



THE CLARION

The Newsletter for Retired Educators
Maine Education Association Retired Vol. 135, No. 5

June 2024

73rd MEA-Retired
Convention
and
Annual Meeting

May 1, 2025

Mark your calendars!

From our President



Bob Jean

MEA-Retired recently held another successful, well-attended Convention and Annual Meeting in Augusta.

The Convention Committee provided us with a great variety of speakers, breakout sessions, and recognition of member accomplishments. It's always a highlight of the year as we eagerly gather to network and socialize with our peers from all over the state.

Now, the post-convention work begins. Our 2024-25 calendar is in place. We begin the new business year with the 96th Annual MEA Representative Assembly on May 18-19 in South Portland.

As has been customary, MEA-Retired has a full delegation filling our 11 seats. We also have four alternates ready to step in if needed. Our members thank you for your willingness to represent us as you

carry out the work of MEA's governing body.

The NEA-Retired Annual Meeting and NEA Representative Assembly will be held in Philadelphia at the end of June/beginning of July. MEA-Retired will be sending six delegates—the maximum number allowed.

Our calendar is set for our own Executive Committee and Board of Directors meetings as well. There are specific agenda items that need to be covered at Board meetings.

Additionally, I plan to carve out some time in our agendas for affiliate sharing. We can learn so much from each other as each county provides opportunities for networking, guest speakers, innovative activities, and volunteerism. I ask affiliate leaders to identify some highlights about your local association and share with

See President, Page 5

Convention: “Memorable, Informative”

By Rheba Michaud, Chairperson
Convention Committee

Nearly 200 members and guests traveled to Augusta from all over the state to join friends and former colleagues at the 72nd MEA-Retired Convention and Annual Meeting on May 2.

Many left very early in the morning to enjoy a brunch, visit the exhibitors' tables, view the county affiliate displays, and participate in the PAC raffle. Fifteen affiliates had posters with information about their activities and raffle items.

I heard many positive comments about the pictures of members involved in their activities. People visited the popular Book Swap

throughout the day.

Morning speakers always update us regarding MEA-Retired news—pension, insurance benefits, and volunteerism. MEA Vice President Jesse Hargrove updated us on MEA activities and stayed the whole day.

The breakout sessions were interesting and several expressed appreciation about the choices people had this year. The overall evaluations gave the breakout speakers excellent reviews.

Master gardener Lynn Lubas of Dover-Foxcroft excited members. She gave a handout with a list of resources for gardening with native plants.

Beth Chamberlin of Thomaston said, “Lynn Lubas did an informative breakout session on gardening for pollinators and wildlife. She discussed using annual,

See 2024 Convention, Page 4

MainePERS: Is your contact information up to date?

By Domna Giatas, Director
MainePERS Communications

Have you moved recently since retiring?

Has your email or cell phone number changed?

Did you give up your land line?

Having accurate information assists us in the verification process when you contact MainePERS and helps maintain the security of your account. It also ensures you receive critical information in a timely manner.

MainePERS is seeking

your assistance to ensure your contact information is up to date.

The quickest way to update your contact information is through the **MainePERS Member Portal**. If you have already registered, please log in and check your information.

If you have not yet logged in to our portal, registration instructions are available at www.maineper.org/memberportal.

Do you prefer to submit

your information via mail? Complete the **Member/Benefit Recipient Data Update** form available at

www.maineper.org/forms-resources/forms/. A quick link to this form is available when you click on “Address Change” on that webpage.

Just complete and mail back to MainePERS at P.O. Box 349, Augusta, ME 04332-0349.

We look forward to serving our members in the most expeditious and convenient ways possible. Do not hesi-

tate to contact us if you have questions: 207-451-9800.

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By Crystal Ward, Chairperson
Legislative Committee

Hello, MEA-Retired Members, The 131st Maine Legislature ended April 18.

We fought hard and were able to get bipartisan support in the Labor Committee for Rep. Jan Dodge’s bill to fix the COLA problem made in 2011. This bill would require that the first \$40,000 of a MainePERS pension be used to compute your COLA amount.

It was very expensive! But Rep. Charles Skold of the Labor Committee found a way to fund it yearly that would be much less expensive. Unfortunately, both bills failed on the Appropriations Committee table.

The bill to increase the amount of healthcare insur-

ance the State paid from 60 percent to 65 percent passed committee and the House and Senate. However, AGAIN FAILED AT THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE TABLE The cost is \$3.6 million, and there is \$1 billion in the rainy day fund.

Sometimes, you work hard, do everything you can to make progress and still lose. This is one of those years!!! But there will be a new Legislature this fall and the work starts all over again.

At the very end of the session, Democrats on the Appropriation Committees pulled the most unbelievable!! They tried to raise taxes on the retired by changing the amount of the Maine Pension Income Deduction for 2024 on your Maine income taxes.

It was set last session at \$45,864—equal to Social Security for 2024. This was a tax cut won by the Republicans during the last session! The amount the Appropriations Committee put in the 2024 supplemental budget was cut down to \$35,000 – a big blow and decrease in the Maine Pension Income Deduction.

Again, the Republicans

came to our help. With all your help, hundreds of e-mails, letters and in-person lobbying, this idea was REJECTED and the \$45,864 MAINE Pension Income Deduction was resurrected and stands in 2024.

Good news for education

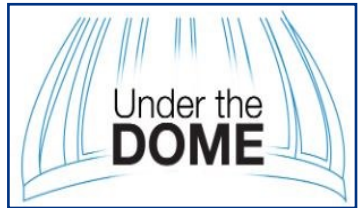
The final supplemental budget passed raises the minimum wage for all school support staff to 115 percent of the state minimum wage and 125 percent of the state minimum wage for ed techs beginning July 1, 2025.

If this were in place right now, the minimum wage for all hourly support staff would be \$16.28 and the minimum wage for all ed techs would be \$17.69. The

budget pays for the increases in the first year (2025-26 school year) and then going forward the additional costs will be reflected in the school funding formula.

The state budget also maintains 55 percent state funding for schools—a goal we pushed to attain for over a decade and now we are in our

See Legislation, Page 3



Members are invited to sign up to receive “up-to-the-minute” legislative news and updates from MEA Government Relations Director Jan Kosinski. Send an email to him at jkosinski@maineea.org.

Contacting our State Legislators

Senators

3 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0003
800-423-6900
TTY: 207-287-1583

Representatives

2 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0002
800-423-2900
Clerk’s Office:
207-287-1400

MEA RA
May 16—18, 2025
Portland Sheraton
at
Sable Oaks
South Portland

MEA-Retired is here for you!
June 3, 2024, 9 a.m.
Board of Directors Meeting
Best Western Hotel, Waterville
August 5, 2024, 9 a.m.
Executive Committee
MEA Headquarters, Augusta
September 3, 2024, 9 a.m.
Board of Directors Meeting
Best Western Hotel, Waterville
Meet & greet begin at 9 a.m.
Meetings begin at 9:30 a.m.

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 kay_grindall@yahoo.com or send to Kay at 23 Hilltop Drive, Oakland 04963.
Questions? Call Kay at 207-512-0027.
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NEA-Retired Annual Meeting and NEA RA
July 1—July 7, 2024
Philadelphia, PA
June 30—July 6, 2025
Portland, OR
July 1—July 7, 2026
Denver, CO
June 29—July 5, 2027
Indianapolis, IN



Did you know that through your MEA Benefits Trust Medicare Advantage Plan you have extra drug coverage beyond what Medicare prescription drug plans usually cover?

This Extra Covered Drug benefit covers certain cough and cold medications, vitamins, minerals, and select over-the-counter medications with a prescription.

Determining costs and confirming coverage on drug lists

Your Extra Covered Drugs are listed in their own document, the “List of Extra Covered Drugs” because these are offered in addition to what Medicare allows us to cover.

All other covered prescription drugs are still listed in the Part D Formulary.

Both the Extra Covered Drug list and the Part D Formulary show the Tier the drug is on. The pharmacy copay Tier structure is as follows: Tier 1: \$10 copay, Tier

2: \$35 copay, Tier 3: \$60 copay, Tier 4: \$85 copay. You can also call Anthem’s Pharmacy Member Services at 1-833-285-4630 (TTY: 711) for assistance determining cost and confirming coverage, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

It’s important to compare costs. Before requesting a prescription from your doctor, compare the store price of the item against the copay for that Tier on the Extra



Covered Drug list. This will help you determine if using this benefit is advantageous for you.

Using your extra coverage at the pharmacy

To use the benefit, the Extra Covered Drugs require a prescription from your doc-

tor. As always, it is important to let your doctor know about any over-the-counter and prescription drugs you are taking. When you are ready to use your Extra Covered Drug benefit, follow the below steps:

Obtain a prescription from your doctor for the over-the-counter item,

Go to the pharmacy and obtain the item (even if it is available for purchase over-the-counter),

Bring your prescription and the item to the pharmacy counter along with your Medicare Advantage ID card. The pharmacist will run the prescription through the system, and you will be charged the appropriate copayment for the drug. If the cost of the drug is less than your copay, you will only be charged for the cost of the drug.

Three options to view the Extra Covered Drug

Extra covered drug benefit through Medicare Advantage

By Jennifer Kent, Exec. Director
MEA Benefits Trust

list

You can find this list and other plan resources at www.meabt.org/documents under the Medicare Advantage section.

You can log in to www.anthem.com to view this list and other important documents related to your health plan.

You can also have a printed list mailed to you by calling Member Services at 1-844-963-0436 (TTY: 711), Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. EST, except holidays.

Legislation, from Page 2

fourth year of maintaining the state’s 55 percent funding commitment to public schools.

The budget also contained provisions to begin moving special education services for youngsters Ages 3-5 from Child Development Services (CDS) to public schools. This is a major undertaking and may further strain capacity in public schools.

However, it was clear that the current CDS model was not working considering that states are federally required to provide these services. The budget allocates \$20 million to help public schools assume these new requirements and responsibilities.

There is \$2 million to help student homelessness and for homeless shelters. All these services impact student performance and overall schools’ environments.

It was so encouraging to see **bipartisan** support for our issues. Two Republican leaders in particular—Senator Rick Bennett of Oxford and Representative Billy Bob Faulkingham of Winter Harbor continue to be allies for us on some issues.

There are dozens of “heroes.” Two stand out. They are Rep. Jan Dodge of Belfast for her COLA and health insurance bills and Senate President Troy Jackson of Allagash working as hard to the very end to increase the wages for our ed techs and support staff. He is a true champion for educators and working people

Thank you to everyone who played a role in these victories. Our retired members stepped up when asked. We had well-attended lobby days in the State House. Hundreds of members of

MEA-Retired reached out to legislators over the past few months to make sure they understood how important our issues are. They made phone calls, sent email messages, and wrote letters. Together, we can make even more progress in the future.

In Washington, DC Update on Social Security Fairness Act: H.R.82

On Tuesday, April 16th, the U.S. House Ways and Means Social Security Subcommittee heard testimony from Social Security experts about the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and Government Pension Offset (GPO).

The Social Security Fairness Act, H.R. 82, and S. 597, seeks a full repeal of WEP and GPO. These bills have bipartisan support in both chambers. H.R. 82 has over 300 co-sponsors in the

House, while S. 597 the companion bill in the Senate has 53 co-sponsors.

The committee heard from witnesses who discussed the intended purpose, shortcomings, and alternatives to these policies. The committee hearing served as a subject-matter hearing only and did not result in a committee vote. A timeline for action to advance the Social Security Fairness Act was not provided.

Part of the discussion was on the math formula used. If you change this formula, you can eliminate or reduce the harm done by the Social Security Offset. There is still HOPE for a House floor vote this session.

Thank you to everyone who worked relentlessly on the Social Security Offset. Stay tuned for the next step. MEA and MEA-Retired are always advocating for you!

2024 Convention, from Page 1

perennials and native plants in our gardens, window boxes and planters. Many excellences and 5+ for her presentation.”

Traci Halverson of Easton was admired for her presentation of her solo journey up the Appalachian Trail. David Michaud of Dover-Foxcroft stated, “The trek was difficult and her body suffered from it, but with her drive and determination she overcame it all and finished the trek. Very Impressive!”

Matthew Cary, Director of Physical Therapy at MaineGeneral Medical Center in Augusta, demonstrated easy stretches and exercises that can be done from or with a chair or near a wall that would maintain and increase mobility and flexibility. People felt they could comfortably do the exercises on their own and left with encouragement that they could improve their physical endurance. His message was essentially, “Work out to Live!”

Joan Hall of Owls Head commented, “He spoke directly to his audience with honesty and humor. All were extremely comfortable, attentive, and ‘physically’ involved when he gave simple stretches for everyone to try. Many who wanted to do exercises but did not know how to start now have exercises they can do to improve their health and balance.”

Pam Partridge of North Anson agreed, “What stuck with me is that he said we don’t lose balance and strength because we are getting older but because we become less active and use muscles less due to less activity. Simply, we go from playing soccer as kids to watching soccer games as adults. We need to keep moving, keep using our muscles, no matter our age. That’s the key.”

Rena Kearney’s European trip was enjoyed by many. Her wit and insightfulness added to her interesting slides. Her enthusiasm grabbed many as they listened and felt they were there. Ruth Chaffy of Dennysville said, “It was well narrated and very informative—beautiful pictures! Very well done.”

Our main speaker, Scarborough Chief of Police Mark Holmquist, certainly enthralled our crowd and elicited strong patriotism from all of us as he chronicled his 24-year career in the military. He kept us on the edge of our seats as he described what it was like to be a soldier (“sentry”) guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C. He spoke of the precision, discipline, excellence,

and undeniable commitment to adhere to the high standards that have captivated audiences for decades.

Comments on the evaluation topped the scale—all were 5+++ . Very impressive! Wonderful! Excellent! We all need to watch out for our veterans! Well done! Thank you for your service and for your memorable presentation.

We had very good comments on the



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delicious, generous lunch. Once again, Jan Kosinski roused our crowd in the afternoon—reminding us how we can become more informed and involved about legislative issues that directly impact our retired lives. He urged us to be sure to contact our legislators with concerns and ask their support of initiatives that we need in place.

Our brief business meeting had no new resolutions and one small bylaw change with a vote initiated by Parliamentarian Phil Gonyar of

See 2024 Convention, Page 5



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4



6

(1) Meeting retired friends from Franklin County are (L to R) Jan Collins, Marilyn Hylan, Caroleen Caldwell, and Nora Thombs. (2) Affiliate displays are always popular views by our attendees. (3) MEA-Retired President Bob Jean presents the 2024 President’s Award to Susan Grondin of Lewiston. (4) Working behind the registration table are (L to R) Rheba Michaud, Dover-Foxcroft; Linda Sprague, Belgrade; and Kathie Choate, Augusta. (5) Jan Prior-Crofoot of Blue Hill confers with Jennifer Kent and Sharon Beaulieu of MEA Benefits Trust. (6) Traci Halverson of Easton presented a session on hiking the Appalachian Trail solo. (7) Crystal Ward of Lewiston expresses her appreciation for the 2024 MEA-Retired Honorary Membership Award.

2024 Convention, from Page 4

Waterville.

The Legacy Committee honored affiliates with Ritter grants to continue their good work among members. Many affiliates are very creative in ways whereby they maintain meaningful connections with their members and keep as many as actively involved as possible.

A highlight every year is the Anne Sheehan Honor Grant of \$1,500 that is awarded to an active teacher who is pursuing an advanced degree. We were impressed to present this prestigious award to Brandi Merry of Norridgewock who teaches at the Skowhegan Middle School. We were pleased to have her parents, David and Darlene Jones, attend to recognize her honor.

Eleven affiliates honored 2024 Leadership Award recipients. See Pages 6 and 7 for more information.

Several affiliates received \$50 awards for increased enrollment of new members to their chapters during the past year. The county affiliates recognized were Androscoggin, Kennebec, Knox, Mid-Coast, and Penobscot.

The new Attendance Award for highest percentage of members at the convention

was given to Piscataquis Region Retired Educators Association. Over 34 percent of attendees from this small chapter were there. Nearly half the chapter members are still in Florida.

Members with the highest number of reported “physical activity” hours for 2023-2024 were recognized as follows: Debbie Whelan, Androscoggin; Maurice Pelletier, Aroostook; Sheila Gagnon, Cumberland; Jane Deely, Franklin; Janet Varnum, Hancock; George Davis, Kennebec; Beth Chamberlin, Knox; Gretchen Burleigh-Jones, Mid-Coast; Ray Seames, Oxford; Mike Smart, Penobscot; Jane Conroy, Piscataquis; Bonnie Chamberlin, Somerset; and Elizabeth Long, York.

Individuals with the highest number of volunteer hours were recognized as follows: Susan Conklin, Androscoggin; Rena Kearney, Aroostook; Sheila Gagnon, Cumberland; Cathy Ibarguen, Franklin; Judith Bragg, Hancock; Corley Anne Byras, Kennebec; Carl Woodman, Knox; Gretchen Burleigh-Jones, Mid-Coast; Blanche Sanborn, Oxford; Christine Haiss, Penobscot; Jane Conroy, Piscataquis; Debra Tuttle, Somerset; and Jan Cerabona, York.

The prestigious 2024 Honorary Membership

Award was presented to a very deserving member who has for years kept us all informed about pending, critical legislative issues in which we all must become involved. She keeps us informed on state and national initiatives. MEA-Retired Legislative Chair Crystal Ward of Lewiston was the most-deserved recipient of this important award. See Pages 8 and 9.

The very prestigious President’s Award was presented to a retired educator who is very creative, insightful, helpful, involved and stepped up to assist in the fall leadership training. Susan Grondin of Lewiston also chairs the Community Participation Committee and is on the Convention Committee.

Overall, the convention

and annual meeting were well received. MEA Benefits Trust trustee Faith Campbell of Sandy Point added, “I enjoyed visiting affiliate displays and also relish opportunities to share memories with former colleagues.”

Serving her third term in the Maine House District 39, Representative Jan Dodge of Belfast said, “So wonderful to connect with old friends and new friends. This opportunity is a bright spot for teacher reconnection and to remember how much we loved teaching.”

A special word of thanks goes to our Convention Committee: Bob Jean, Susan Grondin, Rena Kearney, Carl Bucciantini, and Kay Grindall.

We look forward to seeing you again next year —**May 1, 2025.**

President, from Page 1

us. New ideas for programming, activities, and membership recruitment can be gleaned from such sharing. Your ideas could be valuable to other affiliates.

Throughout the year Board meetings often feature presentations by various members who attend summits, conferences, workshops—sponsored by NEA-Retired, AARP, NRTA, and

other networking organizations..

Speaking of membership, this summer is the perfect time to reach out to new retirees. Make connections with recently retiring educators and speak to them about the benefits of joining their local retired affiliates and MEA-Retired.

One-on-one connections are very effective. Invite them to a meeting or to view your affiliate’s Facebook page or website so they can see exactly what keeps you so engaged.

Invite these new retirees to present at a local meeting if you know of a special talent or skill or passion they have. You never know what will attract new members.

I am looking forward to a productive year for MEA-Retired. I am also looking forward to all that Maine has to offer in the summer—the wonders of nature, the festivals and fairs, the friends and relatives who come to visit us, fresh Maine lobster, of course, and so much more!

FREE Coffee Socials

Sponsored by AARP

Get out and meet other AARP members this summer! Join AARP Maine for free coffee and snacks while greeting neighbors, friends, staff, volunteers, and community leaders. Coffee socials are held each month at the following locations:

Bangor: Third Friday, 8:30-10 a.m., Dysart’s, 1110 Broadway.

Fort Kent: Second Wednesday, 2:30-3:30 p.m., Public Library, One Monument Square.

Lewiston/Auburn: Last Thursday, 8-9:30 a.m., Auburn Senior Community Center, 48 Pettengill Park Road.

Portland: First Friday, 10-11:30 a.m., AARP Maine State Office, 53 Baxter Boulevard, Suite 202, Portland. **June 7—** Special guest Cyrene Siegona, Maine Master Naturalist.

Augusta: Third Wednesday, 8:30-10 a.m. Cohen Community Center, 22 Town Farm Rd., Hallowell.

National Ice Cream Day



July 21

2024 MEA-Retired Leadership Awards

Androscoggin:



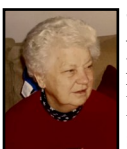
Roger Fuller of Lewiston taught 15 years in California—earning the Milken Award, national recognition for excellence in teaching. After earning his Ph.D., he taught for 22 years at Oak Hill High School as chair of the English, Social Studies, and Foreign Languages Departments. He was co-Director of the Project Discovery Program for Gifted and Talented and directed the schools' theater program. He also taught in the Adult Education program at Lewiston High School for 27 years. Roger was co-founder of Maine Net—a statewide system of telecommunications. He was a member of the City of Lewiston's Planning Committee for three years and still serves on the State of Maine Rehabilitation Council for the Division of Blind and Visually Impaired. Roger is a member of Androscoggin Retired Educators Association and is MEA-Retired's Facebook administrator and a member of the Executive Committee and Board of Directors. He served a two-year term in the State of Maine Legislature District 59. He and his wife Gina have two children and six grandchildren.

Aroostook:



Roger Roy of Caribou taught math one year at Limestone High School and then 37 years teaching math and business courses at Husson University, Emory Riddle Aeronautical University, USC, UMPI, NMCC, and UMFK. He retired in 2016 as Professor Emeritus of Mathematics and Business from UMFK. He has been active in MEA, serving as AFUM chapter president, statewide negotiator, grievance representative, and statewide membership chairperson. He has served two terms on the MEA Board of Directors and a delegate to numerous NEA-RA's and MEA-RA's. He is past president of Aroostook Retired Educators Association and is MEA-Retired Membership Chairperson—a member of the Executive Committee and Board of Directors. Roger owns and operates Fieldstone Cabins and Rainbow Cove RV Park in Stockholm. He and his wife Mae have two children, two grandchildren, and two great grandchildren.

Cumberland:



Carolyn Leavitt of Gray taught Grades K-6, substituted at the junior high, taught nine years in the resource room in Westbrook and the remainder of her 41 years in education in the Portland School System. She held many leadership positions in the Westbrook Teachers Association and Portland Teachers Association. She was building representative, legislative liaison, and recording secretary. Carolyn was involved statewide in MEA's committees—Government Relations, Instruction and Professional Development, and Structure and Bylaws. She was a long-time delegate to NEA-RA and MEA-RA

and member of Cumberland County Retired Educators Association. She and her late husband Keith have one child and three grandchildren.

Franklin:



Gary McGrane of Jay began his education career teaching elementary students the history of the Penobscot Nation. As a member of the University of Maine Professional Staff Association (UMPSA), Gary became a member of MEA and then MEA-Retired upon his retirement from the Bureau of Labor Education. He was OSHA project coordinator and treasurer of UMPSA. A member of the Franklin County Retired Educators Association, Gary is past president of MEA-Retired. He served a term on the Town of Jay Board of Selectmen and was Franklin County commissioner for District One for 28 years. Gary represented Franklin County communities on the Maine Municipal Association as a member of the Legislative Policy Committee. He and his wife Deb have three children and 11 grandchildren.

Hancock:



Priscilla McFarland of Ellsworth taught education for 39 years—all but eight years in various elementary schools in Hancock County. Priscilla coordinated an annual speech contest and coached the Odyssey of the Mind and Destination Imagination programs. A member of Hancock Retired Educators Association, Priscilla plans meetings and is co-chair of the Membership Committee. She was an active member of MEA having served as building representative, co-president and secretary of the local active association, and delegate to the MEA-RA. In her retirement days, Priscilla enjoys hiking, swimming, baking, researching family genealogy, reading, volunteering in a non-profit thrift store, and listening to music.

Kennebec:



Dorothy D'Alessandro of Waterville has more than 50 years of service in the field of education—teaching, assessments, guidance, environmental education, and special education. She began her teaching career in elementary grades in Massachusetts for ten years before moving to Maine. She became administrator of Special Education and a literary specialist in School Union 52 and the Waterville Public Schools. Dot served the State of Maine Department of Education—reviewing special education programs and curricula. She was a liaison between MADSEC and the Department and was a State of Maine focus school coach. More recently she was the administrator of special education at the Central Maine Learning Center in Belgrade. She was honored as the Special Education Administrator of the year for the

State of Maine in 1997-98.

Mid-Coast: **Janice Driver** of Bath taught at Woolwich Central School for 21 years. She was an active MEA member and president and negotiator of her local active teacher association. She has been an active member of Eta Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma International and volunteers at the Bath Area Food Bank. She organizes and prepares snacks for the Woolwich Central School staff. She is an active member of her local Mid-Coast Retired Educators Association. She and her husband David have two children and two grandchildren.



Oxford: **Linda Cousins** of South Paris served as an education support person for 26 years in the Rowe Elementary School in Newry. She was a cub scout leader and a girl scout leader. She is active in the St. Catherine's Sienna Church where she taught CCD classes and served in eucharistic ministry. While an active member of MEA, Linda was a member and negotiator of the Oxford Hills Education Association. She serves as treasurer of the Oxford County Educators Association Retired and is secretary of Zeta Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma International. She knits prayer shawls and is a member of the Western Maine Knitting Guild. She and her husband Larry have four children and four grandchildren.



Piscataquis: **Nancy Grant** of Dover-Foxcroft taught Grades 5 and 6 for seven years in Michigan, Idaho, and Hampden. After being home for ten years with young children, she returned as a Library Media Specialist (LMS) for nine years in Guilford and 19 years in Milo. She then served as a retired statewide LMS consultant for ten years. She is past president of the Maine Association of School Librarians. She led the development of job descriptions and evaluations of LMS and co-authored "Springboard"—a manual for using technology to teach research skills. An active member of Piscataquis Region Educators, Nancy volunteers as a member of the Thompson Free Library Association, the Maine Appalachian Trail Club, and President of the Maine Balsam Library Consortium. She and her husband Bruce have three children and two grandchildren.



Somerset: **Sharon Adams** of Norridgewock earned a master's degree in special education and taught in an elementary resource room in Madison and then moved to a self-contained classroom in special education. Upon retirement Sharon facilitated the "Story Time" at the local public library. Sharon became a leader in the Skowhegan Women's Club and works with the Travis Mills Foundation. She is an active



member of Somerset Educators Association Retired and volunteers. Sharon and her husband Don have two children and four grandchildren.

York: **Diane Zehner** of Old Orchard Beach taught Grade 1 in Biddeford for 31 years and was a reading specialist for four more years. Diane was president of the Biddeford Teachers Association where she also served as negotiator. She is president of the York County Retired Educators Association (YCREA) and is a member of several committees—Hospitality, Investment, Scholarship Raffle, Christmas Fair, Yard Sale, and 50th Anniversary. She volunteers in the local Dyer Library's children room—book donations and yard sales. She presents tours at the Saco Museum Festival of Trees and co-chairs YCREA Community Participation Committee. She loves traveling—Germany, most of Europe, South America, China, and Hawaii. Diane and her husband Ronald have three children and three grandchildren.



2024 Anne M. Sheehan Honor Grant Recipient: Brandi Merry

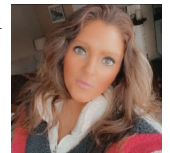
The 2024 Anne M. Sheehan Honor Grant is being awarded to Brandi Merry of Norridgewock. Brandi began her 23-year career in education in the Skowhegan School District as a substitute teacher, an ed tech II and III, and now a middle school Grade 7 & 8 Alternative Education teacher instructing a range of subjects.

She earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Maine at Farmington in English and is enrolled in a Master's degree at Thomas College in the Educational Leadership Degree program. Brandi hopes to become a principal and/or superintendent.

In her free time, Brandi enjoys reading, writing, and is working on a children's book and a teen novel. She is an avid photographer and has entered competitions. She enjoys biking, swimming, and camping and helps with outdoor activities for students.

The Anne M. Sheehan Honor Grant was developed from donations from friends and family of Anne Sheehan. Anne was an active member of MEA and MEA-Retired and demonstrated a great devotion to furthering education for active teachers.

The annual Honor Grant of \$1,500 in her name is available to all teachers in Maine and given to one who has enrolled in an advanced degree program. This degree can be in the arts, science or education. Applications are sent to the MEA-Retired Legacy Committee which selects the recipient.





By Susan Grondin
Androscoggin Ret. Educ. Assoc.

2024 MEA-Retired Honorary Member

Activist in and out of the classroom

A determined, staunch advocate for the rights and respect of all educators, MEA Retired 2024 Honorary Member, Crystal Ward of Lewiston, exemplifies activism at its best through MEA, MEA-Retired, NEA and NEA-Retired conventions, conferences, workshops, trainings, All-Committee days, rallies, marches, and demonstrations.

She has lobbied in Washington, D.C. and is a “regular” advocate in the State House halls in Augusta—providing written and oral testimonies at public legislative hearings.

Born and educated in Fort Fairfield, Crystal graduated from the University of Maine in Presque Isle (UMPI) with a BS degree in history/political science. As a student at UMPI, Crystal joined the Student Teacher Association of Maine (STAM), a part of the Maine Teachers Association (MTA) which is now the Maine Education Association (MEA).

She was a representative on the MTA Executive Board and was secretary and president of STAM. In 1998, she

received her Master’s degree in education from the University of Maine in Orono. Upon graduation in 1974, she joined the teaching staff of Crosby Junior High School in Belfast for six years.

In addition to her teaching responsibilities, she was the high school swim team coach in Belfast, yearbook advisor, and class advisor.



Crystal Ward
Class of '69
Lewiston HS

When asked why she chose teaching as a career, she responded, “At the time the majority of women were either nurses, secretaries or teachers. Since I don’t like blood, have difficulty with spelling, and enjoyed teaching swimming, it seemed a natural for me to teach.”

Through the years some of her mentors included Catherine Sullivan, MTA president when Crystal was a STAM member; Terry Given, NEA director who mentored Crystal when she became the NEA director; Idella Harter, MEA president during Crystal’s term on the MEA Board of Directors and NEA director. She also appreciates the help from Martha Marden and Mary Proulx—both are memorable colleagues while she taught at Crosby Junior High School in Belfast.

In 2000, she began teaching social studies at Lewiston High School (LHS) until her retirement. Joan Macri, a 2008 retired LHS social studies teacher, says, “Crystal was a highly effective teacher across all skill levels,

from Advanced Placement to Action Government in which many students struggled to read their high school textbooks.

“She met students at whatever level they were, demanded excellence and supported the students until they achieved it. And whatever the level, they learned government inside and out. There was nothing in government she didn’t know or couldn’t teach.”

A member of the Lewiston Education Association and four years as president, Crystal was asked to serve on many committees including one for the Maine Department of Education where she provided guidance for the first Gifted and Talented programs in Maine.

Crystal considers a “memorable” teacher to be knowledgeable of the subject, have strong and fair class rules consistently followed, caring, helpful, understanding, and able to see the abilities of all students.

She says, “The educator should meet students where they are, set high standards, and explain in clear, easy to follow small steps so all can understand. Rewarding often inspires classroom success.”

She recalls her own career: “My best teaching moments were with students who had many challenges. They needed a lot of positivity, success, and rewards. Once they believed you were really out to help them they could outdo almost anyone! Hearing a student who HATED history and government end the

year saying it was their best subject was a great reward.”

As a mentor to many fledgling teachers, Crystal’s basic advice is, “I may tell them this is a great profession BUT outside forces can make it very difficult. Make sure to take time for yourself. Do not volunteer for a lot during your first two years.”

As a delegate to MEA RA and NEA RA, she encouraged colleagues to become active on the local, state, and national levels.

Crystal retired in 2008 and in 2011, she became a member of the MEA-Retired Executive Committee and the Board of Directors.

As chairperson of the statewide Legislative Committee, Crystal coordinates legislative advocacy and communications to retired members with MEA Government Relations Director John



Jean Roy and Crystal have traveled extensively to many sites in and out of the country. Cruises are their favorites—this one was in the Mediterranean.

Kosinski.

John says of his ardent lobbyist, “Crystal Ward is a force of nature. When issues come up impacting retirees, she is often my first call. She is a seasoned hand in the Legislature. She knows her way around, how to testify and how to make an impact.

“Educators are disadvantaged in retirement in so many ways—GPO/WEP, COLA

See Crystal, Page 9



Crystal (back row) attends hearings in Augusta to testify in support of legislation that directly impacts the lives of retired educators.

Crystal, from Page 8

caps in MainePERS, inflation, and others. If we have any chance of making progress so educators can retire with the dignity they deserve, we need more Crystal Wards!”

Crystal writes an informative column dealing with legislative updates on Page 2 of every edition of *The Clarion*, the bimonthly publication of MEA-Retired. She keeps us informed of initiatives that directly impact our pension, insurance benefits, and COLA status.

Crystal is also an active member of the NEA-Retired Legislative Committee. She has served on the MEA Board of Directors representing District I from 2008 to 2011 and 2011-2017 representing MEA-Retired.

Mona Ervin, a LHS social studies colleague, states, “Crystal Ward has always had our backs as educators. She encouraged us to be better, both by her example and by recommending educational improvement sites, courses, and other colleagues as mentors. In retirement she has continued her tireless efforts on behalf of active and retired educators.”

Since 1979, Crystal has been a member of Delta Kappa Gamma (DKG), an international sorority for women educators. She was president of DKG Mu chapter in 1990-1992, co-president in 2022-2024, and State DKG Legislative Chairperson from 2010 to present. A DKG sister, Glensys Rider, remarks, “I have known Crystal since 1979 when she became my Delta Kappa Gamma sister! As well as being a devoted teacher, she is a very capable, outstanding leader, who served DKG in many capacities at both the local and state levels.”

Crystal is a two-time recipient of the Geneva Kirk

Service Award, the 2010 MEA Anne Sheehan Political Action Award, the Outstanding County Leadership Award for Androscoggin Retired Educators Association (AREA), and DKG’s Alpha Psi State Achievement Award in 2019.

Besides teaching, Crystal has a love of travel and theater. She and her best friend, Jean Roy, attend performances at Maine Music Theater in Brunswick, travel to places in and out of Maine and the country.

As Jean says, “We have been season ticket holders at the Maine Music Theatre and the Public Theater for a dozen years or more. If you sit near Crystal at a comedy, beware that her infectious laugh will catch the attention of the performers and they will find you in the



Crystal is a member of a game group that meets monthly. Players are (L to R) Jean Roy, Crystal, Mary Gilman, and Susan Stinchfield.

crowd.”

Reading, gardening, playing games, and sewing are activities Crystal enjoys. She is fortunate to have her daughter Erica who lives in Lewiston—close so they can spend time together.

Congratulations, Crystal! Thank you for all you continue to do for the educational community—far and wide.

Susan Grondin taught in Lewiston until her retirement. As an active member, she advocated for educators at the local, state, and national education associations. She continues her involvement as a member of the MEA-Retired Board of Director and Chairperson of the Community Participation Committee.

The goal of the recent National Retired Teacher Association (NRTA) Volunteer Leadership meeting in Charlotte, NC, was to provide experiences that will make a positive difference for state representatives and their Retired Educator Associations (REA).

The meetings and activities were filled with projects and resources for representatives to share with REA state leadership teams as well as fostering collaborations among respective AARP state offices.

There is a strong history of NRTA and REA collaborative work to achieve our common goals. With that in mind, sections of the meeting were purposefully designed to provide opportunities for attendees to become better acquainted with others—both personally and professionally.

Through working together to create understanding and by sharing stories, it was our hope that this meeting will inspire a renewed set of working relationships among fellow colleagues.

A message was resounded to all: “Please know how much we appreciate all that you do to enrich and enhance

NRTA: Our partner in member growth

By Mary Beth Dixon
Senior Advisor
NRTA : AARP Educ. Community

the quality of life for retired educators in your state.”

Pam Partridge of North Anson and Gary McGrane of Jay represented MEA-Retired at the annual event. Pam says, “It was no surprise that NRTA—AARP’s Educator Community, ran an excellent workshop.

“We often give up after asking someone one time to join an organization or fill a volunteer position. While attending “Train the Trainer,” I learned research shows it takes on average of seven contacts to ‘get someone onboard.’ I learned that there are many methods and means of sharing those seven contacts to successfully bring in new volunteers and new members to an organization..”

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. An application is posted on our MEA-Retired website and Facebook page.



NEA-Retired Leadership Summit

By Bobbi Margo, Chairperson
NEA Communications Committee

The Annual NEA Leadership Summit for active educators was held at the Hyatt Regency in Chicago. The theme was **“Education. Democracy. Freedom. Our Right! Our Responsibility!”**

NEA President Becky Pringle opened the Summit of 1,600 attendees and reminded us that the importance of education as the cornerstone of our democracy has never been clearer.

The evening’s keynote speakers formed a panel discussion of parents from North Carolina sharing their experiences of how they are “taking

back their public schools.”

These parents are turning their schools into positive educational platforms for their children.

Two days were filled with excellent breakout sessions and another keynote speaker: John Jackson, President & CEO, SCHOTT Foundation for Public Education.

The SCHOTT Foundation is a BIPOC-led public fund that combines philanthropic funding and promotes racial and educational justice movements. Movements for racial justice in public education are growing -but investment in them is lagging. Find out more at: Schottfoundation.org

The 2024 NEA Leadership summit adjourned and the NEA-Retired Conference was called to order by President Anita Gibson. This year’s theme for the retirees was: “Retired and Powerful. Promoting, Protecting, and Strengthening Education.”

On Monday, NEA Secre-

tary-Treasurer Noel Candelaria of Texas reminded us that when unions win, families and democracy win.

The Q & A to Candelaria centered around how future funding can be made available for more retirees to attend valuable training sessions and future NEA-R Conferences.

The afternoon session was a walk down memory lane—”LABOR CELEBRATION: 40 Years of Bargaining in Illinois” featuring Illinois Retired President Jim Duffy and former NEA President Reg Weaver. The final day of the Retired Conference featured presentations by NEA Vice President Princess Moss and Deputy General Counsel Jason Walta.

Of the 287 retired educators registered for this conference, 74 were first-time participants. Donations to the Jack Kinnamon Scholarship were \$3,796. Proceeds

from the silent auction netted more than \$12,000.

WAY TO GO, RETIREES!

In conclusion, we are retired, but we really don’t have time now to be retired. We are in a fight for the very soul of our democracy, our nation.

By yourself you can make a difference, and you can also work with your union to join together to make us **impossible to ignore!** We retirees continue to stand ready for action, still focused, and committed!



MEA-Retired President Bob Jean (Back) helped fellow retired educators tally donations to the silent auction at the recent NEA-Retired Summit in Chicago.

June: ‘Tis the season for new retirees! Give them a gift! Order while supplies last!

Maine Educator



Retired



- Long-sleeved Denim Shirts @ \$48
- Short-sleeved Denim Shirts @ \$42
- Navy Blue Hats @ \$12
- Red, Iris Blue Tee Shirts @ \$25
- Red, Ultramarine Golf Shirts @ \$37
- Lapel Pins @ \$10

Prices include tax and postage/handling

Name _____ Email _____

Mailing Address _____ City _____ State _____

Zip _____ Tel. _____ Affiliate _____

Qty.	Item	Size	Color	Unit Price	Total Cost
	Sizes S. M. L 1X or 2X: Add \$2 3X or 4X : Add \$4				
	Total Remittance				

Questions? Contact Rena Kearney at rkearney@ainop.com or 207-429-9041. Prices include tax and postage/handling.

Make checks payable to MEA-Retired and mail to Rena Kearney, PO Box 377, Mars Hill, ME 04758.

(Items produced by Cushman’s Embroidery, Presque Isle, ME)

MEA Benefits Trust update

By Faith Campbell, Trustee
MEA Benefits Trust

I am experiencing many positive feelings of camaraderie as a result of seeing so many of you at the MEA-Retired Convention and Annual Meeting. Convention Coordinator Rheba Michaud expertly accomplished the creation of an enjoyable and worthwhile event.

I was particularly struck by MEA Government Relations Director Jon Kosinski's comments relating to educators whose careers span decades serving their students and general communities and continue to do so in retirement.

Anyone, who heard Susan Grondin's report detailing MEA-Retired members community service would have a difficult time disagreeing.

Another example of a lifetime of service is MEA-Retired Legislative Committee Chairperson Crystal Ward who was inducted as our 2024 Honorary Member. Crystal first became associated with the MEA in 1970 as a college student. Congratulations, Crystal, on your receiving this well-deserved reward.

I hope you have received several MEABT and Anthem flyers and booklets detailing health insurance policy changes scheduled to go into effect on July 1, 2024. It gives me great pleasure to have a part in bringing about additional cov-

erages and reduced monthly premiums.

One additional coverage is the added Blue View Vision benefit for ALL members within the Medicare Advantage policy. Enrollment is automatic.

Medicare Advantage members are scheduled to receive a new medical ID card in June to reflect the vision coverage addition. You have or will receive information in the mail about this new benefit.

Information is also available at www.meabt.org or by calling 1.888.622.4418. The Medicare Advantage monthly premium reduction was a result of Trust action and oversight of its funds. It is also the result that our members are following healthy lifestyle practices such as annual checkups and staying current with prescribed screenings.

Credit goes to Executive Director Jennifer Kent, the entire MEABT staff and the Trustees for their dedication and diligence in providing optimal benefits while managing Trust funds.

Members will also notice that the state contribution to retired educators healthcare insurance premiums will increase from 55 percent to 60 percent—due to legisla-

tive action. This should add a few more dollars netted in our monthly pension checks.

Your benefits include many programs to help you achieve enhanced well-being. These programs include Virgin Pulse whereby one earns rewards while working on health goals.

The Member Assistance Program offers services to members and their families in areas such as counseling, legal and financial assistance, dependent care referrals, identity theft and smoking cessation resources.

The Learn to Live program offers emotional well-being coaching. The Live-Heath Online program offers psychiatry and psychology services. The Extra Covered Drugs provision in your policy can help reduce Over the Counter costs for vitamins, ointments, pain medications and cold/flu remedies.

More information on how to access these programs is on the MEABT website. You may also receive information by contacting Anthem directly at anthem.com or calling 1.844.963.0436. This number is listed on the back of your insurance card.

Echoing John Kosinski's recent comments, you have dedicated your life to service. You have earned these bene-

fits. Please avail yourself to them.

On a bittersweet note, longtime MEABT field representative Lynn Anreassen has retired. Many of us had the pleasure of working with Lynn, and we at the Trust will miss her. She was a dedicated professional working with teachers and administrators throughout the state.

Our new field representative is Lynn Aceto. Ms. Aceto has worked for several decades in the health insurance industry. She comes to us with strong recommendations and no doubt will be a valuable asset to the Trust and its members. Welcome, Lynn, to our team.

Best wishes to our members and families for an enjoyable summer.

Thank you, Delegates

MEA-RA

Barbara Bricker	Gary McGrane
Marilyn Burton	Belinda Micucci
Julie Gomez	Ben Paradis
Kay Grindall	Jennifer Perry
Bob Jean	Molly Smith
Douglas Larlee	Zabierek, Bo

NEA-RA

Bob Jean	Belinda Micucci
Molly Smith	Ben Paradis
James Ford	Bo Zabierek

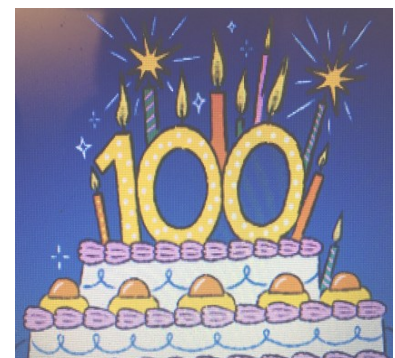
Reminder

Please keep track of your physical activity hours and volunteer hours beginning April 1, 2024, thru March 31, 2025.

Please report these hours to affiliate leaders each month. Those retirees with the highest numbers will be recognized at our Convention and Annual Meeting on May 1, 2025.

Questions? Contact Susan Grondin scgrondin@hotmail.com 207-782-8850.

CONGRATULATIONS



Benita Russo, 1/1/1919
Lucille Walker, 1/1/1921
Frances Bryson, 1/1/1923
Josephine McAlary, 1/1/1923



Membership Matters: Positive growth incentives

By Roger Roy, Chair
Membership Committee

As of February 15, 2024, Maine Education Association Retired had 5,444 members—according to Lisa Collins at the MEA Caribou Office. This number shows an increase over last year, but it is in flux due to deaths, non-renewals, and new retirees joining.

Last year, we reported 5,533 in February, but the June MEA–Retired dropped to 5,423. That 110 drop in membership was due to 69 deaths and 41 non-renewals. I want to commend our local affiliates for the hard work they have exerted to recruit new members and to reinstate former members.

We are incorporating a new recruitment incentive program for local affiliates that was approved at our No-

vember Board of Directors meeting. As we begin a new year of recording membership, we decrease the previous year’s total membership roster by the number of deceased **members**. (Please keep track of deceased **members** during the year.)

That adjusted number would become the new base. Then the affiliate reports how many new members have signed up, and that number is used to calculate membership growth.

Androscoggin County recorded the largest membership growth, and was presented \$100 at our convention. Mid-Coast, Knox, Penobscot, and Kennebec registered growth increases that merited \$50 grants to each of

those four affiliates. The 16 local affiliates posted an overall growth rate of 7.2 percent. Our affiliate membership as of March 1, 2024, was 1,498.

Conditions vary greatly among affiliates. In Aroostook, for example, we had over 450 members a few years ago. Despite working diligently to enroll newly retired educators, we cannot succeed because each year, more members die than those who retire. This problem is common in the rural areas where we have decreasing populations.

A new “Attendance Award” based on percentage was initiated this

year. We simply divided the number of affiliate attendees by the affiliate total membership. Piscataquis won. So, continue to recruit—June is a big month.



Membership Chairperson Roger Roy presents the “Attendance Award” to Rheba Michaud, president of Piscataquis Region Retired Educators Association.