

THE CONDUIT

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December, 2023



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Calendar

December

12—Executive Board Mtg.
10am. at AEA

January

8—Opening Day at
AZ Legislature

17—AEA-R Day at the Capitol

9—Exec. Board Mtg. at AEA

February

6—AEA-R Day at the Capitol

13—Exec. Board Mtg. at AEA

March

Date TBD—AEA Day at the
Capitol

12—Exec. Board Mtg. at AEA

Check the last page for updates of
your Chapter meetings.

A Call to Leadership

AEA Retired Annual Meeting, Elections and AEA Delegate Assembly



AEA and AEA Retired are proud to introduce the new location for the AEA Retired Annual Meeting and the 2024 AEA Delegate Assembly. We are excited about the new venue, the Renaissance Hotel, in downtown Phoenix, and want to invite you to participate. Nominate yourself to be a **delegate** or **candidate for board position** (Vice-President and six At-Large Representatives are open) or attend as a **guest**. We hope you participate in a combination of those roles. You do not need to be a delegate or candidate for office to attend the meetings, however, only delegates can vote on business items and candidates presented during the business meetings. This [link is for nominations](#) only and must be completed on or before the deadline of **February 22, 2024 by 5:00pm**. Continue to [page 7](#) to find more about nominations and the link to the nomination form.

Delegate and guest registration occurs later, to be announced via The Conduit and e-mail. All registration and pertinent details will be available in the March issue of The Conduit, and also electronically by email to all members early in 2024.

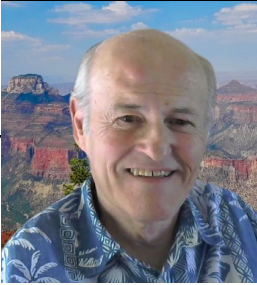
This is your call to LEADERSHIP! We encourage you to [nominate yourself](#) and consider taking on a role on the Executive Board. It is one of our goals to increase nominations from both rural and urban areas. Representation from diverse groups is important to reflect AEA Retired membership.

The 36th AEA Retired Annual Meeting, Friday, May 10, 2024, from 9:30am to 4:00pm is also a celebratory event to honor, reconnect and engage with retired colleagues as well as become familiar with the business and operations of the association. The meeting will be replete with fantastic speakers, informative resources, legislative updates, awards, door prizes and a delicious plated lunch.

The AEA Delegate Assembly, Friday, May 10th from 6:00pm to 9:30pm, continues Saturday, May 11, 9:30am to 5:30pm or end of association business. More details from AEA will follow.

Continued [on page 7](#)

ASRS UPDATE BY STEVE RAMOS



Pension land investment entangled in media debate and Arizona ground water politics

Years ago, Arizona passed the Groundwater Management Act of 1980. The act regulated groundwater use in the most populated areas of the state, but intentionally left sparsely populated rural regions uncovered by the law. The law reflected Arizona's political landscape, pitting government regulation against freedom and property rights.

In 1986, the City of Phoenix bought 20 square miles of land in the newly created La Paz County, as a backup for its own municipal water supply. Other cities did the same, but Phoenix never used their banked water. Then, in 1991, the Arizona legislature outlawed the transfer of groundwater from rural lands to more populated areas, except for a few areas in La Paz County. This made the Phoenix farm property a very valuable asset.

The Arizona State Retirement System (ASRS) became involved in 2012, when \$175 million in pension funds were invested in International Farming Corp (IFC), a North Carolina company that manages agricultural investments. IFC then used the ASRS funds and investments from others, to form a limited partnership Trust, that bought the La Paz farm property from Phoenix for \$30 million. According to ASRS Director Paul Matson, "The purpose of the investment was to protect against inflation and further diversify the investment portfolio, all while investing in the production of food and feedstock while employing Arizonans."



In 2013 IFC, through the Trust, leased the land to Al Dahra Farms, based in the United Arab Emirates. They began pumping water, growing alfalfa, and shipping the harvest to countries in the Middle East. Director Matson said ASRS "did not know that a future tenant would be a non-U.S. entity."

Recently, some confusion has occurred, as the news media and elected officials have expressed great concern about two different foreign owned farms in La Paz County. Both farms are using large amounts of precious Arizona groundwater, growing crops and shipping their harvests to countries in the Middle East. One farm is owned by Fondomonte LLC, a Saudi Arabian company, that leases Arizona State Trust Land, land historically set aside to help fund public schools, for only \$25 an acre, with the right to pump unlimited amounts of groundwater at no extra cost. Fondomonte has no connection to the ASRS pension. The other property is the Al Dahra Farms parcel. It is located on private land and has been part of the ASRS investment

portfolio for the last 10 years.

At the time of this writing, ASRS Director Paul Matson reports that the Al Dahra investment is in a "wind-down phase," with ASRS holding about \$69.9 million, and ASRS plans are to zero out that account over the next year or so. Matson said, the decision has nothing to do with any pressure being exerted by elected officials or the media. He said efforts have been underway for years to find a buyer for the land and get the pension fund out. As recently as 2020 the former Phoenix property was valued, for sale, at \$100 million

Sources: Arizona Department of Water Resources, Howard Fischer Capitol Media Services, Daily Independent

Landowners and Their Water Sources

By the Conduit Editors

Several factors combine to impact the dwindling water supply in Arizona include a long-term drought, which began in 1994; declining snowfall in mountain areas feeding the Colorado, Salt and Verde Rivers; increasing population; increasing use of ground water by corporations and agriculture. Domestic users account for about 2% of ground water consumed.

The population of Arizona has been steadily increasing (from 756,000 in 1950 to 7,450,000 this year). This increase is obviously followed by an increase in the number of single-family homes, approximately 1,414,000 in 2023. The largest portion of water consumed in homes, which comes from surface sources, is for outdoor uses, lawns, landscaping and pools, for example. However, the number of homes with lawns is declining. Some homeowners have chosen to eliminate their lawns in part or entirely and cities are enacting policies which ban front lawns in new developments. Approximately 30% of these homes have a swimming pool.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

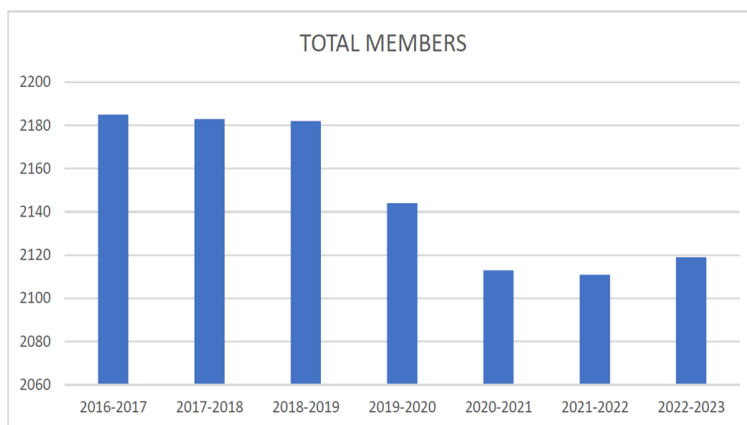
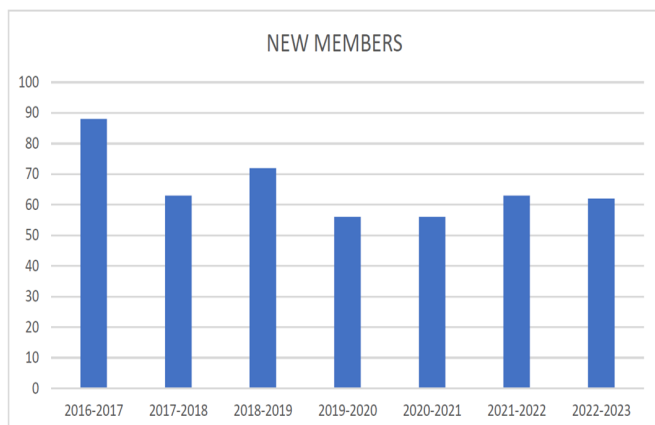
BY ANNA CICERO



“All Hands on Deck!” Bring in New Members in 2024!

We opened the first and second board meeting doing the business of the association as well as creating a mindset with our theme. “All Hands on Deck” refers to the importance of us as leaders engaging in what drives our association forward. All members are invited to “sail” with us! The AEA-Retired Executive Board welcomed the new fiscal year 2023-2024 with a new wave of excitement. Your leaders have put action plans in motion and we invite you to ride the “wave” of change with us. Engagement and more new members is what we seek. We are stronger together and your participation in this wave will make the difference needed in protecting our pensions, and amplifying the work and needs of all educators and their students. We ask you to research and know the candidates in the districts that support our goals and action plans as we prepare for 2024 Elections.

Increased Membership is a must. The budget drives the association goals. I have spoken before about members being our “lifeblood.” Take a moment to think of someone you could invite to belong to AEA Retired. Bring them to a chapter meeting to lend support to chapter action plans thereby increasing membership. Please study the membership data which indicates where we were before Covid and how we are again trending upwards. This is the current reality of AEA Retired.



We need your help to continue the increase in membership. **“All hands on deck!”**

Engagement means “YOUR Hands on Deck!” Here are three easy ways to help.

- **Share the AEA Retired’s website:** www.azedretired.com Share it with someone. Share The Conduit. Tell them what we are all about.
- **Chapter Attendance:** Join your colleagues and bring a prospective member with you. Attend in-person meetings or join by Zoom. We can connect even if you cannot leave home or attend a chapter close to you.
- **Save the date for all engagements:** Wednesday, December 6th is the date for our Annual Advocacy/Lobbying Training to be held at AEA headquarters, 345 E. Palm Lane, Phoenix, from 10am to 2pm. Register at <https://forms.gle/xgz8GWsGK1Hm2kNP9>. Join us with a friend to prepare for the upcoming 2024 legislative session. More dates and engagement opportunities in January and February will be announced then.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE BY LUCI MESSING



And so it begins. . .again

Opening day for the 2024 legislative session is Monday, January 8th. That means it's time to start warming up your fingers for the work ahead. There will be postcards to write, emails to send, phone calls to make and more. We are extending an invitation to our members to join us on January 8th. AEA-Retired had a great presence last year. Be there and be counted as a supporter of public education and protector of our pensions. An announcement and link to register for Opening Day will be shared soon via e-mail.

In preparation for the upcoming session, we had our annual Advocacy/Lobbying training on **December 6th**. We were joined by Representatives Judy Schwiebert and Seth Blattman. They shared relevant information on what to expect come January and beyond. Ellie Perez-Pawloski, AEA Retired Liaison, also provided an informative presentation of what lies ahead. Thank you to all the committee members who assisted with this event. Once again, we are asking for all retired members to send a postcard or handwritten letter to your representatives. (Find your legislator at www.azleg.gov) Do this today. It's easy as 1, 2, 3!

1. Introduce/reintroduce yourself as a constituent and AEA-Retired member.
2. State support for public education or your message
3. Sign, address, stamp, mail. If postcards are needed email me at lucibmessing@cox.net

It sounds repetitious, but unfortunately it is going to be another contentious year in the legislature. We must remember Governor Hobbs vetoed 143 bills. We are sure to see the same or similar bills introduced this session. This is why it is very important to begin engaging with our representatives now and continue to do so throughout the session.

We will be actively involved in the discussions and strategies to address the failure of the voucher expansion. The out-of-control voucher system is at least \$300 million over budget, not including the predicted \$400 million budget shortfall because of Governor Ducey's flat tax. We cannot let the legislative majority attempt to cut the public education budget due to the debacle they created. Arizona is already 48th in the country when it comes to funding our public schools. The gap in teacher pay is one of the worst in the nation. We want legislators to know we oppose universal vouchers. There needs to be a cap on or limiting of vouchers to the wealthy or those who never attended public school. The degree of fraudulent, inappropriate and unacceptable purchases must be addressed.

Mark Your Calendar!

AEA-Retired days at the Capitol
Wednesday, January 17, 2024 - 9:30am to 2:30pm
Tuesday, February 6, 2024 - 9:30am to 2:30pm

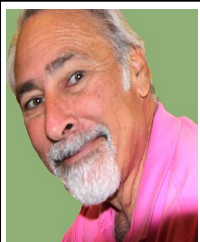
Our days at the Capitol are extremely important. This is our opportunity to speak face to face with representatives and share our concerns. This is when we attend committee hearings and possibly testify. This is when we observe from the gallery and get a first hand look at what happens on the floor of both chambers. We will also make sure that everyone is signed up to use the Request To Speak system. You will receive more information and the details about AEA Retired Capitol days. A reminder that we also participate in the AEA days at the Capitol in March. Dates to be determined.

In addition to the legislature, we will be working on the 2024 Presidential election. The NEA has endorsed Joe Biden for re-election. It's important to remind people of the positive impact that President Biden has had on the average citizen. President Biden was instrumental in the passage of the Build Back Better Bill which provided much needed assistance to families. The Infrastructure Bill allowed for new construction and overdue maintenance on roads and bridges. His executive order offered student loan relief. There is not a better choice than Joe Biden for President.

We wish you all a wonderful holiday season. Enjoy time with family and friends!

"Fight for the things that you care about but do it in a way that will lead others to join you."
Ruth Bader Ginsburg

VEEP TALK BY KEN FREED The Proper Name



I'm afraid! Every time I hear the news, I'm afraid. There are armed conflicts in Europe, Asia, Africa and South America. There is poverty worldwide. Yet, here I sit in the most powerful country in the world, getting ready for the traditional holiday season. How did I get so lucky? I really don't have an intelligent answer.

Yes, I can trace my family history to other parts of the world. After all, I am only a second generation American, my grandparents coming here in the early 20th century. Why was it they chose America? Other family members emigrated to South America, a protectorate in Asia, and I'm sure other places of which I have no knowledge. Yet here I sit thinking about having enough flatware for Thanksgiving and what gifts to get for family for December.

I really need to share the Freed Thanksgiving holiday weekend with you. This is our big holiday of the year. Marilyn explains it as "family, friends, good food and no presents. What could be better?" For us, Thanksgiving starts on Wednesday night. Family and out of town guests congregate at our home to "help" with Thursday's preparations. We bring in food, sit and visit and get tables set for Thursday. This usually means emptying the living room of furniture. Depending on the year, this is 18 to 25 people. On Thursday, we have from 25 to 45 people for dinner, with the stipulation that all of the in town people contribute their specialty to the meal. Finally, Friday, a lunch of leftovers is available. In the Freed household, Thanksgiving is a special weekend. Thank you for permitting me to share our Thanksgiving with my extended AEA-R family.

And now, the ask. Drop me a note about your holiday festivities and what makes them special to you and yours. Could be Thanksgiving, Christmas, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah or any other celebration during this holiday season.

From the Freeds, to our extended AEA-R family, a healthy, happy and safe holiday season and a prayer that we will see peace in the near future.

Membership

by Nancy Putman, Shirley Boswell, Michele Smith

As part of AEA and NEA, AEA Retired works together to ensure that educators like you have a stronger voice. We work with AEA to protect and improve ASRS, health benefits and Social Security. You can stay connected through the nine chapters around the state. (listed on the back page of the Conduit) Your membership provides discounts and savings on many benefits and services. Be sure to visit our website.

Why I joined AEA Retired:

Nancy Putman, Washington District EA. I joined AEA Retired because I wanted to continue to make a difference for quality public education for students in Arizona, especially my grandchildren.

Shirley Boswell, Marana EA. I joined the union because my family members in Michigan were members of their local and to unite with other educators who fought for pay raises, 30-minute duty free lunches and the right to file a grievance when needed and to join a larger unified group of NEA, AEA and Marana EA.

Barbara Matteson, Tucson EA, NEA Retired Past President. I joined AEA Retired because I wanted to work with the group that supports public education and protects my pension, my Social Security and my Health Care.

Michele Smith, Kyrene EA. I joined NEA Life three years before I retired. I wanted to continue to advocate for Arizona's students with other AEA members by lobbying for public schools at the state legislature.

Suzan Austin, Phoenix Union. My reason for joining AEA Retired was to continue supporting public education the way I have since belonging to NEA, AEA and Phoenix Union.

Sharin Manes, Fountain Hills. I joined AEA Retired to help assure a quality public education for my grandchildren and generations to come.

Ken Freed, Tucson EA. I joined AEA Retired because I wanted to continue my work with the association and for the good of our profession.

Deb Larned, Marana EA. Do what you love and love what you do. As a member of AEA Retired, I am able to continue my Association work. I retired from my position but not my Association.

Together, We are Our Union!

Celebrating ESP members and their work

November 15, 2024, NEA celebrated National Education Support Professionals Day! Events acknowledged the important work ESP members perform that support student learning every day.

No matter where you go in this country, one thing remains constant: the dedication and determination of ESPs who go above and beyond to ensure the safety, health, and functionality of our schools.

Education Support Professionals (ESPs), also known as school support staff, strengthen our schools, communities, and associations across the country. They play a vital role on the education team and in students' lives inside and outside the classroom. They keep our schools running and our students safe, healthy, and ready to learn every day. Source [NEA website](#)



Racial and Social Justice Committee

By Janice Dwosh



Our AEA Retired leaders have been busy learning as well as teaching others about racial/social justice issues the past few months. One of our new executive board members, Cynthia Hale, spent time during the October meeting sharing her knowledge of Dual Language programs. Cynthia asked, "Why should we want Dual Language in public schools?" Her answer, "Because the teaching of high-level

content subjects by teachers working in teams, utilizing an integrated curriculum with challenging topics covered in depth, and comprehensible strategies is a Dual Language Program (DLP)!" An example of a successful inner-city DLP was presented through two impressive teachers; one taught math and fractals in English, the other Math and Algebra I in Spanish. An integrated unit on the "The Great Depression" demonstrated the power of a DLP approach using effective English/Spanish instructional teams. As Ms. Hale said, "In 36 years as an educator, this was the best, most exciting school I've served!" Our board members and other leaders were impressed with the knowledge and expertise that Cynthia showed us with this presentation.

Earlier in September, Janice Dwosh, RSJ Chairperson, presented a survey to the AEA Retired board. This survey looked at the impact of including diverse books in public schools and the negative impact of book bans. The results of the survey indicate that our retired leaders are aware of the need for culturally diverse children's literature in classrooms and libraries, and the necessity to stop book bans in all our schools and public libraries. Some of the ways our members can assist in this work include; one on one conversations with others, working with local active education associations, attending school board meetings, running for office and voting for pro-education candidates. In addition to this survey, she presented information about this topic to the PV/Scottsdale chapter of AEA Retired at their October lunch meeting. She read aloud Jacqueline Woodson book *The Day We Learned to Fly*, an amazing, illustrated children's book, which has been banned in some schools. Using diverse children's literature as a starting point for important discussions is another way to keep the dialogue open.

Finally, we ask you to assist us with your ideas and voices in this important work to support racial and social justice as a member of our RSJ committee or join our RSJ book club. The book discussion group meets every 4-6 weeks on Zoom and discusses a wide variety of diverse RSJ fiction and non-fiction literature. This committee meets every few months either in person at AEA-HQ or by Zoom. Please contact Janice at jdwosh27@gmail.com if you are interested in joining our book group or RSJ Committee

When I was young, I was poor.
But after years of hard work,
I am no longer young.



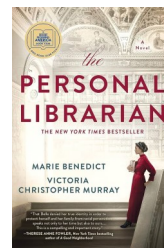
Book Corner

By Ann Myers

Author Louise Erdrich in her book, *The Night Watchman*, took an important but little-known historical fact and spun a yarn that draws you in and ties a knot around your heart. In 1953, Congress was debating whether to end all treaties with Native Americans and terminate their tribal status. Thomas, a member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, believed that this policy would eventually take their land. No land meant no home, meant no identity.

At the same time, Thomas is fighting for his tribe, his niece, Pixie, is searching for her older sister, Vera. The family has had dreams that she is alive, but in need of help. Pixie follows a lead to Minneapolis and in her naïveté, gets a job as a mermaid in a bar previously known as the Mermaid Palace. Dressed in a glittery tail, she holds her breath in the water tank to do flirty tricks. This scene had red flags of disaster flying off every page, but Pixie swims her way out of trouble while I'm laughing out loud.

Erdrich is at her best in *The Night Watchman* with humor, quirky characters, odd situations, and always the ghost. While you're enjoying her storytelling, she's also giving a lesson in the power of community, culture, and family. This book deservedly won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2021.



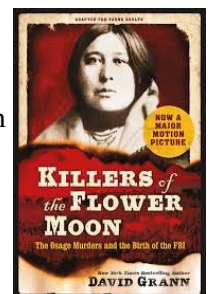
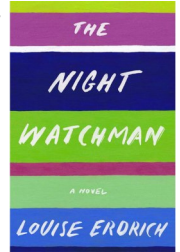
Marie Benedict writes fictionalized narratives of unknown or forgotten women who were eclipsed by men. *The Personal Librarian* is the story of Belle da Costa Greene, who was personally chosen by J.P. Morgan in 1905 as the librarian and later, director of his new Pierpont Morgan Library. She held that position until 1950 despite being a woman, and unknown at the time, a Black woman. She was born Belle Greener to Black parents. Her father was Richard Greener, a civil rights worker, and scholar who was Harvard's first Black graduate.

Belle was talented and well educated but she was also a Black woman in the American early 20th century. To follow her dream meant passing for White, denying her family, sacrificing a home life of her own, and changing her name to the more ambiguous da Costa Greene.

We are also treated to the story of the Pierpont Morgan Library. The funding of J. P. Morgan together with Belle's vision and tenacity built the impressive world-class art museum it is today, yet her name has been lost to most of us.

About a year ago, our book group read *Killers of the Flower Moon*. This year we took a field trip to see the movie. The book, of course, has lots more detail and subplots, but Scorsese did a great job of bringing this story to life.

Do you like to read? Are you interested in racial and social equity? Scramble those ideas together and you'd be a perfect fit in our book group. Our next book discussion will feature *Snow Falling on Cedars* by David Guterson. Call or text Ann Myers, 480-510-8098, for details.



[Continued from page one](#)

[Click here to nominate yourself for any position.](#) If you have trouble with the link, enter https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/AEARetired_2024Nominations in your browser window.

If you have any questions or wish to nominate yourself and do not have the technology, contact Anna Cicero at cicero.anna.1013@gmail.com or by phone (480) 600-1170

The AEA Retired Constitution and Bylaws provide these descriptions of the duties of Vice-President and At-Large Representative and Delegates:

Vice President: The Vice President shall:

- A. Assume all duties of the president in his/her absence and work closely with one or more standing committees as the president may suggest (specific revisions by 2025)
- B. Become president whenever the presidency becomes vacant as provided for in Article V, Section 4, of the Constitution.

At-Large Representative: The Representatives-At-Large shall:

- A. Attend at least 70% of Executive Board meetings.
- B. Be available to Chair at least one Standing or Ad Hoc Committee
- C. Assist with member recruitment and program development/delivery
- D. Assist the Annual Meetings Committee in planning and implementing the Annual Meeting

Delegates: *Approximately 85 delegate positions are open for AEA Retired Local.* Election is done prior to the Annual Meeting. However, if the number of nominations is less than the number of positions to be filled, no election is necessary. An AEA Delegate’s commitment is to attend *both days, May 10 and 11, 2024*, to vote on all related business items on the agenda presented to the AEA delegation. Delegates will be able to speak to the business items that are presented for voting or discussion. Delegates will also vote for leadership candidates at both the Annual Meeting and the AEA Delegate Assembly.

It is **required** that delegates commit to being present for the full two day agenda for the Annual Meeting and AEA Delegate Assembly, May 10-11.

Presentation of the **Les Reynolds Distinguished Senior Service Award** will take place at the AEA Retired Annual Meeting on March 11, 2024. Named after the first President of AEA Retired, it is a prestigious award given annually to an AEA Retired member who has provided outstanding service to AEA Retired and the community. The 2023 award winner was Steve Linder, our Treasurer, who is doing a fantastic job for the association. To nominate a colleague deserving of this award, complete the nomination form on [page 11](#).



Tucson Chapter Meeting



East Valley Chapter

2023-24 Executive Board



Amazing Retiree Danny Barlow

The Navajo Reservation in the Northeast corner of Arizona is a stunningly beautiful and isolated place. One of the towns, close to the New Mexico border, with a little over two thousand citizens, is Ganado. Danny Barlow, this edition's Amazing Retiree, taught and contributed to this community for three years, and then moved to Chinle, another town close by, with a population of 4,518. He spent many years teaching middle school there and eventually retired from the Chinle district.

A native of West Virginia, his family made its way to California early in his life. There he thrived while his father proudly worked as the caretaker of an estate near Van Nuys, California. His father instilled in him the value of hard work, union values and the beauty of diverse cultures.

Danny began his college education at Los Angeles Valley Jr. College, where he met Sylvia, his future wife. While in college, he worked on a golf course and because he worked side by side with Mexicans, soon became fluent in Spanish. He finished his degree at Cal State University, Northridge.

After graduating, he migrated to Arizona, teaching at Phoenix Indian School as a full-time sub, eventually becoming a full-time contract teacher.

Sylvia and Danny were married and left Phoenix to teach on the Navajo Reservation in Ganado. At first, life was hard because they could not speak the prevailing language and knew little about the culture. But, in time, he studied and learned both,

As soon as he signed his new contract in Ganado, he joined the AEA. Union activism was in his DNA. He served in leadership positions on the board and represented the Navajo Nation, increasing membership wherever he taught. He retired from Chinle, where he was instrumental in building membership to 250.

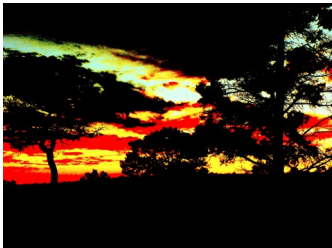
He has been active in lobbying efforts with AEA Retired at the legislature.

After retiring, Danny and Sylvia moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico where they volunteer with Family Promise to provide crisis support to families, especially single mothers with small children. He is also an excellent photographer.



Danny Barlow with former Representative Arlando Teller, Representative Myron Tsosie and members of his family, and Jan Nichols

Grand Canyon Sunset photo-graphed by Danny Barlow



Nihi ka aniiliiied!
Nihaahidoohkah!
(Come join us!)

Changes in Medicare

By Linda Somo, President

Arizona Alliance for Retired Americans



All AEA Retired members are also members of the Arizona Alliance for Retired Americans (AARA), a grassroots advocacy organization with over 49,000 members statewide who are fighting for quality health care and retirement security for all Americans, but especially for seniors. Your membership is paid by AEA Retired

and we are part of 39 state affiliates of the National Alliance for Retired Americans.

As President of AARA, I was honored to participate in a recent press conference on Medicare that also featured Dr. Meena Seshamani, Director of Medicare, United States Health and Human Services. Dr. Seshamani provided valuable information about the annual Medicare enrollment period and the new changes to Medicare provisions that will benefit all retirees. Also joining us were Maricopa County Supervisor Steve Gallardo, and AEA Retired member Marshall Militano, who talked about the amount of out-of-pocket costs of his prescription drugs. (See his essay on pg. 10)

I spoke about the specific improvements that have been provided by the Inflation Reduction Act passed by the Biden Administration, and how they will benefit Arizona retirees. Some of those savings include:

- A \$35 monthly copay cap on insulin
- Free Shingles, RSV, and other expensive essential vaccinations
- \$2000 out-of-pocket caps on prescription drugs beginning in 2025.
- Protections from drug company price hikes that exceed the inflation rate. Over the past 20 years, price increases for brand-name drugs have risen at more than twice the rate of inflation, costing seniors millions.
- Medicare will finally negotiate for lower drug prices. Although drug companies continue to fight this, most have agreed to participate. The first ten drugs to be negotiated account for 20% of every dollar Medicare spends on prescription drugs. Two of these drugs, Xarelto and Eliquis, are used by 96,000 Arizonans with Medicare Part D.

These provisions alone will save seniors millions of dollars yearly, and Medicare billions. The members of the Arizona Alliance are grateful for President Biden for taking on the rich drug corporations and passing the Inflation Reduction Act. The new law is working, and we are looking forward to even more price reductions in the coming years.

Road Trip to Scenic Payson

By Jan Nichols

Right in the geographical center of Arizona is the beautiful town of Payson, known as “The Heart of Arizona,” from Phoenix via the Beeline Highway, it’s a 90-minute trip. Traveling from Flagstaff, via Lake Mary Road, it’s a bit further, approximately 2 hours. Coming from the South, the terrain changes as you climb to 5000 ft: arid desert land to scrub oak and manmade lakes to the largest contiguous Ponderosa Pine Forest in the world. Vistas include the Mogollon rim and panoramic plateaus. The air is clean, and stars are visible at night. Payson was the site of a Northern Lights display in 2001. Gila County hosts nearby towns of Strawberry, Rye, Heber and Show Low. Winter brings skiing, ice skating, and community band concerts. Moderate temperatures in the summer make hiking, horseback riding, boating, fishing, or camping fun.

With a population a little over 16,000, small businesses offer tourists good food, yarns aplenty, and excellent accommodations.



The town is a perfect day trip or stay-awhile vacation. There are plenty of scenic attractions, hiking, fishing, boating, golfing, camping, lodging, cafes, and steak houses. Two events that highlight the year are the Payson Rodeo, the world’s oldest continuous rodeo, held in August, and the Fiddler’s Contest, held in September.



One of my favorite places to sit near the water and read or fish or just enjoy the scenery is Woods Canyon Lake. It’s situated next to Payson where the elevation rises to 7,800 feet. Boat rentals are available. If you need to move around, there are plenty of trails and walking paths. Serenity and relaxation reign.



Author Zane Grey, famous for *Riders of the Purple Sage* and other best-selling novels, built a hunting cabin near Payson in 1921. Grey died in 1939. Then, in 1990, a wildfire completely destroyed it. It was meticulously restored and opened for tours again in 2005. In order to enhance the experience, pick up one of his novels while you’re at it.



Tonto Natural Bridge is the world’s largest natural travertine bridge that you can hike to or view. From the top, visitors can experience four different viewpoints. The bridge spans 150 feet wide and arches 183 feet above Pine Creek and sits above a tunnel. Surrounding the area is a forest of evergreens, the Tonto Natural Bridge State Park. Hiking trails are plentiful and have various degrees of difficulty. All trails are under a half mile; however, some are steep and difficult treading. It’s a magnificent spectacle and camera-ready. Note: Pets are not allowed on any of the trails of the park.



Wildlife of the Payson area include Black Bears, the Hooded Oriole and Grey Wolves, pictured here. Elk and Leopard are also inhabitants of the area.



Real Savings on Medication Coming Soon

By Marshall Militano



I am a Medicare recipient and I spend roughly \$400 per month out of pocket on my prescription drugs which are critical to my health. I am a retired school bus driver living with type 2 diabetes. These medications cost almost half of my retirement pay. I am very happy with my health plan, but, allotting thousands of dollars every year to life saving medications feels burdensome and frankly, unfair.

Fortunately, President Biden recently made a big announcement: Medicare will be able to negotiate lower prices for millions of seniors across the country and the process is starting now. The Biden administration selected the first 10 drugs to see lower prices under the Inflation Reduction Act's Medicare Drug Price Negotiation Program. Under this new program, big drug companies will have to negotiate a lower price for some of the costliest drugs used to treat conditions like cancer, diabetes and heart disease.

This means tremendous savings for nearly 165,000 Arizonans. Unfortunately, I am not yet one of them, but I look forward to the day when my prescriptions are added to that list and the savings will give my wife and me breathing room to pay for other essentials like groceries, gas and housing. This makes a world of a difference for those of us who live on fixed incomes and struggle with rising costs.

As we all know, drug companies have been able to charge seniors whatever they wanted to increase their profits, lining the pockets of wealthy executives and CEOs. On average, Americans pay three to four times more for prescriptions than people in other countries. High drug prices have kept too many Arizonans from the health care they need.

President Biden and Congress delivered on their promise to take on the big drug companies and lower prescription drug prices for seniors. Medicare negotiation could bring down prices by as much as 50 percent, saving seniors and taxpayers billions of dollars. And this is only the beginning: President Biden and Congress are already working to expand these cost savings to more Americans, no matter what age or how they get their health insurance.

The Inflation Reduction Act takes several other important steps to lower drug costs, including limiting insulin co-pays at \$35 per month, making essential vaccines like the shingles shot free, and capping out-of-pocket drug costs at \$2,000 annually beginning in 2025. The law also penalizes drug companies for raising prices faster than the rate of inflation.

Of course, big drug companies are not going down without a fight. After spending hundreds of millions of dollars on lobbying to try to stop Congress from giving Medicare the power to negotiate, some of the biggest drug companies like Merck, Bristol Myers Squibb, and Johnson & Johnson-owned Janssen Pharmaceuticals are going to court to stop Medicare negotiation and hike costs for seniors.

Fortunately, immediate action is being taken to lower drug prices for seniors and groundwork is being laid for everyone to be able to afford medications. For Arizonans like me, that is real inflation reduction!

A former student's gratitude

By Jan Nichols

I read the obituaries page of the newspaper because people's biographies are fascinating and informative. Sometimes, as a native Arizonan, I knew the person. Each one enhances the history of our state.

The Obituaries in the Sunday, October 29th Arizona Republic were replete with fascinating biographies of accomplished people. One piqued my interest. The article detailed the life of a pillar of the Bisbee community in Southern Arizona, Tassie Ladas, who lived 97 years. A native Arizonan, she pursued various professional avenues, including the Secret Service. Throughout this tribute, her wisdom, intelligence, generosity and many contributions were described.

Then, something caught my attention. A paragraph was devoted to explaining gratitude and admiration for Tassie being taught by the first-grade teacher, Miss Addie Wittig, Larry Wittig's aunt and first grade teacher. Larry is an active AEA Retired Member.

Miss Wittig became a major influence in Bisbee by teaching generations of first graders. What an honor to acknowledge a teacher who was respected and admired by so many.



Teachers do make a difference!

Send your email address to

julie.horwin@gmail.com

Win \$100



If we already have your e-mail address, you are entered in the \$100 AEA-Retired Raffle.

Good luck!



The Conduit



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The Les Reynolds Distinguished Senior Service Award

The LES REYNOLDS DISTINGUISHED SENIOR SERVICE AWARD is named for Les Reynolds, the first president of AEA-Retired. The award is presented annually to a member of our association in appreciation for outstanding service to our Association, public education and the community. Previous recipients are Robert Bloom, Bertha Myers, John Campbell, Ralph Lara, Barbara Matteson, Marion Pickens, Mary Bishop, Connie Wittig, Kathy Campbell, Frank Bing, Frank Sacco, Linda Somo, Steve Ramos, Suzan Austin, Luci Messing, Shirley Boswell, Julie Horwin, Ken Freed and Steve Linder.

Please take time to nominate a member you believe meets these criteria. Be specific in completing the form which must be in typewritten format. You may attach additional information. The committee will not consider partially completed forms.

Nomination deadline is March 11, 2024.

LES REYNOLDS DISTINGUISHED SENIOR SERVICE AWARD NOMINATION FORM

Nominee Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (____) _____

Nominator's Name _____

Phone (____) _____

Nominee Information: All information must be in a typewritten format. Attach an additional page, if necessary. There is a two page maximum.

1. Number of years as an AEA Retired member: _____
2. Association positions held at the local, state and national levels:
3. Positions held in other professional and/or social organizations:
4. Community service:
5. List and describe the nominee's involvement in activities that were beneficial to AEA Retired, education and community:
6. Other relevant information:

Please return a completed form to:

**Nancy Putman
AEA Retired
3132 E. Preston St.
Mesa, AZ 85213**

Nomination forms are due by March 11, 2024

AEA Retired, YOUR STATEWIDE LOCAL
Affiliated with Arizona Education Association
345 East Palm Lane
Phoenix, Arizona 85004

AEA Retired Chapter News

Chapters bring AEA-Retired together. This year we expect to meet in person. Some chapters may choose to add a virtual meeting now and then or offer Zoom meetings as well. Each chapter governs itself in order to meet the needs of its members. Meetings usually include information programs and time for socializing with friends and colleagues. This is a great way to keep in touch with the latest issues in our community. Any one interested in forming a new chapter should contact Chapter Coordinator **Susan Sommer**, (623) 628-1935, ssommer114@aol.com.

All AEA Retired members are eligible to join a chapter where they worked or currently live.

When Chapters meet via Zoom, connection is a simple process. All you need to do is click the link you receive from your Chapter Chair via e-mail. We welcome your attendance and participation.

Glendale/West Valley Chapter: This year our meetings are being held in person at 10 am at Biscuit's Café, 19420 N. 59th Ave., Glendale, AZ. We use a private room, enjoy a good brunch and good conversation. Meetings will be on January 18 and March 21. For more information call, text or email **Marshall Militano** at **602-882-3260** or mmilitano1@gmail.com.

Greater Tucson Area Chapter: We are meeting the third Tuesday of the month, August through May. Meetings begin at 10am at the Southern AEA office, 6873 N. Oracle Rd., Tucson, AZ, 85704. Please e-mail Chapter Chair **Peter Coston** at pcoston1@cox.net for Zoom meeting links.

Kyrene Chapter: Welcomes any retired AEA member or Kyrene active to join us for a great Happy Hour at the Hub Grill and Bar, 14205 S. 50th St., Phoenix. Kyrene Board members often join us in our revely and good times. Sometimes we have a special guest or two. Happy Hour tips off at 4:40 on December 1 and January 26 with more scheduled for the spring. Contact Janie Hydrick at hydrick@aol.com.

Mesa/East Valley Chapter: Welcome to any retired AEA member to join us. The Chapter is back on the 8th floor of the Mesa Public School building, 63 E Main St., Mesa. Meetings are from 11:15am to 1pm on January 17, March 20, and May 15. For more information or to be sure you are on the mailing list contact Janie Hydrick at hydrick@aol.com.

Phoenix Chapter: Suzan Austin and Gary Mehok re-initiated this chapter in September. Meeting dates are January 15, March 18 and April 15 from 11am to 1pm at the Beatitudes, 1610 W. Glendale Ave, Phoenix, AZ 85021. Contact **Suzan Austin** at suzanaustin@cox.net or **Gary Mehok** at lojo40@cox.net for more information.

Scottsdale/Paradise Valley Chapter: Until further notice, all meetings will be held on the **third Monday** of each month from 11:00 to 1, September through April (excluding December). If you're not on our mailing list, please contact **Nancy Riley** at **480-600-8559** or rileyfam@cox.net.

Southeast Arizona Chapter: The Southeast Arizona AEA-Retired Chapter is located in Cochise County and is comprised of districts in Sierra Vista, Tombstone, Huachuca City, Naco, Palominas, Elgin, and Ft. Huachuca, and retirees from other states who have moved to Cochise County. Please contact Sally if you would like to be added to the email contact list, our only method of communication. Contact Chapter Chair **Sally Rosén** at **520-249-0233**, azcatsally@aol.com for details.

Interstate/Flagstaff/Northern Arizona/Reservation Chapter (INFARC). Meetings will be held on the third Thursday of the month at 2pm (MST). Meetings will be held on Zoom. Please contact Daniel Barlow at dsjbarlow@yahoo.com. A link will be sent to you to connect to the meetings.

For more about AEA Retired, visit the website at www.azedretired.com.