



THE WATCHDOG REPORT

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF MISSOURI RETIRED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION AND PUBLIC SCHOOL PERSONNEL



MRTA is your pension watchdog!

FROM THE DESK OF MRTA MEMEBERSHIP CHAIRWOMAN

Idella Warden

As I sit here in my very cold home, I am so thankful. My furnace died last Friday, and a new one is being installed. So why am I thankful? I have a pension that allows me to buy a new furnace. I have a pension that will go to my bank account next month and the month after that for as long as I live. I am thankful for MRTA's benefits partner AMBA and their many programs to protect the physical and financial health of retirees. **I AM THANKFUL TO BE A MEMBER OF MRTA, A UNITED GROUP OF CURRENT AND RETIRED TEACHERS WHO WILL FIGHT FOR THE SECURITY OF MY PENSION!!!**

We need to remind new and old members alike of our pension blessings. October was renewal month. Hopefully you reminded members to renew both their local and state memberships. However, October is not the only time to recruit renewals. Getting new members and encouraging former members to renew should be a YEAR-ROUND ACTIVITY. Remind new members and non-renewals that attacks on public education hurt not only our children but indirectly our retirement system. Encourage them to show their thankfulness for our retirement system by joining/renewing their membership in MRTA.

This is also a good time to make a presentation to your respective school boards about the benefits of gifting an MRTA membership to their retiring staff members. Currently, only 65 schools purchase memberships for their retirees. All of us need to be spreading the word about what is right about public education in Missouri. Missouri ranks 50th in new teacher pay and 45th in average teacher salaries. Yet Missouri students consistently outperform national academic standards. MRTA is a strong supporter of both defined benefit plans and public education as an essential component of our country's political and financial success. Urge your school boards to reward retirees for their hard work with a membership to MRTA.

Finally, be BOLD in asking teachers and retired teachers if they belong to MRTA. Carry a membership form with you and urge them to join or renew. All members are part of the membership committee, and more members mean a louder voice in state politics to defend public schools and public pension plans like ours.

I am thankful for all of you, for your dedication to the students of Missouri. I thank you for all your hard work and your help in protecting our largest asset in retirement! **Happy Thanksgiving!**

Happy Thanksgiving!

Inspiring Minds You Want to Know

MRTA Board Members Share Insights, Future Plans and Inspiration for All

MRTA is indebted to the 26 members of our board. Our elected officers, committee chairpersons and regional vice presidents provide steady, reliable leadership for MRTA at all levels and in all parts of the state. Their service helps ensure we can successfully meet our goals to promote the professional, social, and economic welfare of all retired school employees, protect pensions for our public school teachers and educational staff, and support Missouri public schools.

Staying Focused on the Positive

Richard Phillips, Retirement Education Committee Chair



Richard Phillips started his career in public education with a passion for coaching athletics.

"I taught in a public school for four years and then spent two years as an assistant football coach at the college level," he said. During that time, he got his superintendent certificate and at the age of 31, became the superintendent of a small school district with just 250 kids. "God, I loved it!" he said with a smile, and added, "I had a lot to learn."

That was just the beginning as Richard continued to work in the role of superintendent and in other key educational leadership positions. He forged a successful career that spanned five decades, all the while working to help Missouri public schools, educators, and students.

Even though classroom teaching didn't end up being his ultimate calling, his love for teaching and his talent for coaching frame his approach to dealing with challenges. "I view most everything I have done as teaching, and quite frankly, as coaching," he said.

"As a coach, first you look at what your strengths are," he explained. "The second step is to look at the opposition (facilities, finance, staffing, student performance, etc.). This is followed by developing a game plan. What are the strategies you will use to be successful against the challenges facing you? And finally, you implement objectives and measures to make a positive difference."

This approach has served him well, on and off the field, and made him a valuable part of MRTA's recent transition, re-energizing under the leadership of Executive Director Maria Walden. Richard's work as a school administrator, and at the Missouri Department of

Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) have given him practical insight on best practices for major initiatives such as budgeting and strategic planning with a focus on student performance.

In Richard, a business-like manner and logical approach somehow mesh seamlessly with his welcoming and lighthearted personality. He possesses a sincere interest in the well-being of others that is easy to see. Making a positive difference seems to be in his DNA.

"Richard's unique background is a tremendous benefit to MRTA and our membership," Maria said. "But it's more than that. He is an educator's greatest ally, and he inspires others to be their best. He loves to engage with others, and when he does, he truly listens – he genuinely cares."

Richard sees great potential in both the Missouri public school system, and in MRTA's ability to advocate for schools, educators,

and their retirement system. His focus is on the many positive things accomplished every day in the public schools around the state.

"We want to be having discussions with civic organizations, community leaders, and the like about what is right about Missouri public schools and demonstrate the value and importance of public education," he said. "Missouri is above the national average on the number of kids taking the ACT test, graduation rates, and the percentage of kids going to college or trade school as well as numerous student performance standards though we are at the bottom of the list in terms of what we invest in our public school system as state, this is possible because we have seasoned, experienced teachers and administrators," he said. "They are the reason."

He is impressed by the impact MRTA has made and wholeheartedly supports the group's renewed focus on protecting and spreading the word about the many benefits of public schools and the people who make them great.

He also expressed his admiration for his MRTA colleagues. "The people who step forward to assume leadership positions in this organization are people who want to continue to give back,"

he said. "We are talking about people who are in their 70s or 80s who still have fire in their gut and want to continue to contribute. That's inspiring."

Richard easily recounts statistics that demonstrate the efficacy of Missouri public education, flying in the face of recently popular negative themes expressed in the media.

He continued, "Now, a person may ask how that can be true when we are a state that is at the bottom of the list in terms of what we invest in our public school system. It's because we have seasoned teaching staff, with an average of 23 years of in the classroom, and experienced administrative staff at the building level," he said. "All of that translates to improved student performance."

Richard shares his dedication to public education with his family – all three of his children and one of his grandchildren are teachers.

"One of the things I told my kids when they were going into teaching was, this is a way to provide value to your life. One of the greatest rewards in this life is giving to others and helping others. There is no better way to accentuate that feeling than through public schools."

He also understands the important economic impact of public schools, and how the experience they provide helps inspire students to excel and use their talents to contribute to society. "Public education is the biggest economic engine we have in this country. Public



Education runs in the Phillips family!

schools train and teach the people who work on our streets, our healthcare professionals, and our political and community leaders," he said.

While he hasn't been an MRTA member for a long time, Richard is very dedicated and is in it for the long-term. His support is unwavering. "In everything I've ever done, I just want to be of help. I look at how far we've come as an organization in the last 10 months, and I look ahead to where we will be a year from now, or two years from now ... things are looking very positive, and that is exciting."

Turning a Passion for People into a Way of Life

Georgia White, Region 7 Vice President



Georgia White has been highly motivated since she was a child, and a self-professed "people person."

Starting at an early age, Georgia's parents inspired and taught her the rewards of giving back to others. Her desire to help others led her to a career in speech/language pathology, and a teaching certification that allowed her to use her knowledge and talents to help Missouri school children.

Her desire to help others learn and grow burns as brightly today, as ever. "Teachers never quit teaching," she said. "I find myself at ballgames teaching a child to do something or helping one of them with their homework."

Her favorite part of being an educator is the relationships she formed through teaching. "The statement by John Maxwell, 'People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care' is so true," she said. "You have to prove yourself worthy to be a leader, teacher, motivator ... and you have to show them every single day that you care for them." She reflected, "I loved my days (as an educator) because I loved my students and my co-workers.

Many of them have become lifelong friends."

She has the same affection for her fellow MRTA members. "I care about them, and have developed so many friends in this organization," she said, and added, "It might be too simplistic to some, but I love people. I love to be around them, watch them, talk to them, but I love to listen to them, as well."

As a retiree, her work with MRTA is a logical continuation of her desire to help others, and she acknowledges the positive impact it has had on her, both personally and professionally. "MRTA has become a great part of my life," she said. "I have met some of the most amazing people I could ever have the pleasure of meeting. They've lifted me up with cards, phone calls, or visits when I have been ill. They boost me with their spirit and give me the energy to do better. They are true leaders."

MRTA has also had a profound impact on her professional life. "I've learned, grown, and expanded my base of knowledge, particularly of our retirement system." She added, "We do have fun. We laugh a lot! But we know when to get down to business, as well."

"Georgia has a positive energy that infectious to all that meet

her," said MRTA Executive Director Maria Walden. "She sincerely cares about others and she shows it by making a difference through her contributions to MRTA and her community. We are fortunate that she is part our leadership team. I am so thankful for her guidance and dedication to the educators in Missouri."

"I will always be grateful and thankful for MRTA, and the ability to serve the people of Region 7. Service is in my blood, and I will continue to serve until I am not able to do so anymore," she said. Her commitment to the organization is so strong, she is already planning to ensure the knowledge and experience she brings can continue to benefit

MRTA members, even after her leadership days have ended.



"Because of my age, I am beginning to consider mentoring a dynamic but caring person to take over my position in the future," she said. "Though I truly and thoroughly enjoy what I do and believe that I continue to give the region the good representation that these fine people deserve, I feel that at some time I won't be at the top of my game, and I want someone ready to take over and continue the great work of Region 7."

Georgia has a soft spot for today's public school teachers, and she

is cognizant of the special set of challenges they have faced during the past few years. "I will take every opportunity I can to get into schools and tell (today's teachers) what a wonderful job they do," she said. She draws on past personal experience to help provide them with encouragement.

"My best advice was always my motto ... 'bloom where you're planted.' There were times when it was hard for me to bloom at all, or 'keep the faith.' But, when things got really bad, I could always find a really positive thing

... a fourth grader made a perfect /r/ sound, or a language student who was able to make a beautiful sentence with synonyms."

Her message for today's educators: "Please stay in the public schools. The acrimonious times will change, and our boys and girls need you right where you are. Even if some people might not be too kind, you are a gem, a one-of-a-kind person, and just the

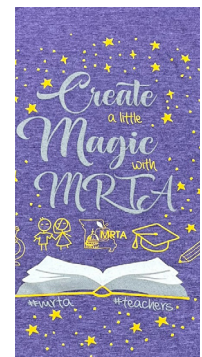


person some child really needs."

She adds, "And besides, you'll look up one day, and retirement will have been so worth it all."

Support teachers and MRTA!

Teaching is heart work!



MRTA women's and men's t-shirts (crew and v-neck)
on sale - \$20.00 - (\$5.99 shipping)

MRTA women's/men's polos - \$28.00 - (\$5.99 shipping)

To order - call MRTA at 877-366-6782 or 573-634-4300.

A decorative border surrounds the text, featuring a variety of autumn leaves in shades of yellow, orange, and red. At the bottom, there are illustrations of pumpkins, including a large central one and several smaller ones on the sides.

FROM THE DESK OF MRTA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Maria Walden

During this season of Thanksgiving I have been reflecting on the things I am most grateful for this past year (almost 9 1/2 months at Missouri Retired Teachers Association). Primarily among them is our talented group of employees. Thank you for the work you do to make MRTA great. Without your commitment, creativity, and high standards, we would not be the thriving association we are.

I am so extremely thankful to our Board of Directors, who have gone through a lot of change this past year and been phenomenally steadfast with all of the changes. They are passionate about our teachers, schools, communities and our members of MRTA. They understand the importance of our pension systems to our members especially those that are limited on any additional cost of living adjustments. Thank you for your dedication to the education profession.

Thank you to our leadership, committee members, unit presidents, leaders and members who are so amazing. You volunteered over 680,000 hours this past year, donated over \$953,228 dollars and over 51,000 food items for those that are in need for Show-Me Hunger. I love meeting our members and hearing about their careers prior to retirement and their giving after retirement. Thank you for constantly amazing me with your passion to our communities. Thank you for your hard work day in and out to serve our children in Missouri. Thank you for your generosity to the Foundation.

Please remind new, current and long-time members of our pension thanksgivings this year. Encourage them to show their thankfulness for our retirement system and profession by joining/ renewing their membership with MRTA.

I wish you a Happy Thanksgiving filled with an abundance of bright moments with your family and friends.

Missouri Retired Teachers Association

The ABC's of MRTA



MRTA is the best insurance to protect your largest asset!

Missouri Retired Teachers Association and Public School Personnel Membership Form

- ☐ Annual MRTA Membership.....\$44/1 Year OR \$117/3 Years
or join via auto renewal at MRTA.org for \$39/year
- ☐ Associate Membership.....\$25
(Anyone who is not currently drawing a public school retirement benefit.)
- ☐ New Membership ☐ Retired Teachers/Administrators
- ☐ Renewal of Membership ☐ Retired Support Staff ☐ I AM INTERESTED IN AUTOMATIC ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES RENEWAL
(Association dues are not tax deductible) Save \$5 a year

Name _____ Birth Date _____

Street, City, State, Zip _____

Email Address _____ Phone (____) _____

School District Retired From _____ Local MRTA Unit (if known) _____

Make check payable to: **MRTA**
3030 DuPont Circle
Jefferson City, MO 65109

Pay by Credit/Debit Card: ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ Discover

Card Number _____

Name on Card _____ Exp. Date _____

You may join MRTA
securely online at
www.mrta.org
or call the office at
1-877-366-6782

MRTA Strategic Planning

Retired teachers, educational professionals, administrators and public school personnel gave so much during their careers to our public schools, school children, and local communities. They deserve to retire with dignity, financial security, and retirement stability. Missouri Retired Teachers Association is an association representing nearly 30,000 retired educators whose purpose is to promote the professional, social, and economic welfare of all retired school employees. Teaching is one of the few professions that truly shapes the future of every child. As former educators, our members understand how important it is to support our state's public education system.

In September, we announced MRTA has started working with the Chad Carden Group to create a strategic plan. Our goal is to continue our strong advocacy for public education pension systems and expand our mission to include improving the overall perception of public education in the state of Missouri. At the same time, we asked for input via a survey which was used to help us assess member satisfaction and engagement while gathering valuable input for future planning.

Survey Results

The 18-question survey garnered nearly 2,500 responses. Overall, those who responded are overwhelmingly satisfied with the current state of the association. Nearly all respondents feel the

mission and vision are aligned with MRTA's purpose. Most feel MRTA should advocate for active teachers, administrators and educational personnel.

When asked how satisfied members are with their membership over 95% say they are either satisfied or very satisfied. Almost 57% of MRTA members who completed the survey indicate they rarely or never participate in MRTA activities. Based on open ended responses provided, participants gave a wide range of reasons for not participating. Some of the reasons given were that they've moved out of state, they have other obligations/are enjoying retirement and they don't know about all the activities. Of the activities listed on the survey, legislative day and unit meetings were the top two favorite activities for members while the golf tournament and regional meetings were the least favorite activities.

Regarding communication efforts, 95% of respondents are satisfied or very satisfied with the MRTA newsletter, email and other communication efforts. Members are also very satisfied with the frequency of MRTA communication. Nearly 90% responded they are satisfied or very satisfied with the MRTA website and 96% feel the site is easy to navigate. When talking about MRTA's social media presence, 77% of respondents are satisfied or very satisfied.



Strategic Planning Task Force

The next phase of our strategic plan included meeting with MRTA members and leaders to discuss the survey results and create guidelines for MRTA's work in the future. Members of the task force met on September 15th and 16th. Those present were, Martha Schatz, MRTA President; Maureen Hacker, MRTA President Elect; Gale "Hap" Hairston, MRTA Vice President; Nancy Craig, MRTA Past President; Karen Miller, MRTF President; Richard Phillips, MRTA Retirement Education Chair; Randy McClain, MRTA Legislative Chair; Georgia White, MRTA Region 7 Vice President; Dr. Dave Baker, MRTA Region 8 Vice President; Shelly Jokerst, MRTA Region 12 Membership Chair; Wanda Hartsock, Kirksville MRTA Unit President; Stan Johnson, MRTA Member; Maria Walden, MRTA Executive Director; MRTA Staff and Chad Carden Group representatives.

Next Steps

A report from this week's meeting will be available soon. We are very excited for the future and thankful for all of our members, especially those who responded to the survey and a special thanks to those who have been volunteering their time and expertise to this project.