



RENY
RETIRED EDUCATORS OF NY

WESTERN CURRENTS

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

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www.wzretiredteachers.org

Spring 2025

Happy New Year Western Zone



This is 2025 and we have much to do in Western Zone. Western Zone has approximately 2100 members. This is the largest zone in NYS. We have added 17 new members this year and lost 95 retired educators in 2024.

Western Zone/ Western Zone Retired Teachers Founders Fund gave 7 Grants to active teachers this spring for a total of \$9000. Teachers from our 5 counties had the opportunity to fill out the application and give plans for projects with their students. Our Grant Committee, using the same criteria for all awards, decided to award 6 teachers and 1 teacher from our state RENY Hudson-Kramer every other year award. We encourage them to follow their educational beliefs/pursuits with their students.

Our Community Service group "Gives from the Heart". We have donated to The Small Blessings Purse Project, Sleep in Heavenly Peace Project, Project Flight (Books to children), City Mission, Winter Pajamas and toiletries, Mother Teresa Home, Response to Love Center, St. Gianna Molla Pregnancy Care Outreach Center, Journey's End Refugee Services, St. Lawrence Vineyard Ministries, Inc, Corner Stone Manor, Alden Marilla

Food pantry, St. Luke's Mission of Mercy, Clarence Community Food Pantry, Gerard Place and many more.

Our Friendly Service Committee is also an important part of Western Zone. They send out birthday cards to members who turn 80,85,90 and 95 during the year. A birthday card is sent out to members over 95 yearly. We send holiday cards to members 90 and older. Many other types of cards are sent out within the year.

These are only 3 of the many committees we have in Western Zone. Please take time to pay your dues and if you have family or friends, please look at our website and print the membership form/include a \$39 check for 1 year of membership. I can print a membership form for you and mail to you. This is a beautiful way to say Happy Birthday, Get Well, Love our friendship, or any other reason.

Our Judy Farmer, Past President of our unit, Eastern Erie, 6 years as RENY Secretary, Nominations Chair of RENY and Western Zone, President of Western Zone for 3 years, was elected October, 2024 to be the RENY (Retired Educators of NY) Senior Vice President. Congratulations!

We need your help Retired/Active Educators! Be safe and have a good new year.

Michelle Claus
Western Zone President
joeclaus@msn.com or 716-481-5279

Spotlight on Maria Hager



As a music teacher, being in the literal "spotlight" of concerts, recitals and other public performances was just part of her job. It's now appropriate that Maria Hager be given the spotlight for her outstanding contributions, leadership, participation and service at all levels of her professional career (active and retired) and her personal commitment to her community and family.

After receiving a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Elementary Music and Elementary Education and a Masters in Reading, she taught for 15 years at Pioneer Central and 18 years at Holland Central. These 33 years were spent primarily as an Elementary School vocal music teacher. During this time, she presented music as a mechanism to enhance the whole well-being and development of children. Students grew to love music for its personal value as well as for its presentation in concerts and other performances. Her role as an effective educator was recognized when she was initiated into Beta Nu Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma Society International, serving as President from 2014 - 2016. After retiring from active teaching in 2012, she continued to substitute teach and maintain a close relationship with her former students and colleagues and taking an active role in supporting school sponsored activities and fundraising events.

Immediately upon retirement, she chose to become active in EERTA, as a way to stay connected with the educational community. Her first experience with Western Zone was as a visitor, but she quickly saw this as a welcoming group where she could display her talents and stay involved. Upon becoming a Board Member in 2015 she took on the huge task of the meal arrangements that are held in conjunction with the Board Meetings. She upped this venture by handling all of the reservation tasks associated with the Annual WZ Meetings. Maria played a key role on the WZ Host Committee for the 2018 NYSRTA (RENY) Annual Convention, leading the attendees in song at the evening meals. She currently holds the positions of Second Vice President and Chairperson of the Teacher Grant Committee.

Outside the educational realm, Maria is the model of generosity to her community. She is among the first to deliver a meal to a needy family, visit the sick, comfort the grieving, drive someone to an appointment, meeting or wherever is needed and quick to assume any other job that needs to be done. She has played a very active role in her church, as organist, choir director, parish council member, liturgy committee member and teacher of the children as they prepared to receive the sacraments. As the spouse of a Boy Scouts' Leader and American Legion

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Western Zone Officers

President
Michelle Claus

1st Vice President
Carol Cascio

2nd Vice President
Maria Hager

Treasurer
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Recording Secretary
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Corresponding Secretary
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Eastern Erie RTA
Judy Farmer

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Marcia Riley

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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

Spotlight On

Continued from page 3



Commander, Maria can frequently be found helping with their varied activities. The local volunteer fire company and other civic groups can always expect her to willingly donate and help as needed. When the call (or even a hint) is out for the need to serve others, Maria responds with an immediate "yes". She takes it as a personal failure if she has to say no for a reason such as being away on vacation.

Maria and Patrick (a retired teacher) have celebrated their 50th Wedding Anniversary. They are the proud parents of four successful children and the doting grandparents of nine grandchildren. Not surprising, Maria's commitment and dedication to her family is readily evident. She is ever ready to babysit, travel to watch the athletic games or dance recitals, or cook and preside over large family gatherings. As she likes to say, "I invite them for dinner and they stay for 3 days!" She wouldn't have it any other way.

At some point during her teaching career, the Music Department performed "The Sound of Music" for its annual grand production. Fittingly, Maria was part of the cast. One of the featured songs asks, "How do you solve a problem like Maria?" You don't! You embrace her for what she is and enjoy the benefits from being connected with her.

WZ Active & Honorary Board Members were paid a Visit



Therese Clarke,

2330 Maple Rd. #304, Williamsville, NY 14221



Irene Zinter

Fox Run Lane #306, Orchard Park, NY 14127



103 yr old **Janice Weitz**

158 Farmbrook Rd.
Port Orange, Florida 32127



Shirley Plummer

Beechwood Continuing Care #409
2235 Millersport Hwy. Getzville, NY 14068

If you know these lovely ladies you may want to send them a card. We are sure they would appreciate it.

Western Zone Nominations Committee Report

The Western Zone is happy to report that as of the December 2024 Board of Directors Meeting, thirty-four of the thirty-six seats on the board have been filled. Serving as a Board member gives you a voice in the zone's decisions and plans. The board meets five to six times a year at The Columns on Transit Road in Elma and all directors serve on one or more of the various committees.

There are still two open seats. Members of RENY can be appointed by our president to fill those seats. It is a wonderful opportunity to serve your fellow retirees. If you are interested, please get in touch with our president, Michelle Claus.

As a reminder to the Board of Directors, we will be electing officers at the September 2025 meeting. All board members can seek election to any of the offices. Please note that the President and Vice-President for Membership have served four terms and will not be serving another term.

Thank you for your consideration of these matters.

Judith Farmer

WZ 2025 Fall Trip Cleveland, Biltmore Estate, North Carolina & West Virginia

Join the Western Zone Travel group **September 8-12, 2025** on an educational, exciting, and memorable trip to North Carolina. The highlight includes a day spent in a self-guided audio tour of the **Biltmore Estate & Gardens** and the Antler Village. The 225-room French Renaissance-style chateau, a National Historic Landmark, was built in the 1800s by George W Vanderbilt and also contains a conservatory and gift shop.

As you head to your destination, you will visit the **Cleveland Roc 'n' Roll Hall of Fame**. Other highlights on the trip will feature a guided historical tour of Asheville, NC, including the Folk Art Center and the Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor's Center. Travel to Chimney Rock Park, where you will take a 26-story elevator ride inside the mountain to the top of the Blue Ridge Mountains, and enjoy a breathtaking view.

A cookout lunch in The Meadows, dinner at the Moose Café, and dinner at Stone Ridge Tavern is included, as well as a cruise on Lake Lure, one of the most beautiful manmade lakes.

As you head home, you will visit the Tamarack in West Virginia.

The cost for this all-inclusive five-day trip, which includes admission to all of the above-mentioned sights, bus transportation, gratuities, lodging, 4 breakfasts, 1 lunch, and 2 dinners is only \$825 for triple, \$890 for double and \$1250 for single. For additional information and reservation forms contact Anne Flansburg at 716-863-3631 or anneflanswz@aol.com. This trip is sure to be a sellout, so inquire and book early.

WZ 2025 Spring Trip Lancaster, PA & Washington Flight 93 Memorial

As of this printing, there are a few seats available for the five-day **June 4-8, 2025** Western Zone travel trip, which encompasses three exciting destinations! Enjoy **Lancaster**, with the Sight & Sound Production of NOAH, as well as dinner at Shady Maple, a guided tour of the Amish Country featuring Jacob's Choice and dinner at an Amish home. Travel to **Washington** and visit the Hillwood Museum – home of Marjorie Meriweather Post, as well as the Smithsonian, Arlington Cemetery, Veteran Memorials, many other structures and enjoy an evening driving tour of the illuminated monuments. Travel to Stoystown, PA, to visit the **Flight 93 Memorial**.

For additional information and reservation forms contact Anne Flansburg at 716-863-3631 or anneflanswz@aol.com

Western Zone Retired Teachers' Founders' Fund, Inc.

John Cardarella, Treasurer

This year the Western Zone of the New York State Retired Teachers' Association, sponsored by Western Zone Retired Teachers' Founders' Fund, Inc. (a nonprofit 501c3) enabled us to continue our support of many local organizations. In May 2024, we were able to provide Teacher Grant money (\$3000) to four local teachers. In January 2025, we were able to provide Teacher Grant money (\$5000) to five local teachers. By Spring 2025 we will have provided over \$6000.00 to local Meals on Wheels, Network in Aging of WNY, local food pantries, soup kitchens. We able to add a few new organizations; Every Bottom Counts, Sleep in Heavenly Peace, Veterans One Stop, St Vincent de Paul and St Lawrence Vineyard Ministries. **Many of these new organization were brought to our attention by our members!** Checks were hand delivered by Michelle Claus (Springville), Vicki Smith (Jamestown), and Karen Schlum (Niagara County). As of February 1, 2025 I will have delivered checks to Sleep in Heavenly Peace, St Vincent de Paul and South Buffalo Community Table.

The Distribution Committee consists of the following: Vicki Smith, Karen Schlum, Dolores Scanlon, Rob Roy Griffith and John Cardarella.



Twin City MOW Kitchen



Amherst MOW Kitchen



Ken-Ton cutting & packing pies



Twin City MOW info

Cattaraugus County Dept. of the Aging



Volunteers



Packing emergency bags

Health News

During my most recent dental appointment I asked my dentist if there were any dental concerns of specific interest to seniors. After only a moment of hesitation, she responded, “Dry Mouth.” Dry Mouth, officially known as Xerostomia, occurs when, for whatever reason, there is a decrease in the amount of saliva that is produced by the salivary glands.

Saliva is not a very glamorous substance, but it does perform several functions that impact our oral and dental health. Saliva washes over our teeth, tongue, and interior of the mouth, resulting in a comfortable feeling. It protects the teeth by cancelling out acids that may be present from foods we have ingested. It also plays a part in the battle against tooth decay by fighting the bacteria that form dental plaque. A lack of saliva affects the taste of food, the ability to swallow easily, and breath odor. And, of course, we can’t forget what we learned about saliva in elementary school – digestion begins in the mouth due to saliva’s ability to begin the breakdown of carbohydrates.

In my next article I will continue this topic with information about some of the causes of Dry Mouth.

2025 NY STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

The RENY legislative committee met on 1/23/25 via Zoom. The following 4 priorities were established:

1. RENY supports legislation that protects retired public employees' **health benefits** under which we retired. This priority is based on HERA, Harckham/Pheffer Amato (Health Equity for Retirees Act). HERA prohibits public employers from diminishing health insurance benefits of public employee retirees below the level of coverage provided at the time of retirement.
2. In light of any Federal funding shortfalls for education, RENY supports legislation and budgetary proposals designed to fund and **maintain current education programs** and any program currently maintained by funding from the Federal Education Department.
3. RENY seeks retirement **Tier Equity** by amending Teacher Retirement Tiers 5 and 6 to be more in line with benefits found in Tier 4.
4. RENY requests your support to improve the **Public Pension COLA** computation formula. Provide a cost-of-living adjustment for members of retirement systems by increasing the base benefit amount for computation to \$21,000.

Submitted by Pat Miceli

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Thank you for your ongoing support of Western Zone Retired Teachers. Donations can be made by contacting our president, Michelle Claus at joeclaus@msn.com or calling 716-481-5279. Legacy donations can be made with your lawyer. Please email or call with questions.

Please be current on your RENY dues. Any questions, please call/text/email Michelle Claus, 716-481-5279. joeclaus@msn.com