

RENY  
RETIRED EDUCATORS OF NY

## WESTERN CURRENTS

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

Volume 24, Number 2

[www.wzretiredteachers.org](http://www.wzretiredteachers.org)

Spring 2026

### Evolving Together

It is my honor to step into the Presidency of this wonderful group! Michelle Claus is moving onto RENEY at the state level serving as VP of Membership. This is a critical role for the future of not just RENEY, but Western Zone and the Units we serve. Membership is in great hands with Michelle as her passion drives us forward and she serves as our Membership VP, too!

In this newsletter, you will find a President's appeal. Why? and What? is the vision to invest in? **First**, the focus needs to be on engaging our current membership beyond the Board of Directors. We do a significant amount of charitable contribution to the wider community (5 counties). I am grateful. Within me lies a vision of greater and wider involvement. We have 1965 total members. When I look out at our zone meetings (Board of Directors) there are around about 40 people. This is a concern.

As we evolve, my **primary goal** is for the Western Zone Board of Directors to connect with and support the Units. Through these deepened relationships, we will seek out opportunities to partner with other organizations to create and implement events that raise money for charitable causes. This is **Phase 1**. In this way, we are purposeful in supporting causes that are in the hearts of the community and its members. As we create these events as a team, we make new friends who are like minded and we help the community to come together and facilitate a decrease in anxiety in our local communities. Positive events lead to positive people.

The Appeal money raised will be focused on relationship building and membership development. The **first accomplishment** we are creating, along with Unit Presidents, are two awards: **The Up Award** and the **Up-and-Coming Award**. These are unit awards for service as recognized by the Units and Zone. The Up Award goes to a Unit/RENEY member. The Up-

and-Coming Award goes to a non-RENEY member (at time of selection). The Award is a membership to RENEY for one year. Audrey Seidel is the lead on this initiative and will be meeting with Zone Presidents in March. So, Phase 1 is in motion.

Next, we will be encouraging Zone Directors to participate in Unit activities, luncheons etc. The President's appeal will support by paying the participation fees for these participating Directors. (**Phase 2**).

**Phase 3:** Publicity is a huge need. On many levels, we don't really know all the gifts that being a member gives us. By publicizing the events, we will be putting a real face to RENEY/ WZ. Our PR team is led by Kathy Cansick and Joannie Wheaton.

Our attention is on active participation at all levels. We will build membership by actively working together in a purpose-driven mission. By building larger circles, partnering with other like-minded organizations, we develop healthier and more supportive communities.

It scares me to put all this out there in some ways as it seems like a big ask... **In small measured steps**, I believe it is doable and we create win-win-win for all involved and/or touched by the effect of our work. **This will all take time to develop**. It may sound overwhelming at first glance. Trust your WZ Exec. Board to guide, lead and when too much to tap the brakes and gently prepare the next step/phase.

Let's evolve together to expand the Units, Western Zone and RENEY. There is nothing like investing your energy, time and treasure into helping others.

Have an amazing Spring!

Karen Thompson, WZ President  
716-628-4384

[karenthompsonwesternzonert@gmail.com](mailto:karenthompsonwesternzonert@gmail.com)

# Spotlight on Carol Cascio



## 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

Carol has a stellar classroom teacher and building administrative history with 34 years in many phases of education. She



began as an elementary teacher in the Iroquois Central School District, retiring as a principal in the City of Tonawanda School District. During this time her school was recognized several times by Business First as one of the top-most Improved Schools in Western New York and New York State. Prior to retiring in 2004 her school was recognized by

President Bush as one of the most improved schools in the country.

After Carol retired from WNY teaching and administration, she moved to Florida. Carol became a supervisor of student teachers at the University of South Florida. She came back to WNY and joined Retired Educators of New York in 2019.

Carol is our gift to Western Zone. She creates our Annual Meeting Agenda and September vendor fair every year. She is a perfectionist making everything she oversees perfect. Carol is also the secretary of our WZ Founder's Fund. When RENY needed a state secretary, we immediately suggested Carol. She accepted the state position and quickly mastered that secretarial job, making us in Western Zone very proud of her. She is also a member of several committees including the Grant, Membership, and Teacher Grants. Carol has recently been elected as our 1<sup>st</sup> Vice president of Western Zone.

**We are lucky to have Carol Cascio as a member of RENY and Western Zone.**

## 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

# Western Zone Retired Teachers' Founders' Fund, Inc.

## John Cardarella

### Treasurer

Western Zone Retired Teachers' Founders' Fund, Inc. (a nonprofit 501c3) (FF), continues to support the Western Zone of the New York State Retired Teachers' Association (WZ) in providing donations to many local organizations and providing support to WZ's Teacher Grant Program. In 2025, FF provided \$5000 to five local teachers selected by the Teacher Grant Committee, this will be continued in 2026!

This year Founders' Fund will donate an additional \$10,000 to local Meals on Wheels, local food pantries, soup kitchens, WNY Veterans Housing Coalition, Veterans One Stop, St Vincent de Paul Society and St Lawrence Vineyard Ministries.

The pictures accompanying this article show the changes to the Alden Meals on Wheels! I visited them in late December 2017 and again January 2026! **WOW** what a difference, from a one room kitchen to a former elementary school kitchen. They are doing great things and increasing the number of clients that are provided with meals.

This year's helpers to hand deliver checks are Vicki Smith, Karen Schlum and Michelle Claus.

### **THESE ORGANIZATIONS ARE IN NEED OF DONATIONS AND VOLUNTEERS!**

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



**Alden MOW in 2017**



**The Alden MOW in 2026**

The



**John Cardarella presenting the check from WZ to Alden MOW**



# **Legislative Action Committee Report**

## **by Patricia W. Miceli, Western Zone Legislative Action Chair**

The Legislative Action Committee prepared 4 major priorities for Reny to promote at the state level and 3 major priorities to promote at the national level.

Utility rate hikes are considered important, but not prioritized under NYS 2026.

### **NY State 2026:**

1. RENY supports legislation that protects retired public employees' health benefits under which we retired.
2. In light of any Federal funding shortfalls for education, RENY supports State 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 requests your support to improve the Public Pension COLA computation formula.
4. RENY seeks retirement **Tier Equity** by amending Teacher Retirement Tiers 5 and 6 to be more in line with benefits found in Tier 4.

Considering the significant **utility rate hikes** for residential utility consumers implemented in NYS by many utility companies in 2026, RENY supports legislation that will improve transparency in utility rate hikes and aims to protect ratepayers in that process.

### **Federal 2026**

1. RENY supports federal legislation measures to protect Social Security and Medicare for the future.
2. RENY supports Medicare Reduction Price Programs that result in decreased costs for prescription drugs and continued negotiations to expand the list of prescription drugs covered by such programs and the speed at which lower costs are implemented.
3. RENY supports legislation to eliminate taxes on Social Security Benefits income **if** such legislation includes accommodation for replacing the lost revenue into the Social Security Trust Fund to prevent earlier insolvency of the Trust Fund surplus.

## **RENY Ad Hoc Health Insurance Committee**

### **Sue Schmidt**

Let me introduce myself. My name is Sue Schmidt from the Genesee Unit. I serve on the Board of Directors and recently became the Western Zone representative on the newly formed Ad Hoc Health Insurance Committee. The committee co-chairs are Kevin Mulligan and Jim Newell. There are representatives from 8 of the 10 zones. We have met twice and are finalizing our mission statement. While we have no legal counsel on this committee, we see ourselves serving as advisors supporting retired educators in the area of health care and health insurance. There are over 700 school districts across NYS and health insurance offerings are varied. As many of you know, there are many changes in the cost and the offerings of health insurance today.

We have identified areas of interest and knowledge among the members of the committee. Already, we have learned much from one another. I was excited to volunteer for this committee as I am a certified volunteer counselor with the Medicare Office at the Genesee County Office for the Aging. I have volunteered for the past three years advising and assisting seniors with "all things Medicare." I can now bring my knowledge and access to areas of assistance to retired teachers across the state. Please reach out to me at [suzyschm@yahoo.com](mailto:suzyschm@yahoo.com) or by calling (585)343-7346 or (585)356-7174. We hope to bring positive changes and support to our members.

## **Resolutions Committee**

### **Sue Schmidt**

Friends, it is time to be thinking about any resolutions you may wish to bring to Western Zone. Any member of RENY may submit a resolution to his or her zone for consideration. The resolution should be practical, reasonable, and financially feasible. To submit resolutions for consideration, they must be presented at our 4/15/2026 or 5/20/2026 Western Zone BOD meeting. Each zone is allowed to submit up to three resolutions annually. Resolutions are forwarded to the State Resolution Chair for the State Resolution Committee to review. Approved resolutions are then sent to state 30 days before the State Executive Committee meeting. This year resolutions must be submitted by 6/8/2026 for the 7/8/2026 meeting date.

When submitting a proposed resolution, please review the 2025 RENY Bylaws found on the RENY website. Only resolutions that pertain to the **objective(s) of the Association as listed in Article II** shall be considered. When writing a resolution, ask yourself:

- Is the intent something that should be expressed as a resolution?
- Is the intent something that requires a Bylaw change?
- Is the intent something that necessitates action by the RENY Executive Committee or a change by another committee or agency?
- Did I research the topic thoroughly?
- Are all the "Whereas" statements and the "Resolved" clearly stated?

Please let me know if you have questions on writing a resolution. If you plan to present a resolution for consideration, please let Karen Thompson know at least a week before the meeting so she can place you on the agenda. You can reach me by email at [suzyschm@yahoo.com](mailto:suzyschm@yahoo.com) or by calling 585.343.7346 or 585.356.7174.

## **RENY Western Zone Holiday Donation**

At the November 19, 2025 Western Zone Board of Directors meeting food and clothing items were collected for the Thanksgiving and Christmas Holiday seasons. The donations included 12 bags of food, 8 bags of stockings and clothing items and a bag of books. The items were part of the W. Zone Community Service program to assist the needy in our area. Stan Nowak, Community Service member, transported the items to several organizations.

The food was taken to the Feed More food trucks at Millard Fillmore Suburban Hospital. That event was sponsored by radio station 97 Rock. The staff of Feed More was amazed at the number of food bags Stan delivered. The clothing and books were donated to the Buffalo City Mission. They, too, wanted to thank our Western Zone Retirees for the donation.



This photo was taken with Stan and 97 Rock staff members.

## **Nominations Committee Information**

As the new Nominations Chair for WZ, I would like to mention that all members of RENY/WZ NYSTRA are eligible to apply for any WZ position! At present there are 3 Board of Directors positions open. There is one Director position open that expires in 2027 and two positions that expire in 2028. If interested in one of these positions, you would need to send a Letter of Intent, stating that you wish to do so and a resume to: [jnccw5@gmail.com](mailto:jnccw5@gmail.com). You could be a Director as soon as April 2026! Directors serve three years and are expected to serve on at least one committee; there are many committees to choose from. Normal elections take place at our September Annual Meeting.

Thank you,

John Cardarella, [jnccw5@gmail.com](mailto:jnccw5@gmail.com)

Nominations Chair

## Western Zone Membership 2026

Western Zone, one of 10 zones in New York State, has almost 2000 members. Our counties are Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, and Niagara. We have 8 units within these counties. Retired? Join our zone.

Western Zone is very involved in Community Service in our 5 counties. We have donation drives every month, September-December and April-June. Some of our donations go to Project Flight (books for Buffalo students), Small Purse Project, Sleep in Heavenly Peace beds for children, Feed More food collection, and various soup and meal kitchens. These are just a few of our outreach projects.

We are also involved in active teachers supporting creative teaching-learning projects. Every year we give five \$1000 awards to teachers within our five counties that have created these student-centered projects.

Our Friendly Service Committee and Chair, Tom Giambra, send cards, visit members, visit hospitalized members and deliver gifts to members that are in rehabilitation. We call our members to make sure they are doing well.

Our Legislative Action Committee is constantly learning about and supporting retired and active educators in New York State. They are the first group watching out for your pensions and social security.

The cost of supporting Western Zone is **\$39 per year**. If you know an educator, active or retired, who would like to join yearly, please give them the membership form or call me.

There are so many ways we can support retired educators!

Michelle Claus  
VP for Membership/Western Zone and RENY  
716-481-5279 or [joeclaus@msn.com](mailto:joeclaus@msn.com)

## RENY York State Newsletter

Attention RENY members. The RENY Newsletter, **York State**, is published 4 times a year (spring, summer, fall & winter). The **spring edition** is **snail mailed** to members in February. The other three editions are only available on line at: <https://retirededucatorsny.org> On the **RENY website** click on the tab on the top bar that says “**York State**” and it will take you to the current and past issues. If you do not have access to a computer, please ask your unit president or another member of RENY to print it off and give you a copy.

## WZ 2026 Trip to Lancaster, PA

Join the Western Zone Travel group from **September 17-20, 2026** for a thrilling four-day, three-night trip to Lancaster, PA. This journey promises memorable experiences with entertainment, artistry, and charm of local attractions.

Enjoy the impressive live production of **JOSHUA** at Sight & Sound Theatres with *preferred seating*, where you'll be drawn into an inspiring story of redemption on stage. Afterwards, indulge in a meal at their famous **Shady Maple Smorgasbord**, the largest buffet in the country, offering a selection to please any palate.

Experience the beloved musical **PRETTY WOMAN** at the **Dutch Apple Dinner Theatre**. You can tap your feet, sing along and enjoy a delicious dinner.

Take part in a guided tour exploring the history of the **UNDERGROUND RAILROAD**, learning about those who found freedom through this region and the families that still reside there. Express your creativity during a fun-filled **CHALK TALK** at Barnyard Art Studio, witnessing stories come alive through art storytelling. Visit **Barry's Car Museum** to discover unique and historical artifacts and end your day with a cozy **family-style dinner** at a genuine **Amish homestead**,



sought today. Elva Hurst's and automobiles



embracing the traditions and hospitality of the Amish community. Before heading home, explore the **Eldred World War II Museum** and immerse yourself in history with countless artifacts from this significant period, providing a meaningful conclusion to your adventure.

The **cost** for this comprehensive getaway is \$894 per person for double occupancy, \$874 for a triple, and \$1193 for a single. This price covers lodging, three breakfasts and three dinners, entry to **ALL** activities listed above, transportation, a souvenir, baggage handling, driver tip, and standard gratuities. A \$100 deposit is due by April 20, 2026, with the final payment due by June 20, 2026.

For more details or to book a reservation, contact

Anne Flansburg at 716-863-3631 or [anneflanswz@aol.com](mailto:anneflanswz@aol.com) or Donna Potter at 716-481-0012 or [donna\\_potter@msn.com](mailto:donna_potter@msn.com).

## President's Appeal 2026

Thank you for your commitment to our common mission of Western Zone RENY. Your gifts of time, treasures, and passion are deeply appreciated! As stewards, please consider investing in our zone and focusing on an era of growth as we look to:

- invest in new member recruitment and informational events (key to our growth and success)
- make ourselves known and educate our community about RENY through increased publicity
- And more, as we brainstorm together

It was suggested that I write a President's appeal. Our leadership has ideas to help us grow, but we need your support. Your generosity is both welcomed and appreciated. If anyone needs a receipt of your donation, please let me know. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Please, don't hesitate to reach out to me if you have questions or concerns. Karen Thompson  
[karenthompsonwesternzonert@gmail.com](mailto:karenthompsonwesternzonert@gmail.com) or 716-628-4384

Please send the form below with your check payable to: **Western Zone Retired Teacher's Founders Fund, Inc.**

**Your check's memo line must say: "Western Zone President's Appeal for membership development".** Any check that **does not** direct it to the WZ President's Appeal for membership development will be a donation to Founder's Fund. Mail your check and form to John Cardarella to the address below.

I \_\_\_\_\_, would like to contribute to the Western Zone Retired Teachers President's Appeal for Membership Development: **Please, include this form with your check.**

\$10.\_\_\_\_ \$20\_\_\_\_ \$30\_\_\_\_ \$50\_\_\_\_ \$ 75\_\_\_\_ \$ 100\_\_\_\_ other amount \$\_\_\_\_\_

John Cardarella, Treasurer Western Zone Founders Fund  
48 Presidents Walk  
Buffalo, NY 14221-2425

In appreciation,

*Karen K Thompson*  
Karen Thompson, President  
Western Zone of RENY

**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. \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

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

School Dist./College/University Retired From \_\_\_\_\_

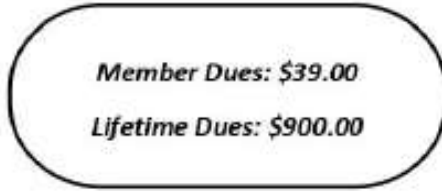
**Payment Options**

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

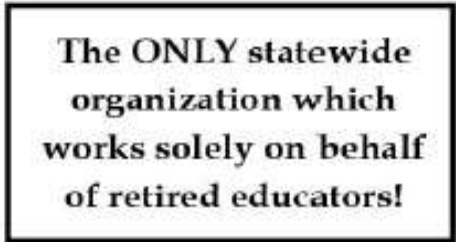
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Print your name clearly as it appears on your card \_\_\_\_\_

Authorizing Signature \_\_\_\_\_



**Western Zone Retired Educators**



## Health News

While looking for a topic for this article, I came across some information that got my attention. It drew me in with a headline touting the benefits of the classic PB&J sandwich. The article did not refer to the typical nutritional account of grams of protein, fats, and carbs. Instead, it referred to something I have never heard of, a HENI. HENI is the Health Nutrition Index, a number that represents the value of a food as it affects a person's healthy life span. This index was calculated from a study done on over 5,000 foods at the University of Michigan. The study determined the number of minutes a person could gain or lose off their healthy life span by eating them.

The headline that got me stated that eating a PB&J sandwich adds – on average – 33.7 minutes to the eater's life span. Thinking of all those PB&Js you may have eaten over the years, one would expect to live a nice long life. However, in nutrition, as in most things, the universe seeks balance. So, for the gains of time from some foods, there are losses from others. For example, eating a beef hot dog on a bun results in a loss of 36 minutes. A food's HENI number could be used as another tool used to choose the most beneficial diet.

The article also referred to the HENI number of another popular food...the world-renowned delight named for Buffalo - the chicken wing. Eating a serving of chicken wings results in a loss of 3.3 minutes of a person's life span. This doesn't sound too bad, but no information was given to establish a serving size for chicken wings. I would guess it isn't too many, maybe two or three. Something to think about as you dig into those tasty morsels during the next big game.

Vicki Smith

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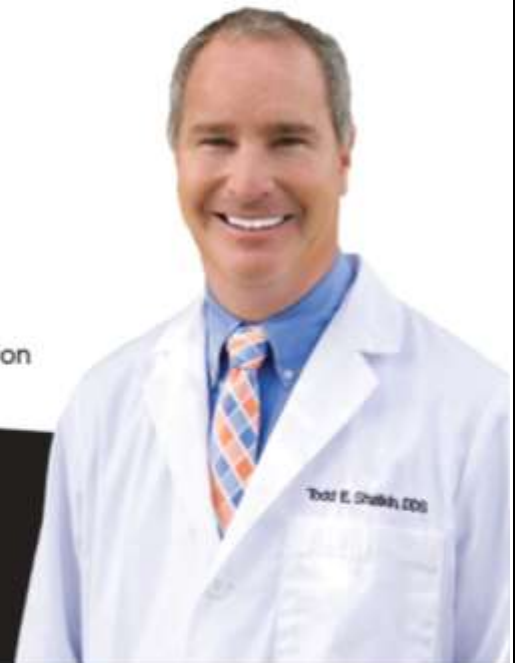
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