRTA (RENY) Annual Meetings as a WZ delegate until recently. In 2012 she was a recipient of the WZ Citation Award. It is almost impossible to find anyone else who has more of an “Old School” record of distinguished service as a retiree.

It’s not surprising that Marie would expand her involvement into the community. She has volunteered and taught Tai Chi at the Amherst Senior Center. Even though she did not have military service, she has been active with the AMVETS Post 49. She displayed her commitment to civic duty by serving faithfully as an Election Inspector prior to the onset of Covid. It’s not always “all work and no play” for Marie. She is one of the last surviving members of a group of women friends who have been meeting together every month since college. As her children agree, “She has more of a social life than the two of us put together.”

Marie met her husband, Leo Zafron at a dance in 1966 where it was love at first sight. They married in 1967 and were devoted to each other until his sudden and unexpected death in 2005.

They successfully parented two children, Michelle, who is an academic librarian and Mark, who is an engineer. The children’s education and wellbeing were paramount in their lives. A life-threatening health crisis struck Mark as a young man. The family did not have health insurance, but Marie was tireless in assuring that her son had the health care he required, navigating the maze of social workers and hospital bills. Family notes tell us that she is an excellent cook, especially being able to make tasty and nutritious meals out of minimal provisions. Could this be an “Old School” trait that developed as a child growing up in the 1930’s & 40’s?

We salute this vibrant nonagenarian! Thank you, Marie, for being such a marvelous role model of “Old School” values. You are greatly admired and respected. May you enjoy many more years of good health and happiness.



**Marie and her family at the 2025
WZ Annual Meeting**

Western Zone Retired Teachers' Annual Meeting Report 2025

Our annual meeting, September 17, 2025, started with coffee, tea, juice and assorted pastries. There was plenty of time to join in with the basket raffle in Banquet room 2. A card with twenty-six “tickets” was included in each registration bag.

At 9:15, our call to order in Banquet Room 3 began our business meeting. Tables had favors that included medical ID cards that could be filled out and kept in your wallet or kept on your refrigerator, candy, and Western Zone business cards with our new president’s info and the phrase, “Thank You for Supporting Western Zone” on the back.

At this business meeting: we voted on two RENY bylaws, Board Member Nominations and vote, election of new officers of Western Zone Retired Teachers’ Association and Western Zone Founders’ Fund. Officers newly elected to Western Zone RTA beginning November 1, 2025 are:

President	Karen Thompson
1 st VP	Carol Cascio-continues in this office
2 nd VP	Richard Siegel
Secretary	Amy Graves-DeMario
Corresponding Sec.	Audrey Seidel-continues in this office
Treasurer	Don Lawrence-continues in this office
VP for Membership	Michelle Claus

Congratulations to our new officers and continuing officers.

Our keynote speaker was Craig Gestring. He is the Chief, White Collar/General Crimes Division for the US Attorney’s Office Western District of NY. His topic was “Help, I’ve Just Been Scammed!” How to Avoid Becoming a Scam Victim. This new topic was very informative, timely, and very interesting.

Western Zone BOD and Western Zone Founders’ Fund meetings took place at the end of the day.

The buffet luncheon, tickets for raffle, breakfast, and other freebies were included in the price of \$40 for the day. In the picture at the right, WZ member, Judy Toner, was the winner of the “Money Flower Bouquet” donated by the ENCRTA Unit for the raffle. We encourage our 2000 WZ members to register next year for our annual meeting on September 16, 2026. The registration form will be in next summer’s Western Currents Newsletter.

Ask your friends to join RENY/Western Zone retired educators. Our membership form is found in this edition. Our website is wzretiredteachers.org. Check us out!



Health News

I have addressed the topic of memory before in this column, particularly in reference to Alzheimer's disease. Not as severe as Alzheimer's, but still a troubling situation to experience is Brain Fog. Brain Fog is not a medical condition in its own right, but instead the term refers to certain symptoms that can affect a person's ability to think. These symptoms include confusion, difficulty focusing, a lack of mental clarity, and memory issues. Sound familiar? I think most of us could say we have experienced one or more of them, and we associate them with the aging process. However, if they persist or interfere with you living your best life, you may want to speak to your medical professional about them.

There is no test for Brain Fog. Instead, some medical detective work needs to be done to determine the underlying cause of these symptoms. Brain Fog has been associated with stress, sleep issues, diet, hormonal changes, and medications. It can also be linked to other medical conditions, such as anemia, depression, diabetes, dehydration, and Long Covid-19.

Treatment could be as simple as getting more sleep or more involved, like changing a medication. Treatment might involve some trial-and-error attempts.

Western Zone Retired Teachers' Founder's Fund, Inc. President's Report

WZRTFF held their annual meeting on September 17, 2025.

President reported:

- 5 teacher grants were awarded in 2024-2025 at \$1000.00 each
- Numerous charities supported by Founders' Fund were identified.
Suggestions for other charities are always welcome.
- Donations to Founders' Fund are accepted at any time with a tax form available.
You can send donations to: Karen Gembar 4550 Martingale Ct.
East Aurora, NY 14052.
- The 2025/2026 Founders' Fund Board of Directors:
President – Karen Gembar
Vice President – Don Lawrence
Treasurer – John Cardarella
Secretary – Carol Cascio
President of WZ – Karen Thompson
Directors: Michelle Claus, Russ Gervasi and Richard Siegel

WESTERN ZONE 2025 CITATION AWARDS

This year at the 2025 Western Zone Annual Meeting, the Citation Award was presented to Carol Cascio and Kearen Gembar. This award is given to Western Zone Board members who have devoted exceptional time and energy for the benefit of Western Zone Retired Teachers.



Karen, on the left, retired from Lancaster Central Schools in 2016 where she taught Health and Physical Education for 28 years. She joined the New York State Retired Teachers Association in 2017. Karen is currently the President of Lancaster/Depew RTA. As a member of the WZ Board of Directors she has been chairperson/vice president for membership and has worked diligently to increase membership with various innovative ideas. Her other position on the board is President of Western Zone Retired Teachers Founders' Fund. In this position she will be watching over the

donations and grants that will be awarded. Congratulations, Karen

Carol, on the right, retired from teaching after 30 years as a classroom teacher and administrator. She became a member of Western Zone Retired Teachers in 2020. Carol has been an active participant serving on the Board of Directors, assisting as Co-Secretary, as well as serving on the Grant and Membership Committees. She currently holds the office of 1st Vice-President of Western Zone. For those of you who attended last year's WZ Annual Meeting, Carol is the person who made the celebration of our 75th Anniversary memorable. She is not only active in our zone, but was recently elected at the Annual State Convention to fill the position of Secretary to the statewide organization. Congratulations, Carol and Karen!

WZ 2025 Fall Trip

The Western Zone travel group enjoyed a September 8-12 trip to the Biltmore Estate and Asheville area. The Estate, Antler Village and the Gardens were the highlights of this memorable trip and a truly educational experience delving into the art, dynamics, development and influence of the establishment.

The trip also included a visit to the Cleveland Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, a relaxing two-hour lunch cruise aboard the Star of Knoxville, a guided tour of Asheville and the Blue Ridge Parkway, a visit to Bucee's, and other sights of interest.

Travelers came home with beautiful memories, various souvenirs and gifts, and with a great spirit of camaraderie and joy! The WZ Travel Committee includes, Anne Flansburg, Donna Potter and LaVonne Walker.



WZ 2026 Summer Trip

The Western Zone Travel Committee invites you to explore and discover the beauty and intrigue of the Thousand Islands. Our trip to the **CASTLES OF NEW YORK & THOUSAND ISLANDS** is planned for **July 13-16, 2026**. Enjoy comfortable bus travel and four days of carefully curated sightseeing at top destinations.

A boat ride along the St Lawrence River will take you to Dark Island to enjoy a guided tour of the Singer Castle which was built by the Bourne Family in 1905. Later the boat will take you to Heart Island for a self-guided tour of Boldt Castle, erected for \$2.5 million in the early 1900's, and currently generates over \$46 million annually in regional economic activity. Learn the many joys and hidden sorrows of these Castles!



Singer Castle

The trip will also include Tibbett's Point Lighthouse, Antique Boat Museum, visit to Alexandria Bay, tasting at Thousand Islands Winery, Thousand Islands Museum – on National Registry of Historic Places, Fort Stanwix National Monument, and other points of interest. There will be group activities and free time to explore.

The cost for this all-inclusive trip is only \$1,224 for single occupancy, \$915 for double and \$900 for triple. This includes lodging at a resort along the St. Lawrence River, three breakfasts, one boxed lunch, three dinners, admission to ALL events, souvenir gift, baggage handling, bus driver tip, and all standard gratuities. Initial deposit of \$100 is due by or before February 13, 2026, and final deposit by April 13, 2026. Reservations are taken in the order received, as is the bus assignment. If the trip fills, you will be added to the waiting list. Sign up early, to guarantee a spot.

For reservation information and forms, or for any questions, contact Anne Flansburg at anneflanswz@aol.com or 716-863-3631 OR contact LaVonne Walker at 716-434-7120.

SPECIAL ADVANCE NOTICE: Reserve September 17-20, 2026, for our Lancaster, PA Sight and Sound's performance of "Joshua", Elva Hurst's "Chalk Talk", Dutch Apple Dinner Theatre featuring "Pretty Woman", Underground Railroad Trip and much more. Details and reservations will be in the February issue of CURRENTS, and reservations will open in February.

RENY Annual Convention- October 15-17, 2025

The State Annual Meeting (RENY) Retired Educators of New York, took place in Verona, New York. RENY has 10 zones and over 9000 members. The State has been incorporated since 1955.

Our Western Zone, which has 5 counties (Chautauqua, Cattaraugus, Erie, Genesee, and Niagara) represents over 2000 members. One of our yearly highpoints is the Annual Meeting which this year had 24 Western Zone delegates attending and voting on the following 2 Bylaws:

Proposition RMFBOD (Required Meetings for Board of Directors) 2025:

The Board of Directors will meet as necessary to fulfil its responsibilities. At least two face-to-face meetings shall be held annually. Additionally, electronic meetings are authorized in accordance with the parliamentary authority identified in Article XVII of these bylaws.

Proposition AMAWAC (Annual Meeting, Annual Workshop, and Annual Convention) 2025:

The Annual Convention of the Association consists of the Annual Workshop and the Annual Meeting plus other activities of the Association at the time the Annual Convention is held.

Both propositions passed by a “yea” vote of 112 delegates and are now part of our Bylaws

Western Zone was allotted 20 zone delegates and 4 at large delegates for a total of 24 WZ delegates this year. The number of delegates is based on our WZ membership as of July 1, each year.

Western Zone also has newly elected state officers. They are Judy Farmer, Senior State VP; Carol Cascio, State Secretary; John Cardarella, State Nominations Chair; and Michelle Claus, State VP for Membership.

A friendly Trivia Night Competition was held the second night. WZ had 3 teams with 6 members on each team. The Southtowns’ Legends, one of the WZ teams, came in second place. Congratulations!

When we are not at the RENY or our Western Zone Conference, we are spending time donating and gathering for our retirees and communities. Spending much of our time on Community service activities. Our units implement county-wide service projects, too. We collect pajamas, coats, hats, gloves, socks, toiletries, purses, wallets and several other types of clothing. In September, we collect books for Buffalo school children, as well.

Monetary donations are given to Heavenly beds, Mercy Flight, and Veteran’s Outreach among others. Other WZ committees with state leadership are: Legislative Action, Friendly Service, Active Teacher Grants, Public Relations and the DeCormier Memorial Fund.

We focus on the  of our retirees!

New members are always welcomed!

**WZ Delegates
At the RENY
Convention**



RETired EDUCATORS OF NY NEW MEMBER ENROLLMENT FORM AND PROFILE

Name (circle one) Mr. Miss Mrs. Ms. Dr. _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Telephone (____) _____ Date of Birth _____ Email _____

(Circle one) Retired Educator Active Educator Associate (non-certified support staff) Year Retired _____

County of Residence _____ School Dist./College/Univ Retired From _____

Subject Area _____ Level Taught _____ Level of Admin if Applicable _____

Spouse Enrollment - OPTIONAL Referred by: _____

Spouse Name (circle one) Mr. Miss Mrs. Ms. Dr.

Spouse Name (circle one) Mr. Miss Mrs. Ms. Dr. _____

Date of Birth Email

Retired Educator? Yes No (year retired) Active Educator? Yes No State Retired From

School Dist./College/University Retired From

Payment Options

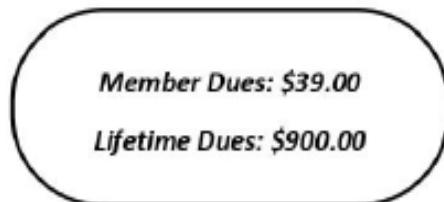
I have enclosed my check or money order made out to NYSRTA/RENY in the amount of:

Charge my: VISA Mastercard Credit Card# Exp CVV

Print your name clearly as it appears on your card

Authorizing Signature _____

Figure 1. The effect of the number of training samples on the performance of the proposed model.



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