



THE CLARION

The Newsletter for Retired Educators
Maine Education Association Retired

December 2025

Vol. 137 No.2

74th MEA-Retired
Convention
and
Annual Meeting
April 30, 2026
**"The Many Hats of
MEA-Retired"**

From our President



Over the course of the past month, I have encountered challenges while working to complete this message for The Clarion.

The difficulty has not been a lack of ideas or uncertainty about what to express; rather, it has been the abundance of thoughts and topics I could address.

Recently, I was privileged to travel with my husband on a cruise. Travel holds a special place in my heart for many reasons, which I won't elaborate on here, but I do credit my parents for instilling in me a thirst for exploration. As the child of educators, our family

trips were seasonal. We would spend a week or two each summer-the time when my father, a school administrator, could load the tent, cooler, and the family into the station wagon so we could escape and explore.

Our journeys typically took us through the Midwest, especially to the Great Lakes. For years, those lakes served as my ocean since I had never seen one.

Over the fifty-two years I have lived in Maine, my connection with water has become clearer and more intense. I have called six different places home, each one situated on the banks of

See President, Page 2

Don't miss out!

By Rheba Michaud, Chairperson
Convention Committee

The MEA-Retired Convention and Annual Meeting will take place on April 30, from 8:30 - 3:00 at the Augusta Civic Center.

Registration begins at 8:30. This gives people time to choose their table, relax, grab a snack and coffee, stroll around visiting vendors and affiliate tables, check out our PAC auction and raffle, and visit the popular free book exchange table.

Many enjoy arriving early as it gives them the opportunity to greet former friends and colleagues. A slide show with pictures from previous conventions will be running at this time as well.

President Molly Smith will call the meeting to order at 9:30. A convention booklet will be included in your packet outlining the order of the day's events.

The schedule has been tweaked some this year to allow for longer breakout session based on feedback

from last year's convention and read many comments about the length of the sessions. We will accommodate by adding time to each session.

This year we will offer 4 very different, but interesting, breakout sessions.

One breakout session will feature a group of women who are competitive axe throwers.

John Kosinski, MEA's Director of Government Relations will host a session on what is happening on the legislative front and where MEA will be focusing its efforts.

Visiting Southeast Asia is another session which will be led by Karen Cookson, a retired teacher who has traveled extensively with her husband, Fred.

The fourth session will be conducted by Brian Harris sharing his knowledge of Medrythms. Medrythms deals with healing through music.

When registering for the convention sign up for the two sessions you would most like

See 2025 Convention, Page 4

We need delegates! YOU?

MEA-RA: 5 delegate and 10 alternates
NEA-Retired Annual Meeting / NEA-RA:
4 delegates
MEA Board of Directors; 1 delegate

MEA-RA

Maine Education Association Retired has 11 delegate seats at the MEA Representative Assembly to be held at the Marriott Sable Oaks Hotel in South Portland in May.

Will YOU be the one new delegate we need?

We are seeking 5 delegates and 10 alternates for these positions. One alternate will

be returning.

The opportunity to become actively involved in your MEA-Retired Association by attending the RA is here!!! You are invited to participate in the all-important voting processes on new business items, resolutions, and other actions.

Will YOU join the race? At its 2024 RA, MEA voted to implement one-year terms for ALL delegates. We have delegates who were originally elected to three-year terms. Six of our 11 delegates will continue their terms: Four delegates have one

See Delegates, Page 3

**Dental
enrollment
season opens**

**Rate increases and
other details on
Page 3**

**Need to change
your plan?**

See Page 3



Inside this issue

From our President	1,2,5
Convention Update.....	1,4
Be a Delegate	1,3
PAC Captain	5
Pre-Retirement	6
Day of Caring	7,8
MEA Benefits Trust	9
AARP	10
Convention Registration.....	11
Member Survey	12
MEA/Alfond Partnership.....	12

President, from Page 1

or beside a lake.

Reflecting on my love for the water—whether being immersed in it, on it or simply nearby. I have realized several insights.

Water is inherently dynamic much like the weather, always shifting and changing. Its power is unmistakable, ranging from peaceful moments of relaxation to overwhelming displays of force and destruction. The vastness of water is awe-inspiring, with depths that defy imagination and horizons without end.

Beyond its physical qualities, water is a profound teacher. It guides us in navigating life's uncertainties, encouraging us to "go with the flow". This lesson means that, not resisting change, but trusting that, no matter the outcome, we emerge intact and stronger for having made the journey.

As I prepared for the November Board of Directors meeting, I reviewed information compiled from various sources. These included insights from collaborative group work where we identified shared priorities. Valuable feedback was also gathered through surveys from MEA-Retired leaders of local affiliates.

A prominent theme that emerged from discussions and surveys is the importance of raising funds to provide grants

and scholarships. These financial resources support educational pursuits within our public education community, specifically assisting active educators and their students in furthering their academic and professional growth.

A Story of Resilience

I would like to share a story of resilience and perspective sent to me by a high school friend in Ohio. Although I cannot cite her original source, the story left a lasting impression on me.

As educators, many of us have encountered students who remind us of the young man in this account. Ryan's story is a testament to the transformative power of a supportive perspective, unwavering clarity of purpose, dedication to hard work, and the strength to persevere through challenges.

The mother's outlook was instrumental in shaping her son's path. Her guidance instilled in him the importance of staying focused and resilient, lessons essential to his eventual success. These same qualities—perspective, pur-

pose, diligence, and resilience—are the gifts we strive to nurture in our students as an educational community.

They are not only tools for academic achievement but invaluable assets for a lifetime.

Here is Ryan's story. When I stood to give my Valedictorian speech, the students in the front row—the ones with new cars and apartments already waiting near their universities—laughed. The "farm boy" was giving the big speech. Ten seconds later, you could have heard a pin drop in that gym packed with two thousand people. But to understand why, you need to know about the smell.

My name is Ryan, and I grew up in a corner of Ohio where time was measured by the price of feed. The auto-parts plant in town had closed, laying off hundreds. Our small family farm was sinking under its weight. We weren't "economically anxious." We were just broke. My mother, Brenda, was a widow who wore hard work

like a uniform. Her hands told her story—cracked and scarred from winters that split her skin and summers that baked her arms the color of dry dust.

If you looked closely, you'd always see a crescent of Ohio soil under her nails. It never came out. I learned early that "clean" didn't mean polished. Clean meant the bank wasn't calling and there was enough gas in our rusted truck to reach the feed store. School is where I learned to be ashamed of that.

On the bus, I'd press myself against the window, hoping no one would sit beside me.

Resilience, see Page 5

The Clarion is published bimonthly by Maine Education Association Retired. Readers are encouraged to submit feature stories, news articles, notices of events and activities, and opinions of statewide interest by the fifth day of the month preceding publication. Please send articles to vegas04861@yahoo.com or mail to Bob Jean at PO Box 821, Rockland 04841. Questions? Call Bob at (207) 593-6597

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NEA-Retired Annual Meeting and NEA RA

July 1—July 7, 2026
Denver, CO

June 29—July 5, 2027
Indianapolis, IN

June 29—July 5, 2028
Washington, D.C.

June 29—July 5, 2029
Kansas City, MO



MEA-Retired is here for you!

December 1, 2025, 9 a.m.
Executive Committee
MEA Headquarters, Augusta

March 2, 2026, 9 a.m.
Executive Committee
MEA Headquarters, Augusta

April 6, 2026, 9 a.m.
Board of Directors Meeting
Best Western Hotel, Waterville

Meet/greet begins at 9 a.m.
Meetings begin at 9:30 a.m.

Contact affiliate leaders
with ideas and concerns.

MEA-Retired Delegates

MEA-RA

**We need 5 delegates
and 10 alternates**

**NEA-Retired Annual
Meeting and NEA-RA**

July 1–7, 2026

We need 4 delegates

Will you consider?

Delegates, from Page 1

more year and will end their terms in April 2026. Five delegates will end their terms in April 2027. According to MEA Executive Director Rachelle Bristol: "Those elected to longer terms will complete those terms."

MEA-Retired president and president-elect are automatic delegates to the MEA-RA.

MEA Administrative Assistant Erin Noyes has confirmed that MEA-Retired needs 5 additional delegates and 10 alternates for the 2026 MEA Representative Assembly.

All expenses are paid, and mileage to the MEA-RA will be reimbursed. Candidates must be "unified" members which means one must be a

to serve as a delegate or an alternate. Will you give these opportunities some thought and fill a seat? Dues for becoming a unified member are listed at the end of this article.

Interested candidates should submit the "Notice of Intent" located at www.maineeca.org/meaelections **by January 15, 2026**. If more delegate candidates file than the number of positions, an election will be held.

NEA-Retired Meeting NEA-RA

Additionally, we have six delegate seats to the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting and NEA Representative Assembly in Denver, Colorado on July 1-7, 2026.

MEA-Retired pays for all expenses—transportation, lodging and meals so that delegates may carry out the expected duties. Delegates pay nothing.

The president and president-elect shall serve as elected delegates to the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting and the NEA-RA. The other four delegate seats are one-year terms open to our MEA-Retired unified members. Will you serve?

Delegates have opportunities to participate in robust discussions on many topics related to education, retirement, pensions, legislative initiatives and more. It is also a time to connect with colleagues and become acquainted with other retirees as well as younger, active educators.

It is very important to have members step up and say, "I am willing to serve." Alternate delegates are called to serve if an elected delegate is unable to attend. MEA-Retired has filled all seats in recent MEA-RA assemblies because members like you feel the call and step up to serve.

Immediate Past President of MEA-Retired, Bob Jean, has been a delegate for a

number of years and says, "There is a special feeling of camaraderie gathering with thousands of delegates from across the country who share the goal of advancing public education."

"Our Maine delegation has a rich history of being well-prepared and well-informed about the issues. We work hard at the daily early morning caucuses to be as prepared as possible. It is my hope that members will consider running for the delegate positions."

First time delegate to the NEA RA, Julie Gomez, said, "The NEA RA was inspirational. It was breathtaking to walk into the convention hall and see close to 7,000 educators working together to better the lives of ALL educators in this country."

Interested candidates should submit the "Notice of Intent" form located at

www.maineeca.org/meaelections **by January 15, 2026**. If more candidates file than the number of positions, an election will be held.

More information on all of these positions of leadership in MEA and MEA-Retired may be obtained from MEA Administrative Assistant Erin Noyes at 1-888-622-4418, Ext. 2218 or erinnoyes@maineeca.org.

Visit our websites for more details and activities: www.mearetired.org and www.maineeca.org.

Unified Member Dues	
NEA-Retired	35.00
MEA	31.00
MEA-Retired	21.00
Total cost:	87.00
\$7.25 per paycheck	

Dental enrollment season opens

Northeast Delta Dental announces the opening of open enrollment for insurance for the ensuing year. It will begin on November 1st and end on December 14th.

There will be a rate increase this year.
Retiree: \$63.65 (up 4.63)
Retiree + 1: \$108.42 (up 7.89)
Retiree + 2 or more: \$170.74 (up 12.43)

Below are some of the many benefits offered through Northeast Delta Dental: Double-Up Max, vision and hearing discount, extra dental benefit—Health through Oral Wellness (HOW) program, and benefit lookup site.

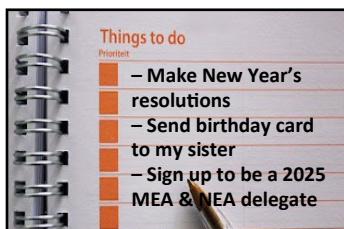
Questions regarding any of these programs may be directed to customer service at 1-800-832-5700.

Interested members are

invited to enroll, make changes, or cancel dental. They must submit the form by December 14. Forms can be mailed to MEA, PO Box 310, Caribou, ME 04736.

For assistance completing the enrollment/change form, contact Lisa Collins at: lcollins@maineeca.org or call her at 207-888-3804.

If you are a current subscriber and do not want to make any changes you will automatically be re-enrolled.



member of MEA, MEA-Retired, and NEA-Retired.

The MEA bylaws, also found on the website Governance Documents - Maine Education Association (maineeca.org), specify the following: Delegates representing retired members shall be apportioned in accordance with the ratio of one (1) delegate per five hundred (500) members or major portion thereof.

Just a note of explanation: The term of a delegate expires in April of the following year of service—which is before the current MEA-RA held in May.

If there is ever a situation where MEA needs to call a special meeting, the "current" delegates (who served in the most recent May MEA-RA) are then eligible and called upon to attend a meeting up until April 30.

We need unified members



Convention, from Page 1

found in last year's surveys.

Following the breakout sessions a buffet style lunch will be served. If you are unable to carry a tray of food, we have people who will gladly assist you.

During the lunch break please be sure to check the poster at the PAC table to see if you have won an item. Items can be claimed at that time. Lunchtime is also the last chance to visit vendors and exhibits.

The Keynote will be delivered by a group who call themselves The Q-Tips. They are a comedy group out of Dover-Foxcroft who performed at a local fund raiser for Hospice.

The Q-Tips formed in 2018, first performing at the Pine Tree Hospice Spring Fundraiser.

The original Q-Tips were Barb Austin, Jayne Sharrow, and Judy Raymond.

Judy retired from the group in 2023. Judy Dow was recruited to fill the void.

In addition to the Pine Tree Hospice fundraiser, the group has performed in variety shows.

The gals like to have fun, make fun of themselves, and make folks laugh. It will be a very funny and relaxing time before our afternoon business meeting.

A little about the Q-Tips...

Barbara Austin moved to Dover-Foxcroft in 2003. Years of selling Longaberger Baskets has served her well in making a fool of herself in front of a crowd. From her first performance in 2018, where she mooned the entire audience, her career has blossomed. Barb has always enjoyed making people laugh. As her husband Jimmy says,

"You can smell the ham when Barbi walks into a room!"

Jayne Sharrow is a native

Mainer. She is a retired registered nurse with a background in music—although that is questioned when she is on stage. She has been in several theater productions, but enjoys the shenanigans of the Q-Tips most.

Judy Dow is a retired teacher who joined the group in 2023, performing at the Pine Tree Hospice Spring Fundraiser and the variety show at church. She didn't know what she was getting herself into. Judy serves as President of the Piscataquis Area Retired Educators Affiliate.

Breakout session bios

Brian Harris is the Founder of MedRhythms, developer of the world's first prescription music platform, who is pioneering work at the intersection of music, neuroscience, and technology. He is a board-certified music Therapist and one of only 350 Neurologic Music therapist Fellows worldwide. Brian began his clinical career at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital, where he created and implemented the hospital's first full-time inpatient Neurologic Music Therapy program. Specializing in traumatic brain injury, stroke, and other neurological diseases, he built the program into the most comprehensive NMT program in the country. Brian co-founded the Arts and Neuroscience Group at the American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine (ACRM) and was named a 2025 Fellow of ACRM for his nationally recognized contributions to rehabilitation medicine. He is also the first music therapist selected as a member of the

Recording Academy. He has been an invited speaker at leading institutions worldwide, including Harvard Medical School, Stanford University, Berkeley College of Music, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine, and the Neurology Foundation of India. Brian is an author on multiple publications in music and rehabilitation and is listed as an inventor on several patents related to MedRhythms products. His work has been featured in Forbes, CNEC, Rolling Stone, and The Huffington Post. He has also been named to MedTech Boston's 40 Under 40 Healthcare Innovators and recognized as one of the Top 100 Innovation CEOs by World Biz Magazine.

Karen Cookson

Born and raised in NJ married (Maine) my husband Fred in 1973. We have 3 children Ben, Rebecca and Jamika. We have 7 grandchildren. We have been a therapeutic foster home for over 20 years. I am a retired elementary teacher with most of my years in third and fourth grade. My entire career was in SAD#46 starting in Garland where there were 4 teachers and fewer than 100 students each year. I also taught in Exeter, Dexter Primary Middle School, and Ridgeview Community School. After 36 years, I retired, however, I did long term sub for another 7 years which extended my time in the classroom to 43 years. I finally, (finally) retired two years ago. Fred and I have been traveling

since retiring. We have been to Egypt, Hawaii and Southeast Asia. Our most recent trip was the month of October 2025 to Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. Coming to this session, you will be visiting Southeast Asia. You will travel with me by tuk tuk, Jumbo, Lambro, High speed train, Water Buffalo cart and long boats. I will share how people make their living in affluent to meager situations. We'll visit numerous temples, Buddhas, a floating village, the killing fields of Cambodia, the tunnels used by the Vietcong during the war and so many more places that most people are unaware exist. In addition to my presentation, I will bring artifacts purchased in each country which helped the economy of each region.

The afternoon schedule sets aside time for our Annual Meeting where we will conduct the business of the Association. We will be voting on proposed resolutions, and changes in Constitution/Bylaws language.

The afternoon session is also a time to memorialize educators who have passed away during the year.

Many important awards are given out toward the end of our business session. These awards are recognition to those who have helped make this organization so successful. We always enjoy cheering them on and showing our appreciation for all the work they do!

Our Annual Event is scheduled to end by 3PM. We hope to see many members present.

The Registration Form for the 2026 Convention and Annual Meeting is on Page 11.

Resilience from Page 2

The smell of the barn clung to my clothes—a mix of hay, diesel, manure. It was the scent of survival, but kids can smell weakness.

“Dude”, what is that?” Kyle asked once in the cafeteria. His father was a lawyer. “You smell like a petting zoo.”

Laughter in a big room echoes. It bounces around and lands on you again long after it stops. I scrubbed my hands raw every morning with pink industrial soap trying to wash the farm off me

That spring, my English teacher, Mr. Harrison, gave us one final assignment. My America. Most students wrote about Disney trips or city skylines—places I had only seen on an old TV. I tried to do the same but my page stayed empty.

That night, I was outside fixing the fence with my mother. The sun was sinking and the air was sharp enough to bite. She was wrestling with the post-hole digger when her grip slipped, cutting her hand open. She swore softly, spat on her knuckles and kept on working. She did not have time to bleed.

I went inside and started my essay. “My America isn’t a flag or a skyline. My America is the dirt under my mother’s nails.”

When I read it in class, my voice trembled. I waited for the laughter. None came. The room was still—the kind of silence that means people are really hearing you. After class, Mr. Harrison stopped me. He put a hand on my shoulder and said, “Ryan, never be ashamed of the work that feeds you.”

But shame is stubborn.

That winter the letter from the bank arrived—the kind that comes certified, with a signature line on the envelope. We kept it in an old cookie tin with other bills we couldn’t pay. I used to catch my mother staring at that tin in the morning light, her face hollowed by worry.

Then one day, the power shut off with a quiet click. My mother lit a lantern and said, “The pioneers did it this way.” She smiled but her hands shook.

A week later, a new envelope appeared in that cookie tin. It held my SAT registration form and a pawn shop receipt. My mother’s wedding ring was gone. She kept her left hand in her pocket for a week. When I finally asked her about it, she just said, “rings are metal, Ryan, - an education is land. No one can take land from you.”

I studied in the truck cab with the engine running for heat. I studied at the diner where she waitressed, sipping the coffee she slipped me when the manager wasn’t looking. “Don’t stop” she whispered each time she refilled my cup.

When my acceptance letter came that spring, we celebrated with a grocery store pie. I told her I should wait a year to work and save money. She shook her head. “No.” she said. “It’s time the field we planted paid us back.”

Four years later, I stood on that stage in a borrowed gown that pinched at the shoulders. I spotted her in the crowd wearing her old funeral dress, hands folded in her lap, still marked by the faint line of the soil she could never quite wash away. They called my name. Valedictorian.

The same kids who once laughed at me were whispering again. I looked at the speech I had written—polished, forgettable—and then at my mother. I set it aside.

“When I came here, I was ashamed.” I said. “Ashamed of the smell of work. Ashamed of the hands that raised me.” I paused, my throat tight. “But I understand now—I’m not smart despite that work. I’m smart because of it.”

I lifted my diploma. “This isn’t mine. It belongs to my mother, Brenda. This is her rings, her dawn alarms, her calloused hands, her sleepless nights. She tilled the ground of her own life so I could stand here.”

The room stayed still. Then Mr. Harrison rose from his seat and started to clap. One by one, everyone joined him until the whole gym stood—not for me, but for her.

My mother didn’t clap. She just pressed her hand to her chest and let the tears fall.

I came back to that Ohio town years later. I teach biology at the same high school now. We built a small greenhouse out of scrap wood and donated plastic—a place where kids can put their hands in the dirt without shame. Above the door, I painted a sign: Dignity Comes with Dirty Hands.

If you’re reading this wondering if your life is too small because it doesn’t shine online, listen to me. If you’re clocking in when everyone else clocks out, cleaning up after the “important” people, or packing lunches before sunrise—your work matters.

The things that save us rarely sparkle. They come in early

mornings, heavy loads, and calloused hands.

People may laugh—let them. Their laughter fades.

Love doesn’t. Love leaves a mark. It’s written in sweat, soil, and sacrifice.

The diploma is paper. The story is soil. Carry it. And help someone else grow.

May we all be able to take the time to ponder, to reflect and gain perspective about the things and people who affect our lives. Lastly and most importantly to respect and honor the labor that we do and that of others.

PAC Matters to all MEA-Retired Members

As MEA-Retired PAC Captain, I attend NEA PAC meetings on Zoom. At a recent meeting we discussed the variety of donations at the NEA RA and Retired Annual Meeting (RAM).

A quilt was raffled off at the NEA RA. The quilt cost \$345 to make and brought in a total of \$8,600 in ticket sales. Live and virtual auctions were held in March at the Annual Meeting. Those auctions raised another \$42,425.

A total of six (6) members from Maine contributed to the Quilt Raffle.

Fifty-two (52) MEA-Retired members have donated to NEA PAC, for a total of \$3,800 so far this year. We have over 5,400 members. Imagine how our numbers would change if each donated \$3 a month?

Go to the following link to see how you can donate to NEA PAC.

<https://educationvotes.nea.org/donate/>

The PAC is fueled by educators like you. Donations help us to elect pro-education candidates in Maine and nationally. Consider donating to the cause.

Pre-Retirement Committee Report By Bo Zabierek

The pre-retirement seminars offered by MEA and MEA-Retired got off to a great start on October 7th and 8th.

Tuesday evening featured a presentation by MEA Benefits Trust Manager, Sharon Beaulieu. She walked members through their health care

options while still teaching and into retirement.

Committee member Jim Thornton of Westbrook hosted the meeting and facilitated the chat room where members could ask general information questions regarding the MEA's Anthem Medicare Advantage plan. This plan is offered to most K-12 educator retirees.

The Wednesday session was hosted by Julie Gomez of Lewiston. Julie serves as MEA-Retired President-Elect. She monitored the chat room for our presenter, Kim Bumford from MainePERS. Members are encouraged to enter their retirement pension questions in the chat room.

MEA-Retired President, Molly Smith, spoke to the attendees about the benefits of unified membership upon retirement. She stressed that association membership does not have to stop when one retires. She encouraged members to join MEA-Retired.

Those sentiments were echoed by Julie as she spoke briefly about joining your local affiliate as soon as you retire. She pointed out that joining one of our MEA-Retired county or higher ed local affiliates comes at a cost of under \$100 per year.

We repeated the sessions on October 21st and 22nd. This time Anthem's

Patty Whitcomb presented to free up Sharon for her important MEABT Trustees meeting.

Jim and Patty continued to inform members about their health benefits while Julie and Kim covered Wednesday's retirement information.

Thanks to former President, Bob Jean, for his technical assistance and to Lisa Collins for her continuing support through MEA's Caribou Uniserv Office.

Please note that the schedule for the Winter Seminars is below. If you know of an active educator who is thinking of retiring in the next year or so, spread the word about our pre-retirement sessions.

Web Page Administrator Needed

MEA-Retired is in need of a website administrator. There is a stipend that goes along with the position.

The administrator will be working with an experienced assistant and be part of the

Communications Committee. The committee will be a huge help as you transition into this role.

The candidate for this position should be:

- comfortable using a computer
- able to connect to and navigate the internet
- willing to learn about website

designs by exploring other sites on the internet

-willing to learn about and use the GoDaddy website platform

-able to use a word processing software such as Microsoft Word

-able to create PDF files

Some other helpful skills:

-familiarity with Adobe Acrobat Pro for editing PDF files

-ability to use photo editing software such as Photoshop

-familiarity with Microsoft Publisher would also be helpful

If you are interested in the position, or need to know more about it please contact us with your questions.

Bob Jean- vegas04861@yahoo.com

Molly Smith- gpond15@gmail.com

CONGRATULATIONS



Benita Russo, 1/1/1919
Josephine McAlary, 1/1/1923
Frances Bryson, 1/1/1923
Theresa Thibeault, 1/1/1925
Gladys Stokinger, 1/1/1925
Ruth McInnis, 3/14/1925
Elwyn Walker, 6/17/1925

AARP Maine

Join Us for Our Free Coffee Socials

Bangor- 3rd Friday of the month
Dysart's Broadway
1110 Broadway-Bangor
8:30-10:00 AM

Lewiston/Auburn-
Last Thursday of the month
Auburn Senior Community Ctr.
48 Pettingill Park Rd. -Auburn
8:00-9:30 AM

Yarmouth-
1st Friday of the month
Yarmouth Community Center
20 Mill Street, Yarmouth
10:00-11:30 AM

Fort Kent-
2nd Wednesday of the month
Fort Kent Public Library
Monument Square- Fort Kent
2:30-3:30 PM

Pre-Retirement Winter Seminars

Jan. 13 - MEA Benefits Trust
Jan. 14- MEA-Retired & MainePERS

Jan. 27- MEA Benefits Trust
Jan. 28- MEA-Retired & MainePERS

Feb. 10- MEA Benefits Trust
Feb. 11- MEA-Retired & Maine PERS

To register for a session contact:

Lisa Collins
lcollins@maineea.org

Day of Caring 2025!

MEA-Retired retirees once again were generous in providing school supplies, mounting bulletin boards, photocopying first-day-of-school documents, laminating words, weeding gardens, and volunteering to assist our active educators as another school year opened.

Our Day of Caring projects provided opportunities for educators to communicate with each other and to support one another as a new year began. The numerous tasks involved in

setting up a classroom or organizing materials for another year can take many hours.

By volunteering in our schools, MEA-Retired retirees were able to assist with many of these tasks. This allowed our active educators time to focus on their new students.

A special message of appreciation is extended to our selfless educator retirees who are not only "life-long learners" but they are truly "life-long givers."

Day Of Caring 2025

Androscoggin County

Androscoggin Retired Educators Association (AREA) Day of Caring Project 2025: Feeding Homeless Students!

The wonderful, outstanding members of AREA donated \$850 in Gift Cards to Hannaford's, Shaw's, and Walmart for homeless students in Lewiston and Auburn.

\$425 in Gift Cards went to Natasha Turcotte of the Lewiston Homeless Student Resource Program which serves over 250 students in Pre-K-12th grades each year.

\$425 in Gift Cards also went to Sasha Anastosoff of the Auburn Homeless Student Program serving over 250 students in grades Pre-K-12 each year.

The number of homeless students, and their families, is growing. Many students between ages 12 and 18 are sleeping with friends, in garages, in the woods, and in cars. They have no 'home'. The schools are the only stable homes they have. Our project will help many get the items they need just to survive.

Many need help buying food for the weekends and holidays when schools are closed. The current cuts in food programs are causing great harm.

Cumberland County

Members of Cumberland County Retired Educators Association (CCREA) donated a variety of school supplies such as pencils, colored pencils, crayons, glue, scissors, notebooks, picture albums, tissues, and note pads to teachers and students at Congin School in Westbrook. Staff expressed appreciation for the supplies that will be extremely helpful for many students as they begin a new school year.



CCREA President Roberta Morrill and Vice President Martha LaViolet contribute donated food to Westbrook Middle School's food pantry.

Kennebec County



KREA members Marc Poulin and Phil Sprague lend a helping hand.



Thirteen Kennebec County Retired Educators Association (KREA) members joined together to help teachers at the Manchester Elementary School in Manchester prepare for the first day of school in August. The school is home to Pre-K through Grade 5 classes.

They worked on bulletin boards, bus tags, room readiness, photocopying, collating, laminating posters, and clothes sorting.

KREA supplied morning donuts, coffee, lunch, and a great time of fellowship with fellow teachers.

KREA workers included Phil and Linda Sprague, Larry Given, Marc Poulin, Linda Ellis, Marshalyn Baker, Bonnie Nielsen, Betty-Jane Meader, Gail Perry, Kay Grindall, Roberta Drummond, Joan Meehan, and Kathie Choate. Special helper Katie Baker assisted with lunch.

Knox County



KCREA members Beth Chamberlin, Charlyn Dickens, Susan McNeilly, and Linda Woodman present school supplies to Principal Justin Kangas and Asst. Principal Scott Hastings at the Warren Community School. Students are on hand to accept the gifts. Front row: Parker, Lillian, Jasper, and Kainen. Behind the bench: William.

See Day of Caring on page 8– Knox

Day of Caring, from Page 7– Knox County (cont.)

The Warren Community School, serving grades Pre-K to 6, was selected as the recipient of the 2025 KCREA Day of Caring Project.

The project included donations of numerous school supplies and a Wal-Mart gift card of \$100. These were delivered to the school on September 12 by members of the KCREA.

In addition, the \$100 MEA-Retired Grant will be used to purchase plastic cups, spoons, and snacks. Other personal items such as socks and underwear will also be purchased. The Health Office at the school will distribute these items to students in need. Thank you KCREA members for your generous donations.

Penobscot County

For a number of years, Penobscot County Retired Educators Association (PCREA) has given a \$200 donation to a small school in Penobscot County to be used where needed.

This year, the \$200 was awarded to the Glenburn Music Department.

Under the leadership of Mr. Avery Whitney, the school band has doubled in size. The money will be used to purchase instruments to be loaned to students who can't afford them.



During band rehearsal, PCREA members Joy Knowles and Sheila Underhill awarded the check to Mr. Whitney, music director. Student, Harper McLaughlin, Principal Miller, and band members were excited to receive the donation.

Piscataquis County

Over the years the Piscataquis Region Retired Educators Association has given \$100 to groups affiliated with our five local school districts.

This fall the awards and monetary donations were distributed to library staff in each of the districts.

Shown presenting the gifts are top left, member Jane Conroy presenting to SeDoMoCha Library Media Specialist, Carolyn Clark; bottom left is member Janie Lander presenting to SAD#4 Library Media Specialist, Kathy Jarret; top right is member Louise Clement presenting to MSAD#41 Librarian Jeannine Lavigne and in the bottom right is member Carol Sherburne presenting to AOS#94 Librarian (and her niece) Liza Reinhardt. Library Media Specialist, Sarah Wentworth of Greenville Consolidated School was teaching and unavailable for a photo. We are always pleased to be able to support our local schools and staff members.



Volunteer

As we continue helping our schools and communities

If your affiliate missed out this time around, you can still submit your Day of Caring articles and pictures. We will publish them in the February issue of The Clarion.

Remember to send them to
vegas04861@yahoo.com

MEA Benefits Trust Report

By Faith Campbell
MEABT Trustee

The contract dispute between Northern Light Healthcare and Anthem has been foremost on our minds.

The Center of Medicare and Medicaid Services has made revisions affecting our Medicare Advantage premiums.

Northern Light Healthcare and Anthem have negotiated a new multi-year agreement. Northern Light Healthcare and Anthem announced on November 5 that they had successfully negotiated a multi-year contract agreement.

The Trust is well aware of the angst this contract dispute has caused amongst our members.

Our Executive Director Jennifer Kent has been steadfastly communicating with both parties advocating for our members and actively suggesting paths to possible resolutions.

Please contact the Trust with any questions or concerns at www.meabt.org or 1.207.622.4418.

The Center for Medicare and Medicaid services enact changes affecting Medicare Advantage premiums effective January 1, 2026. The Trust was informed that recent Center for Medicare and Medicaid decisions will cause Medicare Advantage premiums to increase effective January 1, 2026.

The Trust has been working closely with Anthem and Berry Dunn, Inc. to determine costs for our Medicare Advantage members. These decisions will increase of the monthly premium to approximately \$400.00 per member per month from the

current premium of \$356.17.

These amounts will be adjusted by the State of Maine's current 60% percentage contribution.

Members share of the premium will be approximately \$160.00. The State contribution will be approximately \$240.00. A recent article in the Maine Monitor informed the public about the increasing senior male suicide rates. Maine has one of the highest rates in the nation.

Maine Monitor Article- "Across the Country, older men are dying at higher rates of gun suicide". This article claims that Maine senior males have amongst the highest rates of gun suicide in the nation.

Piscataquis County has the highest rate of senior suicides in Maine and is higher than 97% of all counties in the United States according to the US Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Piscataquis has the highest average age in Maine, has one of the highest poverty rates with 15% of seniors living below the poverty level.

There are currently no State offices in the county. The nearest medical facilities are an hour away and there are limited transportation options. These factors all contribute to feelings of isolation and desperation leading causes of suicide. A full copy of the article can be found at www.mainemonitor.org/maine-suicide-rates/.

MEABT Wellness Director Michael Booth has provided a list of emotional health resources available to our members. He states that most MEABT resources can be found under our Member Assistance Program (MAP) link found within MEABT and Anthem Websites.

The MAP telephone number is 855.686.5616 to speak directly with a representative including coordination with a home well-

ness check.

The MAP program includes other resources such as articles, videos, FAQ's, podcasts and books.

Topics include suicide prevention, how to choose a therapist, preventing suicide at work, as well as suicide prevention in older adults.

These resources can also be found at www.anthemcap.com

- 1. When signing in you will be asked for your organization. Type in ME-ABT
- 2. Then click "wellness resources" from the homepage and search "suicide".
- 3. This will take the participant to all resources located on the "emotional wellness content". (You may be prompted to type in "suicide" again.)

It is important to note that the above programs are available to subscribers' family members, frequently, even those not included in the subscriber's insurance plan.

Other helpful links include: National Suicide Prevention hotline number 988 NAMI Maine - Mental Health Matters to ME - You are Not Alone 1.800.464.5767 Maine Suicide Crisis Hotline Free 24/7 Chat, Text and Phone 1.888.568.1112

Please do not hesitate to reach out either for yourself or another individual. If you do need to reach out for another individual then, reach out for yourself as well.

Communications Committee Reminds You.....

The Committee continues to work hard at keeping the membership informed.

The MEA-Retired website is a great resource that you must explore. Forms, news, and archived Clarions can be found there. Take some time to see what's available on the site at: mearetired.org

MEA-Retired also has a Facebook Page. Simply type in MEA-Retired Facebook Page into a search and you will find it. Give it a try today.



Partnership for Caring

Retired educators remain eligible to participate in the "Partnership for Caring" financial assistance program. The criteria reads: "MEA will assist local affiliates to meet exigent expenses of an unpredictable nature incurred by members or their immediate families. Specifically, the MEA will match, dollar-for-dollar, up to \$1,500 in contributions raised by a local affiliate or combination of affiliates to meet such expenses."

When an affiliate raises funds to assist a needy unified member to help with catastrophic circumstances (fire, flood serious health diagnoses, etc.), MEA will match the raised amount up to \$1,500. Applications are on our MEA-Retired website and Facebook page.

De
**Deadline for February
Clarion Articles
January 5, 2026
Please submit articles
to: Bob Jean
vegas04861@yahoo.com
or mail to
PO Box 821-Rockland**

AARP News You Can Use

By Joyce Bucciantini
Community Outreach Volunteer

The winter holidays will soon be upon us filled with December parties, family gatherings and gift giving.

And yet, while we are busy shopping, and anxiously awaiting time with family and friends, scammers are also looking forward to increased opportunities to cheat us out of our hard earned money and spoil our holiday cheer.

According to the AARP Fraud Watch Network, the number of scams increase during the November and Decem-

ber holidays. As more people are shopping online or giving to charities, there are more opportunities for scammers.

While there are different types of scams, there are some easy ways we can protect ourselves; we can all stop, think, and investigate texts, emails, or offers that just don't seem right.

Phony package delivery texts are a common type of scam. These texts ask us to click a provided link to provide more information or trick us into paying fake fees.

Instead, we can contact the retailer directly if we are concerned about a package. Using tracking numbers for any package is another way to monitor the delivery process.

Holiday time is also a time when many of us tend to give more to charities. At that time fake charities are eager to take

our money.

AARP suggests never giving personal or banking information over the phone. Take the time to research the charity on sites like [give.org](https://www.give.org) or [CharityWatch.org](https://www.charitywatch.org) to make sure the charity is real. Being asked to pay with prepaid gift cards is another good clue that something is amiss.

A good way to stay informed about how to protect ourselves from scammers is to watch "Fraud Watch with Pam and Phil", a free thirty minute virtual scam awareness series sponsored by AARP Maine.

Each monthly program focuses on different topics such as cybersecurity, types of scams, and tips to avoid scammers.

Copy the following link to your browser to register:

<https://states.aarp.org/maine/monthly-fraud-watch>

Scammers may be smart or

clever, but we can help prevent scams by paying attention and staying informed. We can protect our personal data and money by avoiding responding to unknown texts or emails and researching unsolicited charity requests.

There are many types of scams but remember, "If you can spot a scam, you can stop a scam."

Happy Holidays and as always, check out the AARP website for an event near you!

A Note From the Editor:

AARP offers webinars on various topics. I have recently attended two of them, in the comfort of my own home. I learned all about the many uses of my smartphone that many people don't know about. I also learned how to 'cut the cord' from cable tv. Go on the AARP website to learn more about webinars that are being offered.

MEA-Retired AARP Liaison By Pamela Partridge

You may wonder why MEA-Retired has an AARP liaison to the board and what do they do as a board member. It is because of our connected histories that go back to the mid 1900s.

AARP's founder, Dr. Ethel Percy Andrus, herself a retired school teacher and high school administrator, made it a mission to improve the lives and expand opportunities for older Americans so they could lead lives of independence, with dignity and purpose.

To that end, as a member of the California Retired Teachers Association, she founded the National Retired Teachers Association in 1947 which later became AARP in 1958. (See also our MEA-Retired History at <https://mearetired.org/history>

to understand the role of the NRTA in MEA-Retired's history.) The AARP liaison to MEA-Retired serves as the communication link between MEA-Retired and AARP Maine.

In order to do that, the liaison attends both the MEA-Retired Board and Executive Board meetings and the AARP Maine monthly Executive Council meetings and some regional meetings of NRTA, the educational branch of AARP.

With the information learned at those meetings the liaison submits monthly reports to the MEA-Retired Board and Executive Board, bi-monthly articles for publication in The Clarion, and an annual report to the MEA-Retired Convention or Annual Meeting.

You will find, near the bottom of our website homepage (mearetired.org), a link to the AARP state-wide and national (virtual) events, that are often free and without the require-

ment of AARP membership.

These events support retirees to live that life of independence, with dignity and purpose that Dr. Andrus envisioned.

With a quick look at a list of events at <https://local.aarp.org/virtual-community-center/>, you will see under most event descriptions a camera icon and the words, "Free, no membership required," but you do need to preregister for each event, whether it is in person or virtual.

Each year at this time AARP Maine sets goals for the coming year, keeping in mind our founder's mission. Members of the Executive Council discuss the goals and help to set priorities. They will be made public in December and will remain centered around previous pocket book issues: social security and financial security, home and community based care, affordable housing, utilities, fraud, and voter engagement

with the upcoming 2026 election. (It is accurate to say, "Our Voices Decide" since people over 50 make up 65% of the people who vote in Maine.)

As members of MEA-Retired, please share your thoughts with me, the AARP Maine liaison to the MEA-Retired Board, about these topics so that I can bring them back to the Executive Council for discussion.

Under the Dome

MEA-Retired Members are invited to sign up to receive "up to the minute" legislative news updates from MEA Government Relations Director John Kosinski.

Send an email to him at:
jkosinski@maineea.org

74th MEA-Retired Convention & Annual Meeting

“The Many Hats of MEA-Retired”

Keynote Speaker
The Q-Tips (comedy group)

April 30th, 2026

Augusta Civic Center, 76 Community Drive, Augusta

Registration begins at 8:30 a.m.

Name _____ Tel. _____ Affiliate _____

Address _____ City/Town _____

State _____ Zip _____ Email _____ Age 90+ FREE _____

Registration: \$30—coffee/juice/food, vendors, raffles, prizes, book exchange, awards, affiliate displays, buffet lunch, entertainment, annual business meeting, fellowship

Two breakout sessions featuring four topics: Select 1st and 2nd choices for each one.

- (1) Axe Throwers (2) Travelling to Southeast Asia (Karen Cookson)
- (3) John Kosinski (MEA Director of Government Relations)
- (4) Medrhythms (Healing with Music) - Brian Harris

Session 1 10:35—11:10 a.m.: _____ 1st choice _____ 2nd choice

Session 2 11:20—11:55 a.m.: _____ 1st choice _____ 2nd choice

This form may be duplicated—submit a separate registration form for each registrant. Registration is to be postmarked by April 14, 2026

***Make check payable to MEA-Retired. Send with registration form(s) to
Carl Bucciantini, Registrar, PO Box 352, Greene, ME 04236-0352.***

Book table at convention

Tables will be set up at our MEA-Retired convention for our **FREE** book swap. Bring books you have read and take books donated by others. It is a great way to expand your reading and clean out bookshelves. You do not have to bring books to take books.

Children's books will also be available. We always need new books to read to our grandchildren now that we are retired and have more free time. Bring books and take books.

So, when you start your spring cleaning, begin with your bookcases and share your reading material. For more information, contact our convention coordinator, Rheba Michaud at 207-564-7494.



Convention Booklet Deadlines

December 1: Leadership Award Bios & Photos to MEA-Retired President-Elect Julie Gomez

February 1: Leadership Award Bios & Photos to booklet editor Kay Grindall

March 1: Reports from MEA-Retired officers, liaisons, and committee chairpersons

March 15: Necrology Reports

Names of all deceased who contribute to the education of students—bus drivers, custodians, cooks, secretaries, coaches, ed techs, teachers, principals, crossing guards, superintendents,
Dates of decease: March 10, 2025, thru March 10, 2026

**Please send to kay_grindall@yahoo.com.
Mail to 23 Hilltop Drive Oakland 04963**



Maine Education Association Retired
35 Community Drive
Augusta, ME 04330

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04901

MEA and Alfond Scholarship Foundation Partnership

The Maine Education Association is proud to partner with the Alfond Scholarship Foundation (ASF), spreading the word about the Alfond Grant — a \$500 grant invested for every baby born to a Maine resident since 2013 (and on a limited basis from 2008–2012).

The Alfond Grant helps families build aspirations for their child's future and provides resources to plan for education after high school—whether it's college, trade school, or another pathway.

Alfond Grant Ambassadors are trusted community members with strong local connections and a passion for supporting Maine families. They spread awareness of the \$500 grant and the importance of

planning early, sharing information at libraries, childcare centers, schools, and community events in approachable, meaningful ways.

ASF is especially seeking new ambassadors in Aroostook, Penobscot, Knox, Waldo, Piscataquis, Somerset, Franklin, and Oxford counties. Ambassadors receive training, support, and a stipend for their time and effort.

If you're interested—or know a parent, grandparent, educator, or community volunteer who would be a great fit—reach out to ASF's Caroline Palmetier (Coordinator).

www.myalfondgrant.com
Cell: 207-551-3647
Office: 207-347-8638

Membership Survey Notice We Would Like to Hear from You!

The Association is currently conducting a comprehensive survey of our entire membership. In our initial phase, the Membership Survey was distributed electronically to the email addresses we have on record. The electronic survey was available for responses from September 25th to October 25th. **How to Participate if you Missed the Survey**

If you do not have an email address, or if you missed the opportunity to take part in the survey and would still like to participate, we encourage you to reach out.



Our goal is to ensure that every member's voice is heard. This will enable us to gain a better understanding of our Association, establish priorities and effectively plan for our future.

Contact Information:
Molly A. Smith
MEA-Retired President
gpond15@gmail.com
207.837.8522