



THE WATCHDOG REPORT

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

Legislative Edition 2025

A Historic Victory

MRTA's Decades Long Fight for WEP/GPO Repeal Ends in Success!

Missouri Retired Teachers and Public School Personnel Association (MRTA) Applauds Presidential Signing of H.R. 82, Repealing Unfair Penalties on Educators' Retirement Benefits

January 5, 2025 marks a historic moment for Missouri's retired educators and public school employees. At 3:00 p.m., President Joe Biden signed H.R. 82, the Social Security Fairness Act of 2023, into law at the White House. This landmark legislation repeals the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and Government Pension Offset (GPO), ending decades of unfair reductions to Social Security benefits for countless retirees. This monumental step comes after years of advocacy by the Missouri Retired Teachers and Public School Personnel Association (MRTA) and its members.

"We are overjoyed that President Biden has signed H.R. 82 into law," said Maria Walden, Executive Director of MRTA. "This victory represents decades of advocacy and dedication from MRTA members who refused to give up the fight for fairness for teachers, firefighters, police officers and public servants. Today, we celebrate the culmination of those efforts and the brighter future it ensures for Missouri's retired educators."

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What's "Hap"pening with Hap

by Dr. Gale "Hap" Hairston, MRTA President

MRTA 50th Leadership Summit on March 19 & 20 at Stoney Creek Hotel in Columbia, MO – I am looking forward to seeing many of you at our Leadership Summit scheduled for March 19 and 20 at the Stoney Creek in Columbia. MRTA's theme for 2025 is: Honoring the Past; Inspiring the Future.



- Who should attend? The Leadership Summit is open to all MRTA members. Unit leaders & committee members and regional vice-presidents and committee members, and MRTA & MRTA-F board members are strongly encouraged to attend.
- What is on the agenda? The agenda will include a Celebration of the Repeal of WEP/GPO; keynote speakers; small and/or committee work sessions; and panel discussions. Other activities and events will be announced later this month or early February.
- How & When to Register? Registrations are requested on or before March 15, 2025. The Early Bird Registration Fee is \$44. The cost of registration after is \$55. Please register by February 28th to get the Early Bird discount.
- If you have questions and/or topics for the Summit? Please send the questions and/or topics to Hap Hairston (hap.hairston@gmail.com).



The Spirit of Christmas and the First Year Principal - Thanks to everyone who shared their thoughts about my 1st Christmas at Laurence J. Daly Elementary School in Fayette, Missouri. Many of our faculty and staff shared their recollections of Daly Christmases in 1978 and 1979. Willa Moore reminded in early November 1979 that the Christmas Tree would NOT be put up until December. Many others shared memories of Christmases past about trees, music programs, and parents filling the seats in the balcony. Several commented about playing basketball games on the court located on the second floor. I received several messages from loved ones of those mentioned in the article.

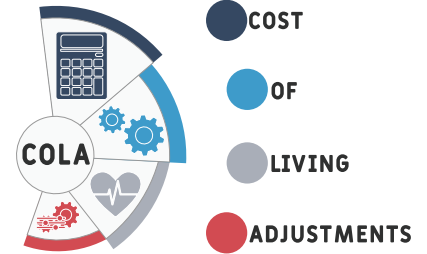
I also learned more about the folklore and ghostly spirits residing in Daly Elementary School. We will share those stories and recollections in the October Newsletter. Stay tuned to learn more about the "White Electric Elephant" and the ghost of Principal Sudie B. Long.

PSRS/PEERS Statements Are Coming To Everyone - January symbolizes a fresh start to the new year and a time to review your personal finances. One of the most important documents comes to you via mail or website from PSRS/PEERS. Let me take a few moments to discuss what you will find in your 2025 Statement.

- PSRS/PEERS Update – This section provides general information about the overall retirement system.
- Positive Impact – PSRS/PEERS benefits each member, community, and Missouri. For example, In Boone County, there are 2,514 PSRS/PEERS members with over \$90 Million in benefits paid as of June 30, 2023.
- Benefit Summary – You will see information about the Cost-of-Living Adjustment. We will be receiving another 2% COLA at the end of this month. Tax deductions for federal and state are also listed along with the amount of your monthly benefit.
- Tax History – More information about the amount deductions is provided. You may want to work with your tax professional about the amounts being withheld.



- **Your PSRS or PEERS History** – Your history is outlined in this section. It starts with your date of retirement, the retirement option you selected, the amount of your first monthly benefit, what you have contributed plus interest, and the total amount of benefits paid. This is what PSRS/PEERS means to you. Each year that you worked, you made contributions to PSRS/PEERS. Your school district matched those contributions. Your benefit includes interest. This is your money and part of your contractual agreement. It is not taxpayers' money!
- **Beneficiary Designation** – Upon retirement, you made decisions about your benefit. This included options about payment, last payment, and beneficiaries to receive your Death Benefit. This is another important section that needs to be reviewed and possibly changed depending upon life's situations. We have had members designate their Death Benefit to MRTA-F. If you choose to do this, it is important to inform your beneficiaries about your decision.
- **COLA History** – The income from PSRS/PEERS investment portfolio has provided COLAs. Information about recent COLA's is outlined.
- **Payment Schedule** – You will find a payment schedule for your benefits.
- **Work After Retirement** – PSRS/PEERS retirees are allowed to work after their initial retirement date. This section outlines the rules and regulations that must be followed.



MRTA is your best investment to protect your largest asset - your pension!

Regional Vice-Presidents Zoom Meeting – Our Regional Vice-Presidents met on January 16. The discussion topics included:

- Celebrating the Repeal of WEP/GPO & Next Steps
- Regional Meetings – Fall Recap & Spring Plans
- Information from the Strategic Task Force – Members & Regions
- Legislative Day – February 11.

If you have a topic to bring to this group, please contact your Regional Vice-President to share your thoughts or contact MRTA Vice-President Georgia White, President Hap Hairston, and/or Executive Director Maria Walden.



Lodging can be reserved by calling 573-442-6400 using code 25MRTA.

*Join us for a
Celebration*

**MRTA 50th Annual
Leadership Summit
March 19-20, 2025
Stoney Creek Hotel
Columbia, MO**

Go to
www.mrta.org
for more or scan
QR code



SCAN ME

Victory Years in the Making: Repeal of WEP and GPO

From the Desk of
Maria Walden
 MRTA Executive Director

Dear MRTA Family,

As we step into a new year, I had planned to write a message full of optimism and anticipation for the year ahead, welcoming 2025 with hope and excitement. But as I reflect on the incredible events that have unfolded in December and the beginning of January, I can think of no better way to start the year than by sharing the historic victory we've achieved together—the repeal of the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and the Government Pension Offset (GPO).

This victory represents years of tireless advocacy, countless stories shared, and the collective strength of more than 30,000 members who refused to give up the fight for fairness for public servants. It's an achievement that will forever change the lives of Missouri's retired educators and public school personnel, and it's the perfect way to ring in the new year.

For as long as I can remember, I've been deeply passionate about supporting educators. Growing up with teachers in the family—my aunts, uncles, and sister-in law—and surrounded by educators who shaped my life, I've always valued the role teachers play inspiring our children and helping our communities. My admiration for retired teachers grew even stronger when I began working with the Public School Retirement System (PSRS) years ago. However, it wasn't until I joined the Missouri Retired Teachers Association (MRTA) that I truly realized the personal toll WEP and GPO had on so many retired educators, particularly those in Missouri.



MRTA Staff meet with Representative Blaine Luetkemeyer regarding WEP/GPO.

When I first started hearing from our members, I was moved by their stories. These weren't just statistics or policy issues—they were real, heartfelt accounts from people whose lives were deeply affected by these unfair provisions. Their experiences made the fight for repeal feel urgent, personal, and deeply meaningful. This battle was about more than just numbers—it was about fairness. It was about ensuring that our Missouri teachers, who have dedicated their lives to educating our children, are treated with the respect and fairness they deserve in retirement, especially when it comes to Social Security.



In years past, MRTA had lobbied Washington, D.C., advocating for change. But in 2023, I realized we needed to do something different. We had to amplify the voices of those affected. Data alone wasn't enough—personal stories, shared by those who had lived the impact of WEP and GPO, were the key to making real progress. I remember calling one of our members before the meeting to ask if I could share her story, and that decision became a turning point. We arrived at our nation's Capitol and met with Congressman Smith and the Ways and Means Committee staffers, we began sharing our members' personal accounts. By focusing on personal narratives, our advocacy efforts became more powerful, more personal, and ultimately more effective.

Year after year, bills to repeal WEP and GPO were introduced in Congress, but it wasn't until this year that it felt different. I felt hope after our meeting. Throughout 2024, MRTA sent over 12 calls-to-

action to our membership asking for and collecting personal impact statements from our members and urging them to contact their elected officials.

In spring of 2024, we started working closely with Representative Terry Thompson about actions Missouri's elected officials could take to help with MRTA's advocacy efforts in the repeal of WEP and GPO. In July, MRTA and Thompson spoke about the possibility of him hand delivering the first round of personal impact statements by our membership. In early September, MRTA staff delivered over 3 binders of letters from our members with their personal impact statements. On September 16, 2024, Representative Thompson delivered almost 2,600 MRTA members' personal impact letters to members of Congress, including House Ways and Means Chair Representative Jason Smith. In late September, MRTA provided every Missouri congressional official a copy of the letters from our members who were personally impacted by WEP and GPO.



MRTA staff (l-r) Sarah Hoeller, Ryan Mankin, and Maria Walden first met with House Ways and Means staff (l-r) Ben Ridder and Shaun Frieman.



MRTA Director Maria Walden delivered 2,600 MRTA member letters to Representative Terry Thompson

When the bill passed the House of Representatives in November 2024, we celebrated this important milestone, but we knew the hard work was far from over.

As the bill moved to the Senate, we continued to rally our members, sending more than 6,000 personal statement letters to senators urging them to support the bill. We watched with bated breath as the Senate voted, and when it finally passed on December 21, 2024, the culmination of years of hard work and dedication washed over us with a wave of excitement and joy.

That night, staff celebrated the victory over Facetime, and we reflected on how far we had come. Our team—Sarah, Paige, Morgan, Ryan, and so many others—had worked tirelessly, and this victory was a testament to the power of persistence, passion, and collaboration. We still needed to make sure that the President signed the bill. So another call-to-action was sent to contact the President.

On January 5, 2025, President Biden signed H.R. 82, the Social Security Fairness Act of 2023, into law, officially repealing the Windfall Elimination Provision and Government Pension Offset. This was a historic moment for Missouri's retired educators, one that marked the end of decades of unfair reductions to Social Security benefits. The fight for fairness had finally been won.

This repeal wasn't just about ending unfair penalties on Social Security—it was about treating our educators and public servants with the fairness they deserve in retirement. After a lifetime of service to our communities, our teachers, police officers, firefighters, and other public servants should not face financial penalties simply because they worked in both public service and Social Security-covered employment. This is a victory for fairness, for equity, and for justice for all educators who have dedicated their lives to the betterment of our children.

This victory was made possible by you—our members. Over 30,000 voices, coming together to share personal stories, write letters, meet with lawmakers, and take action. This was the

Continued on next page.



Representative Thompson delivered MRTA's binders of letters to Representative Jason Smith.

power of grassroots advocacy at its finest. It's a powerful reminder that when we stand united, we can achieve remarkable things. We've been advocating for the repeal of WEP/GPO for decades, and now, after years of tireless work, we have seen the results of our collective efforts.

But even as we celebrate this victory, our work is far from over. We will continue to monitor the implementation of this legislation to ensure that the repeal is fully realized. We will continue advocating for the rights and benefits of retired educators and public school personnel in Missouri to make sure our pension is protected.

I want to take a moment to thank every single one of you for your dedication to this cause. This victory would not have been possible without your unwavering support. Whether you wrote letters, shared your personal story, shared our posts or supported our efforts in any way, you were an essential part of this achievement. Together, we have shown that collective, grassroots action works.

As I reflect on this journey, I think about the lessons I hope to pass on to my children —about the importance of persistence, passion, and teamwork in making real change. I want them to understand that fighting the good fight matters, and that standing up for what's right is crucial. The work we've done to repeal WEP and GPO will have a lasting impact, not only for our generation of educators but for the generations to come.

As we celebrate today, we must remember that the fight for fairness is ongoing. Social Security is facing significant challenges. We will continue to advocate fairness for our retirees. Together, we've achieved something truly remarkable. Let's continue to stand united, honoring the past and inspiring the future for Missouri's educators. There is strength in numbers, and when we show up, we make a difference.

Thank you for your dedication, your passion, and your commitment to the cause. Together, we've shown that sometimes the good guys do win.

- Maria



We did it!

Fairness for all is here!
WEP/GPO is REPEALED!

MRTA

Find out more from MRTA!

MRTA - The best investment to protect your largest asset in retirement - your pension! Join today!
www.mrta.org - 573-634-4300

A New Year A New Beginning
From the Desk of MRTA Membership Chair
Idella Warden



As we begin a new year, MRTA members need to be reminded that our state has a huge group of new retirees who are beginning their FIRST full year out of the classroom, school building, and school bus! We must not forget that MRTA is an organization for all education retirees including cooks, custodians, secretaries, nurses, paras, bus drivers and all other public school staff along with certificated teachers! All these new retirees need to know that MRTA is protecting their pensions so they need to become a member!

These new retirees will now need health insurance that is not board paid. MRTA through AMBA offers all sorts of insurance plans. New retirees need a means to keep informed of political actions which will impact their pension pay-outs. MRTA keeps members aware of state and federal legislative maneuvering which affects public schools and its employees. New retirees may not be interested in attending meetings, but they can join MRTA whose influence is strengthened by numbers of members! And sadly, many of these new retirees have NO idea what MRTA does for their benefit. We must all help educate them about the goals and achievements of MRTA!

So how do we reach these folks? Every spring, local membership chairs collect names of the new retirees from each school district. Local membership chairs have contact information for MANY new retirees who were not given a paid membership as a retirement gift by their board. These new retirees plus new members need to be contacted and urged to join MRTA or renew their memberships when the board paid membership expires. The staff in Jeff City can send out cards and emails, but they cannot possibly write a personal message to each new retiree.

So, divide these names among your unit members and have each member contact a new retiree or two with a phone call, email, text, or note. Don't forget that, EVERY MEMBER OF MRTA IS PART OF THE MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE! So let's get the new retirees off to a great new beginning of their retirement by convincing them they need to be part of MRTA! Happy 2025 to all!



There is STRENGTH in Numbers!

From the Desk of MRTA Legislative Chair

Randy McClain

The 103rd General Assembly began on Wednesday, January 8, 2025. The 2025 State Legislature will have ten new senators which is 29% of that body and fifty-four new state representatives which is 33% of that body.

MRTA is blessed with an AMAZING and AWESOME staff! Executive Director Maria Walden, Assistant Director Sarah Hoeller, Membership Database Coordinator Paige Holtmeyer, MRTA Legislative/Accounting Specialist Ryan Mankin, and MRTA/MRTA-F Administrative Assistant Morgan Rush! They are the BEST!!!

I can't say enough about the AMAZING and AWESOME efforts of Executive Director Maria Walden, Assistant Director Sarah Hoeller, and ALL who shared their personal stories and responded to ALL the MRTA Calls to Action and Phone2Action texts regarding the repeal of the WEP/GPO!!! While this effort was forty years in the making, it is rock-solid proof that there is strength in numbers!!!

I am sure you have heard MRTA Executive Director Maria Walden share the importance of Advocacy, Benefits, and Community involvement for MRTA members. What a GREAT difference MRTA made in passing the repeal of WEP/GPO. MRTA makes a powerful difference in legislation impacting Public Education and our PSRS/PEERS pension!

Membership is crucial as NUMBERS offset the "Dark Money Billionaire dollars." Missouri campaign finance law has loopholes that allow mega-donors and corporations to circumvent voter-imposed contribution limits. We can't compete with those billions of dollars, but we CAN compete with NUMBERS!!! To quote MRTA Executive Director Maria Walden, "MRTA membership is the best investment to protect your largest asset in retirement." A growing membership is CRUCIAL not only to our pension protection, but also to the future of public education!!!

MRTA Legislative Day is Tuesday, February 11, 2025

I strongly encourage EVERYONE to PLEASE attend! I would encourage each local unit to be in contact and communicate with their MRTA Region's Legislative Chair regarding transportation such as chartering a bus for that day. That would provide attendees with easy drop-off and pick-up. MRTA staff will have a trolley available to and from the Jefferson City Mall to the Capitol thanks to a generous donation by an MRTA member. This will be very beneficial for those who choose to drive. This will allow much better parking and offer easy drop-off and pick-up at the Capitol. MRTA will share much more information about the details of Legislative Day.



This coming legislative session appears less contentious with new Speaker of the House Jon Patterson in addition to some strong charter and voucher proponents losing reelection bids or being termed out. The Senate gives the impression of being more civil than the past session with some vocal and quarrelsome members gone.

Governor Mike Kehoe spoke at an earlier MRTA President's Summit now called Leadership Summit. He understands the importance of both public education and agriculture to strong communities.

While we are hopeful this legislative session will be different, we know that in the past school choice, charter school expansion, vouchers, open enrollment, the so-called parents' bill of rights, countless unfunded mandates on public schools, and meddling legislation not only in the curriculum but even the school calendar have unfortunately been all too common.

MRTA will continue to advocate

against all these and any harmful legislation. MRTA will strongly advocate for our state legislature to fully fund SB727, especially the Teacher Baseline Salary Grant Fund! Beginning with the 2025-26 school year, this act increased the minimum teacher's salary from \$25,000 to \$40,000.

For teachers with a master's degree and at least ten years of experience, this act increased their minimum salary from \$33,000 to \$46,000 and further increases their salary by \$1,000 each year until the 2027-2028 school year, when the minimum shall be \$48,000.

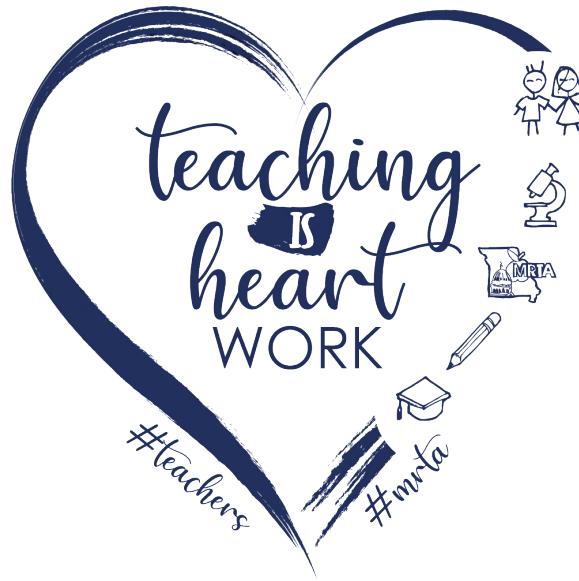
If the state legislature doesn't provide funding for the mandates of SB 727, local school districts will be held responsible for funding those mandates. Local school districts could be forced to appeal for increases in local tax levies, make severe cuts or eliminate programs, eliminate teacher and support staff positions, increase class sizes, and potentially lead to the closing of some smaller school districts.

As an MRTA member, you are already making a difference. You can make a stronger difference by:

- Encouraging EVERY Education Employee to JOIN or RENEW their MRTA Membership!
- Get to know your state representative and state senator and make sure they know you.
- Read all MRTA and Legislative emails that are sent.
- Attend MRTA Legislative

Day held Tuesday, February 11, 2025

- Stay tuned for and ALWAYS respond to Phone2Actions and Call to Actions.
- With MRTA Phone2Action



you can write your legislators with just a few taps on your smartphone.

- With a supermajority in the general assembly and a governor of the same party, our PSRS/PEERS could be dramatically changed or eliminated in only a few days. We must NEVER forget, the THREAT to our pension is ALWAYS REAL!!!

Public Education has the power to Transform Lives!!! It is the HEARTBEAT of EVERY community!!! Ninety percent of the students in Missouri attend a traditional public school. In most cases, the school district is the community's largest employer and purchaser. Strong public schools create strong communities and great places to live and work. Despite Missouri being at or

near the bottom in public school funding, beginning and average teacher salary, Missouri's Public Schools rank above the national average in MANY categories. There are STILL SO MANY GREAT things taking place EVERY DAY in our public schools!!!

Among the objectives of the MRTA Legislative Committee is the promotion and publishing of "Letters to the Editor" in local newspapers. Local patrons who are happy with and supportive of their school district are often not aware of potentially damaging proposed legislation that could dramatically and negatively impact their local public schools.

Retired educators spent many years preparing impressive lesson plans and countless other informative documents. We encourage MRTA members to use that expertise in writing letters to the editor for their local press informing readers of potentially harmful legislation and telling their readers about the great things taking place in their local schools.

MRTA Board members are working on templates for members to use with minor modifications to adapt to individual communities.

MRTA and ALL public education advocates must remain vigilant!!! Public Education needs us NOW more than EVER!!!

The Importance of Joining MRTA: Protecting Your Future, Your Pension, and Your Financial Peace of Mind

As we start a new year, it's an ideal time to reflect on what truly matters: your future, your financial security, and the benefits you've earned through your career as a dedicated educator or public school employee. For those of us who have given years of service to Missouri's students and communities, the most important asset we have is our retirement – the pension we've earned and the benefits we depend on including social security.

That's why joining the Missouri Retired Teachers Association (MRTA) is one of the best investments you can make to protect your largest asset: your retirement.

For decades, public pension plans have been under constant attack. Efforts to reduce, freeze, or even eliminate these benefits continue to pose threats to our financial futures. As the challenges facing public pensions persist, it's more critical than ever to stand united and protect what's rightfully ours.

By joining MRTA, you become part of a powerful, collective voice working tirelessly to defend public pensions. MRTA advocates at both the state and federal levels to ensure that your pension remains secure, stable, and protected for the years ahead. Without a united voice, our hard-earned pensions could be at risk — but together, we can ensure that won't happen.

For many of us, Social Security was meant to be a supplemental income, providing support in our retirement years. But for those who spent their careers in public service, the story has often been different. Policies like the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and the Government Pension Offset (GPO) have unfairly reduced Social Security benefits for public school employees, including teachers and educational personnel, who have dedicated their lives to serving others.

These provisions have had a devastating impact on many retirees, stripping them of the full benefits they earned through years of hard work. MRTA has fought long and hard to advocate for fairness — and thanks to the tireless efforts of our members, we achieved a historic victory in 2025 with the repeal of WEP and GPO.

The fight for the repeal of WEP and GPO has been one of MRTA's top priorities for decades. We rallied, we lobbied, and we shared the personal stories of thousands of educators who had seen their Social Security benefits unfairly slashed. Year after year, MRTA members called their elected officials, traveled to Washington, and made their voices heard.

And in January 2025, our efforts culminated in a historic win: President Joe Biden signed H.R. 82, the Social Security Fairness Act of 2023, into law, repealing both WEP and GPO. This victory is a testament to the power of collective action, the strength of our membership, and the unwavering commitment of all those who refused to back down in the face of adversity.

This win means that for future generations of educators and public employees, the unfair reduction of Social Security benefits is no longer a threat. It is a major milestone in our fight for fairness, and it is a victory we all share.



The repeal of WEP and GPO is just one example of what can be achieved when we stand together. But the work is far from over. Public pension plans are still under attack, and Social Security continues to face challenges. By joining MRTA, you are adding your voice to the movement that fights for your rights, your benefits, and your future.

Your membership in MRTA is more than just a way to stay informed — it's a powerful investment in your future and in the future of all Missouri's retired educators and public employees. With your support, MRTA can continue to advocate for the policies and protections that ensure a secure retirement for all of us.

Together, we can continue to make a difference. Together, we can protect our pensions, ensure fair treatment under Social Security, and defend the rights of those who dedicated their careers to educating Missouri's children.

Join MRTA today and become a part of the movement that fights for fairness, justice, and the security of our future. If you are already a member, talk to a retiree and ask them to join. There is strength in numbers.

For more information or to become a member, call 573-634-4300 or visit www.mrta.org.

MRTA Membership Form

\$44/year

Sign up with autorenewal and pay \$39/year!

Name _____

Street Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____

Cell _____

Email _____

Position Retired From _____

School District Retired From _____

Pay by Credit Card

I would like to sign up for auto-renewal (\$39/ year a \$5 savings!)

 Visa/MasterCard/Discover/AmericanExpress

 exp. date ____/____/____ cvv ____



MRTA Member Spotlight: Ken Dillner

MRTA members are an amazing and accomplished group. Their dedication and many contributions to our organization are what has made it a success.

In this Member Spotlight, we get to know our inspiring and enthusiastic fellow member and leader, former MRTA-F Board member Ken Dillner. Ken is a shining example of what we can achieve if we stay positive, work hard, and truly care about others. We hope you enjoy this article, in which Ken shares the unique experiences, thoughtful insights, and practical advice he has gathered during his journey as a part of Missouri's public schools and as part of MRTA.

Serving with Honor, a Get-it-Done Attitude and a Heart of Gold

Ken Dillner has lived a life of service to his family, his country, and his fellow educators. His refreshingly positive and bold outlook may be a result of his life experience. But it is certain that his many selfless achievements and positive, “go-getter” attitude, combined with an endearing and engaging sense of humor, make him someone we can all admire.

Born in 1936, Ken grew up in a suburb of Denver. He earned a bachelor's degree in education at Colorado State Teachers College in Greeley, Colorado. He spent three years in the United States Air Force, working for the Weather Service at Scott Air Force Base, which gave him the opportunity to visit many countries.

Ken's teaching career also began in 1961 as a team teacher, teaching in conjunction with a paraprofessional at Clark Elementary School in Webster Groves, located in St. Louis County. In 1966, he obtained a master's degree in educational administration and later became an

elementary school principal.

Ken loved being an educator and working in the public schools.

“I really enjoyed teaching, and teaching at Clark Elementary was marvelous. What a great experience! We had two classes at every grade level, and we had a marvelous sixth grade camping program. That week we spent at camp was worth two or three months' worth of growing up!” he laughed. Ken later taught at one other elementary school in

the Webster district, as well as one in the Affton School District, before becoming an elementary school principal with Clayton Public Schools.

He loved working at the elementary school level, so when his administration wanted him to move to the high school as an assistant principal, he chose instead to

take a position at the Northwest R-I School District in House Springs, in Jefferson County. It was a decision he didn't regret. “I had a marvelous time there – 18 years.”

Ken enjoyed a full and meaningful career, retiring from education in 1998 after almost 40 years in the field. But even after retirement, he remained active in the education community and kept up with his fellow educators from Northwest R-1 at social outings and lunches.

His participation in MRTA began right away. Upon retirement, he joined the Webster Groves Unit, where he eventually served as both president and treasurer. “I just went

straight in there,” he laughed. “A fellow in Webster Groves was a buddy of mine, and we kept track of each other. We travelled together to the first MRTA meetings that I went to.”

He later joined the Jefferson County Retired Educators Association (JCREA), to serve with his colleagues from



Ken reading the mail he received as part of the Honor Flight.



Ken with his daughter Ann, wife Beverly, and son Eric.

Northwest R-I.

MRTA was a great fit for Ken. He was no stranger to advocating on behalf of his fellow educators, having served as president of the teachers association at Webster Groves while working there. He recalls with admiration the tremendous growth and success MRTA has achieved since he first joined all those years ago.

“When I started with MRTA, the office was in Columbia, and it was cramped and hard to schedule time there.” He recalled that back then, the association’s director was only half-time. In the early 2000s, the decision was made to move to the Jefferson City office, and hire a full-time director, changes that were helpful to the association and its goals. “That was much more accommodating, and it worked out well.”

“Every time I packed up and travelled to Jeff City I thought, ‘Wow, what’s on the agenda for today?’ Even back then, there were always more great ideas than we could handle, and we are still working on some of those great ideas today.”

He enjoyed the collegial, diverse, and hard-working group he was a part of at those MRTA gatherings. “It was always fun to get together with people from around the state. Our group included people from the local rural communities out in the

middle of nowhere and others that were from pretty good sized cities and some like me, I come from a great big area. It was really very significant to be a part of what this association has turned out to be.”

But Ken’s fondest memories with the group came from his involvement with the Missouri Retired Teachers Association Foundation, where he was a Board member for many years and took part in presenting hundreds of classroom grants in Region 8. He very much enjoyed reading grant applications and awarding the grant checks to winners each year.

“Awarding grants was so fun. I remember going out to a school that looked like they were alive and well, but really, those teachers needed a grant to do what their wonderful ideas were. That was really gratifying to think that we could raise enough money to help several schools that were struggling – our contribution was significant.”

As a former teacher himself, Ken

understands both the difficulties and joys his fellow educators face daily in the classroom. And he also understands how necessary it is



Ken and his fellow veterans at the Air Force Memorial.

to support them and the schools where they work.

Ken believes all retirees should be members of MRTA. “There is no question – everyone should join. Go give it a nudge. Raise some money. Participate in the business meetings. If they do, they will know they are not quite finished (with education). Might as well hang on a little bit and help!”

He encourages his fellow MRTA members to stay motivated to fight for public education. “Keep grinding away, keep going. If we don’t, then the school system won’t be able to do what it is trying to do. Our society is growing and needs a growing public school system.”

Ken’s dedication to MRTA and MRTA-F is greatly appreciated by his colleagues, including former MRTA President and current



Ken and son Eric at the Washington Monument

Continued on next page.

Jefferson County Retired Educators Association (JCREA) Unit President Nancy Craig, MRTA-F President Karen Miller, and Executive Director Maria Walden. “We truly appreciate Ken’s commitment to MRTA and his many contributions to our group, his fellow retirees and our working educators over all these years,” Maria said. “His positive attitude and many acts of service are humbling and inspiring. He is someone we can all benefit and learn from.”

Ken served on the MRTA-F Board as long as he was physically able, but even today, his enthusiasm for the organization and its mission have not waned. In addition to his work with MRTA and MRTA-F, as retirees, Ken and wife Beverly have traveled to many countries and enjoy time with their two children and two grandchildren.

They are proud of their daughter Ann and son Eric. Ann is an air pollution professor at the University of California, Davis, who monitors air pollution in our national parks and forests. Eric lives on the East Coast and manages an arts alliance where he works to

raise money to help budding artists fund and display their artistic expressions.

While Ken was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2023, he has persevered. Having had 30 transfusions, his doctors call him Superman, as he has so far beaten all odds. He still sings in both his church choir (64 years) and the Mason Pointe (the independent living facility

where he and his wife reside) choir in addition to doing aerobics, art, and ceramics. He participated in water polo and water aerobics until his recent need for oxygen when being active.

Over the past summer, Ken was able to enjoy the experience of a lifetime, participating in an Honor Flight trip to Washington, D.C. and visiting seven war memorials, accompanied by his son Eric.

He is both grateful for and honored by the experience. “That was really spectacular. My golly, to see those monuments, to see the whole area, to

see the cemeteries in the valleys and the hillsides. it just brings a sense a gratitude to the many people who have been making this country

what it is. It gives you a renewed feeling for the folks who have been committed to making this a better place.”

As an Air Force man, he was especially touched by the symbolism and majesty of the United States Air Force Memorial he visited while there. He described it in detail, bringing it to life.

“Think about if you have three tall, slender sleeves of vegetation, made of metal of course, like our Arch, with one facing east, one facing north and one facing south. Now, you might ask, ‘Where’s the west-facing one?’ Well, they didn’t all come home. . .”

He also speaks kindly of the experience of the Honor Flight itself. “Of all of those people, with an airplane full of us from St. Louis here, three great big busses that had even side wheelchair loading abilities – I never felt like they were rushing us, pushing us, poking us, prodding us, trying to get us to hustle up,” he laughed.

After all his many achievements, Ken stays humble and maintains both a positive outlook and passionate support for all those who choose to dedicate their lives to serving in public education. Maybe it’s the military man in him coming out, but his advice for his fellow retirees is as no-nonsense as he is: “Come on into MRTA and do it. Give it your best shot. Take responsibility. Be ready. Think about the issues. Let’s dive in and take care of it.”



Ken, Beverly, daughter Ann, son-in-law Cort, grandson Teo, daughter-in-law Susan, son Eric and grandson Eric Junior.



Ken and son Eric at the Air Force Memorial.

Informative & Protective Services Committee

The Informative & Protective Services Committee (I&PS) is pleased to announce the list of monthly topics and committee members who will be sharing their thoughts about it. This listing also includes the dates, times, and topics for AMBA's Webinars that are scheduled on the second Thursday of each month beginning at 10:30 AM. This information and details from previous AMBA Webinars can be found on the MRTA Webpage (mrtatmo.org; go to Benefits; go to AMBA Webinar Series).



**Missouri Retired Teacher Association & Public School Personnel
Informative & Protective Services Committee
Monthly Topics for 2025
(Second Thursday Morning of Each Month Beginning @ 10:30 AM)
January 4, 2025**

Dates	Topics	Volunteer	AMBA Webinar
January 9	Cancer Screening & Awareness	Rich Boulton	Health & Financial Wellness in 2025
February 13	Heart Health	Marsha Keithley	Impact of Critical Illness
March 13	Nutrition & Exercise	Mary Mael	Aging in Place
April 10	Outdoor Activities for Health	Linda Lueckenhoff	The Basics of Medicare
May 8	Spring Cleaning	Wilda McNeil	Preparing for Summer Discounts & Emergency Transportation
June 12	Alzheimer's Disease	Evelyn Boyle	All About Your Dental & Vision Plans
July 10	Skin Cancer Awareness	Phillip Tucker	All About Long Term Care
August 14	Eye Health & Safety	Shirley Raines	Protecting Your Nest Egg
September	Healthy Aging	Martha Hurley	Annual Conference



**MRTA is the best investment to protect
your largest asset - your pension!**



The MRTA Informative and Protective Services (IPS) Committee is committed to keeping our members informed about issues that matter most. Starting this year, we will feature important topics in each MRTA newsletter and post valuable information to our local Facebook pages. These updates will cover a wide range of subjects, including health and wellness, safety, and MRTA events, aimed at protecting the interests and well-being of our members. This initiative is part of our goals and objectives for the upcoming year, as we strive to provide timely, relevant, and helpful resources to our retired education employees across Missouri.



Cancer Screenings Save Lives!

Tips from Rich Boulton, Region 2 IPS Chair

Cancer! Just the word brings scary thoughts and sad memories to all of us. We probably all have had some experience with this disease through friends, family and for some, personal experience. Like many diseases, the earlier it is detected, the better the treatment results. The question is how to look for or screen for cancer signs. Any part of the body can be affected by cancer and cancer in one area can spread to other parts of the body. Unfortunately, humans do not have a “check engine” light. Cancer screenings are like when we have a yearly servicing of our HVAC equipment; we do not think there is a problem but having it looked at by professionals might prevent bigger problems.

Here is what the National Cancer Institute wrote about screening:

Cancer screening is looking for cancer before a person has any symptoms.

Screening tests can help find cancer at an early stage, before symptoms appear. When abnormal tissue or cancer is found early, it may be easier to treat or cure. By the time symptoms appear, the cancer may have grown and spread. This can make the cancer harder to treat or cure.

It is important to remember that when your doctor suggests a screening test, it does not always mean he or she thinks you have cancer. Screening tests are done when you have no cancer symptoms.

There are different kinds of screening tests.

Screening tests include the following:

- Physical exam and history: An exam of the body to check general signs of health, including checking for signs of disease, such as lumps or anything else that seems unusual. A history of the patient’s health habits and past illnesses and treatments will also be taken.
- Laboratory tests: Medical procedures that test samples of tissue, blood, urine, or other substances in the body.
- Imaging Procedures: Procedures that make pictures of areas inside the body.
- Genetic Tests: A laboratory test in which cells or tissue are analyzed to look for changes in genes or chromosomes. These changes may be a sign that a person has or is at risk of having a specific disease or condition.



Screening tests have risks.

Not all screening tests are helpful and some have risks. It is important to know the risks of the test and whether it has been proven to decrease the chance of dying from cancer.

(https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/screening/patient-screening-overview-pdq#_1).

The first step in screening is to discuss with your main health professional any concerns you have and what they recommend. Some screenings are recommended for most individuals (e.g., colonoscopy ever 5 years, PSA test for males every year, mammograms every other year). Some screenings are recommended only if there might be a concern, such as skin cancer. Your health care professional can suggest additional screenings. Many organizations (including the federal government) have screening guidelines based on age and gender, but space limitations prevent a complete listing here. Below are some websites which can provide not only screening but additional information.

Sources of Information

Screening by age

<https://preventcancer.org/prevention-screening/cancer-screenings-and-prevention/>

<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/screening/screening-recommendations-by-age.html> (American Cancer Society)

CDC cancer screening

https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/prevention/screening.html#cdc_generic_section_6-screening-for-other-kinds-of-cancer

MD Anderson Cancer prevention Center

<https://www.mdanderson.org/patients-family/diagnosis-treatment/care-centers-clinics/cancer-prevention-center.html>

National Cancer Institute

<https://www.cancer.gov/search/results?swKeyword=cancer+screening>

Cancer can be overwhelming but the knowledge you receive from screenings may reduce or eliminate the fear.

MRTA - NOT JUST FOR POLITICAL ACTION

The MRTA Informative and Protective Services (IPS) Committee is committed to keeping our members informed about issues that matter most.



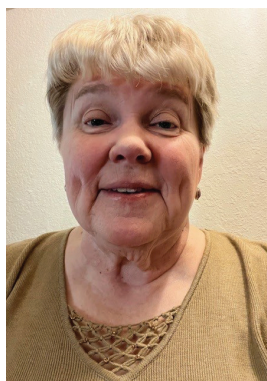
Inspiring Minds You Want to Know.

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

MRTA is indebted to the 11 members of our board and the 14 members that serve as region vice presidents. 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.

Let's get to know one of our inspiring and open-minded leaders, MRTA Region 2 Vice President, Kathy Hollembeak.

Uniquely Successful: Making Progress Can be Personal



During Kathy Hollembeak's teaching career, she used her talents to help students in a variety of ways over a range of grade levels. While

her experience included time in classrooms from kindergarten to eighth grade, her philosophy as an educator was always the same. "I felt like it was my job to figure out where a child was (with their studies) and help them to grow from there. As long as I saw them making progress, then I was doing what I was supposed to be doing."

Kathy started out teaching in a small, rural K-8 school in Strasburg, Missouri. Certified in both Elementary Education and Elementary Vocal Music, she was hired to teach both third grade and music in a combined third and fourth grade classroom.

After six years, her husband was transferred by his job, and they moved to St. Louis, where she worked in a parochial Lutheran school in St. Louis for four years,

teaching fourth through sixth grade.

But their moving wasn't done. They ended up back in the Kansas City area, and this time, Kathy taught seventh grade at a Catholic school until she was able to get a position at Blue Springs R-IV working as a para in the special ed department. She gained valuable insight and experience working with autistic and special needs children. It was an experience she would draw on throughout her career.

Kathy admits that her definition of student success sometimes felt at odds with conventional learning standards. She understood

that everyone's path to success is different. "When I was teaching kindergarten, I had children come to me who could already read some, and then I had other children who couldn't even write their name. You can't tell me that those two children are going to end up at the same place at the end of the year," she said. Kathy met her students where they were at, and focused on helping them grow at their own pace. "My job was to work with them and to help them achieve their own personal progress."

She gave an example. "One of the things I learned while working in special education is the importance of giving students choices," she said. By letting students have some control over what they were doing, Kathy was able to help them complete their lessons. She continued, "You learn to say, 'Well, we can choose this or this, which one would you like to do?' And most of the time, no matter what choice they made, they would do it. And then you could say, 'Okay, now that we have done that one, let's do the other one.' They no longer felt trapped into doing something, or forced into doing something that they didn't feel comfortable with."



Kathy's daughter and son-in-law, Heather & Joel Henning. Grandchildren: Lillian & Graham

Kathy also has firsthand understanding of the importance of allowing students some autonomy in making their own choices. She recounted her own experience as a high school student.

"My main goal is to make sure people know how important and helpful MRTA is and to make them understand how it can help them. We are not just a fluff piece out here. There are reasons behind what we do, and this organization is constantly working for the retiree, the educator and the public schools."

"In high school, we had a kind of 'track' system, and I was in one of the higher level tracks," she said. "Of course, our high school counselor encouraged me to go to college. But when I said I planned to go to college and major in elementary education, she immediately said to me, 'You can't do that.'" Kathy was taken aback by the response. "I just looked at her," she recalled. The counselor went on to tell her she was too intelligent for that and needed to be a nurse or doctor.

"I thought, 'Oh my,' and I remember also thinking, 'So what! This is what I feel comfortable with and what I want to do.'" Nevertheless, she started college with what was deemed a more challenging degree, majoring in

foreign language to become an interpreter. After a couple semesters of that, Kathy had had enough. "I thought, 'No, this is not what I want to do.'" She followed her heart and pursued an education degree.

Teaching was where she belonged and enjoyed a full career. Kathy retired from the Blue Springs School District, after spending her last 12 years teaching kindergarten. It didn't take her long to find her local retiree Unit. Even though she was still subbing at the time, she always made sure to block out Unit meeting dates on her calendar as days she couldn't work. "I wanted to be involved and active and not be sitting around at home." As part of the Blue Springs Unit, she started hearing about MRTA and also got involved in Unit leadership.

"The lady who was the chair of our local unit had been Unit Chair for 17 years, and she wanted someone else to take it over. At that time, I had two young grandchildren, and I was still helping out with them on occasion,

so another lady and I agreed to co-chair." The arrangement worked well. "This is our fifth year now serving as co-chairs! We've been working to keep our unit active and keep our members informed."

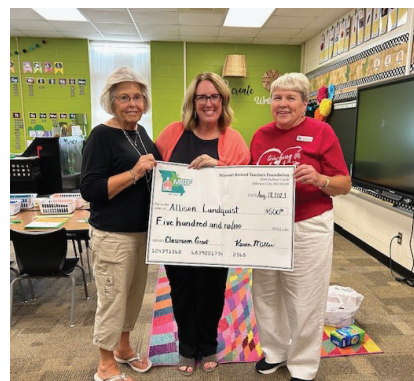
As Unit co-chair, Kathy started going to the President's Summit and attending MRTA annual meetings as a delegate, becoming more involved with MRTA on the state level. At one point, she agreed to take on more responsibility by

serving on the Missouri Retired Teachers Association Foundation board. But fate had other leadership plans for Kathy when the call went out for someone to take over as Region 2 Vice President. "I didn't respond to the email, because I had already said I was going to serve on the Foundation board," Kathy recalled. "But my co-chair of the Blue Springs Unit did respond to the email and said, 'Kathy would be really good at this job,' she laughed. "I said, 'You did what?' So, I told my co-chair, 'Guess what? You're taking the Foundation position – I am not doing both!' So that's how it worked out."

As Region 2 Vice President, Kathy has been visiting the Units in her region, looking for ways to help them increase their membership. As with many Units



Kathy presents an MRTF Grant to Shelley McCullough.



Kathy and her good friend and MRTF Board Member Pam Waterman present an MRTF Grant to Allison Lundquist.

Continued on next page.

in rural areas of the state, some are struggling with keeping members in attendance.

But Kathy's experience in the classroom taught her that making progress sometime requires unique solutions. And she knows if things get tough, she can count on her fellow MRTA leaders to help find answers that fit.

Recently state Legislative

Committee Chair Randy McClain and Region 1 Vice President Sherry Rouser went with her to visit a Region 2 Unit thinking of dissolution due to low attendance and problems

finding people to take leadership roles. After some brainstorming and discussion, the Unit's President ended up making a great move, by contacting the local school superintendent's office for a meeting. Together, they reviewed the district's retiree list. "The district agreed there is no reason some of their retirees can't be more involved. So, the district is going to have a dinner in the spring for all retirees. There are some people on their list they think they can tap and get involved."

Kathy is excited about the fact that next year's Annual Meeting will be held close by, in Independence. "I told each Unit I have visited, if you have never experienced one

of these meetings, this is the time for you to go. You will meet people from other areas and get ideas for your Unit that you didn't know could happen."

MRTA Executive Director Maria Walden is appreciative of Kathy's leadership in Region 2. "Kathy truly understands the significance of the work MRTA does for retirees, teachers, and all school staff members," she said.

"She brings a wealth of experience and a deep commitment to improving the lives of those in the education community. Kathy's leadership has shown that she isn't afraid to embrace new approaches and explore innovative solutions. Whether she's addressing challenges faced by local Units or working to strengthen membership, Kathy consistently looks for ways to create positive change. Her proactive and thoughtful approach is crucial to helping MRTA achieve its mission and continue to make a lasting impact for all those it serves."

While she spends time helping the Units in her region meet their goals, she hasn't lost sight of reminding members and non-members alike about the personal benefits membership in MRTA provides. "MRTA stays on top of things that can affect not only our retirees, but our schools, also."

She encourages retirees to take advantage of the products and services provided by AMBA, as she

did when she needed a Medicare supplement. And she is cognizant of how the group's legislative initiatives have a personal impact for all school staff, regardless of position, working or retired. "I look at what they do legislatively, at the state and even at the national level, making an important impact for us on things like the WEP/GPO legislation they helped pass. WEP/GPO personally affected me, and I know it has affected many others, too."

Just as she once helped set her students up for personal success, Kathy is now dedicated to providing the individualized support each Unit in her region needs to recruit new members, grow their numbers and inform the education community on the issues at hand.

She is ready to do what it takes. "My main goal is to make sure people know how important and helpful MRTA is and to make them understand how it can help them. We are not just a fluff piece out here. There are reasons behind what we do, and this organization is constantly working for the retiree, the educator and the public schools."



Kathy and friends Pam Waterman, Alice Berry and Paula Herron.

Save the Date
Join us in Independence
September 23-24, 2025
MRTA Annual Meeting
Stay tuned for more!



New MRTA Standing Chairpersons

Over the past three years, the organizational structure of MRTA has undergone significant changes. One of the key changes was the recommendation from the Strategic Task Force (STF) Internal Structure Committee to elect a Regional Vice-President to be MRTA Vice-President to represent MRTA's fourteen regions on the board. This was approved by the Delegates Assembly in 2023. There are eight positions on our board, three of which are elected, while the remaining five positions are appointed by the President and approved by the board.



Martha Schatz



Mike Jarvis

Life events have impacted several individuals serving on our board. The Community Service Chair position is vacant as well as the Interim Chairs leading the Retirement Education and Informative & Protective Services Committees. We are pleased to announce that two of the three positions have been filled.

- Community Service Chair – Martha Schatz has agreed to be the Chair until the Annual Conference in September 2025. With her extensive leadership experience at the local, regional, and state levels, Martha is a great fit to serve in this position and honor Marlin Kinman's dedication to MRTA and MRTA-F.
- Retirement Education Chair – Mike Jarvis will be replacing Dave Baker as one of the Committee Co-Chairs. Mike has been serving on the Retirement Education Committee for several years and will serve as the Chair until the end of his term in 2027, with the approval of the future MRTA Presidents. Richard Phillips will remain as Co-Chair. A special thank you to Dave for serving as the interim chair this past year. Your dedication and leadership have been greatly appreciated.
- Informative & Protective Services Chair – This committee met in December and began the discussion moving towards a broader focus of communications. We are still in the process of identifying the right person to become the chair.

MRTA Standing Committee Chairpersons

Membership Committee
Idella Warden



Legislative Committee
Randy McClain



Retirement Education Committee
Mike Jarvis



Retirement Education Emeritus
Richard Phillips



Community Service
Martha Schatz



Informative & Protective Services
Gale "Hap" Hairston



Let's Attract MORE Attention!

By Karen Miller, MRTA-F President

For the past several months, MRTA has worked extremely hard for our members in support of H.R. 82, the Social Security Fairness Act. The bill passed and was signed by President Biden on January 5. This work attracted a lot of attention to our organization.

Let's attract MORE attention!!

Let's support our grant program that helps current Missouri Public School employees enhance the learning, comfort and safety of our MO kids.



MRTA-F \$10,000 Raffle to the rescue!!

We can help provide MO kids with experiences, equipment and supplies that their school cannot afford by buying or selling tickets for our \$10,000 Raffle! This is our biggest fundraiser and it requires your help. Here is an example of what we can provide.



Jared C. Ripley, Lone Jack C-6 Art, writes:

"I received a \$500 classroom grant from the MRTA Foundation for my grant proposal titled 'A Trip to the Museum.' On November 5th, the funds received paid the transportation costs to take 3 bus loads of Lone Jack Elementary students to Kansas City's Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. This grant benefited over 150 young learners from grades 3rd-5th, many of whom had never visited an art museum before. The classes were broken up into small groups, and the museum's volunteer docents guided them through different exhibits and activities. Lone Jack is a rural community, and such a trip has a positive effect on a huge percentage of our community population. Many of our parent chaperones were even experiencing the museum for the first time! As the K-5 Art teacher at LJE, much of what students saw and experienced at the Nelson-Atkins Museum supports and enhances my classroom curriculum. Thank you so much for the grant award, and for the work that the association does for Missouri's children."

It's no surprise that providing grants requires funds ... funds we hope to raise with this raffle. **Won't you help us help more MO kids?**



MRTA-F \$10,000 Raffle Facts

Prizes: \$5,000, \$3,000, \$1,000 and \$1,000

Cost: Tickets are \$10 each or \$50 for 6 tickets

Drawing is Wednesday, April 15, Live on Facebook



Scan to buy tickets online!

Awarding our Classroom and Support Staff Grants attracts the attention of the current MO Public School employees, students, their parents and their communities. Let's attract them by awarding more grants! **Let's attract MORE Attention!**



Door Prizes
Lunch for Golfers
2 Free Drink
Passes
Silent Auction
Raffle



2025 MRTA Golf Tournament

June 18th
Eagle Knoll Golf Course
Hartsburg, MO

GOLF FUNDRAISER



Registration Deadline, Wednesday June 11, 2025

Supporting the Missouri Retired Teachers Association Vision and Mission

All proceeds will support the mission and vision of MRTA advocating for Missouri's retired teachers, administrators, and education personnel. Please call 573-634-4300 for more information.

Registration: 8:00 a.m.

Shotgun Start: 9:00 a.m. (lunch provided for golfers)

Format: Four-person scramble with 2 putt maximum with mulligans available for purchase

Event Registration \$125 per person or \$500 for a team

Contact Person: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____ Company/Team Name _____

Address: _____

Golfer 1 Name: _____ Email: _____

Golfer 2 Name: _____ Email: _____

Golfer 3 Name: _____ Email: _____

Golfer 4 Name: _____ Email: _____

_____ **Lunch Only Option - \$25 - You may join us for lunch only if you do not wish to golf.**

_____ **Number of Mulligans. You may purchase 4 mulligans per team at a cost of \$5/mulligan.**

Please make checks payable to MRTA. Mail to: MRTA 3030 DuPont Circle, Jefferson City, MO 65109.

To pay by credit card:

Credit Card Number: _____ CVV: _____

Expiration Date: ____/____ Name on Credit Card: _____

Please circle card type: Visa Mastercard Discover AmericanExpress

Continued from page 1.

passage and presidential approval are the results of relentless grassroots advocacy. MRTA members and supporters wrote thousands of letters, met with lawmakers, and rallied in support of this critical legislation.

The bill passed the Senate on December 21, 2024, following overwhelming approval in the House of Representatives earlier in the fall, with a vote of 327 to 75, with one voting present.

In the fall of 2023, while advocating at our nation's Capital and visiting with Congressman Smith's office, the Ways and Means Committee staffers, and Missouri's congressional leaders, MRTA launched a grassroots campaign, working closely with our members to collect their personal impact statements on the effect WEP and GPO had on their lives personally and financially.

Throughout 2024, MRTA sent over 12 calls-to-action to our membership asking for and collecting personal impact statements from our members and urging them to contact their elected officials. In spring of 2024, we started working closely with Representative Terry Thompson about actions Missouri's elected officials could take to help with MRTA's advocacy efforts to repeal WEP and GPO.

This victory represents decades of advocacy and dedication from MRTA members who refused to give up the fight for fairness for teachers, firefighters, police officers and public servants. Today, we celebrate the culmination of those efforts and the brighter future it ensures for Missouri's retired educators.

- Maria Walden, Executive Director of Missouri Retired Teachers Association and Public School Personnel

In July, MRTA and Thompson spoke about the possibility of him hand delivering the first round of personal impact statements by our membership. In September, MRTA staff delivered over 3 binders containing thousands of letters from our members with their personal impact statements.

On September 16, 2024, Representative Thompson delivered over 2,600 letters to members of Congress, including House Ways and Means Chair Jason Smith. Later in September, MRTA provided every Missouri congressional official with a copy of the letters from our members who were personally impacted by WEP and GPO.

On November 12, 2024, H.R. 82 was brought up and passed the House by a vote of 327-75. After the bill passed the House, MRTA sent out another call-to-action to our members and collected over

6,000 personal impact statements. Those letters were sent to the bill sponsor and Missouri's senators. MRTA, also, placed a call-to-action on Senator leadership to ensure that this bill would be taken up for a vote. The Senate took eight votes on H.R. 82, including the final passage vote on December 21, 2024. (December 20, 2024, central time.)

After the bill passed the Senate, MRTA was paramount in sending out a call-to-action to the President to sign the bill. President Biden signed H.R. 82 into law on January 5, 2025.

This grassroots campaign underscored the power of our membership in effecting change and ensuring that retirees' voices were heard at the highest levels. This success is the result of sustained advocacy, including countless letters from MRTA members, meetings with lawmakers, and grassroots efforts to garner support for the bill. MRTA has been fighting for this repeal since 1983.

Continued on next page.

I celebrate this historic moment. This legislation brings long-awaited fairness and financial relief to countless retired educators who have devoted their lives to shaping the future. The emotional relief it provides cannot be overstated.

We commend the Missouri Retired Teachers Association for its unwavering advocacy and tireless efforts over the years. Their leadership, along with members who shared personal stories with legislators, has made this possible. MoASSP is also proud of our members who reached out to Missouri's U.S. Senators, amplifying the voices of retired educators throughout the state.

With this new law, we honor the commitment of those who have contributed to Social Security for years and restore the financial security they so richly deserve.

- Clark Mershon, Executive Director of Missouri Association of Secondary School Principals and MRTA Member

The repeal will bring the following changes:

- A projected average monthly increase of \$360 for beneficiaries affected by these provisions. (The exact amount for each individual will vary based on their specific circumstances.)
- A one-time lump sum payment for 2024 to compensate for previously lost benefits.
- Spouses, widows, and widowers will no longer experience reductions in survivor benefits due to the Government Pension Offset (GPO).

"This is a monumental win for Missouri's retired teachers and public school personnel," said Randy McClain, Legislative Chair of MRTA. "The signing of H.R. 82 proves the power of grassroots action and what can be achieved when we stand together for a common cause. This victory honors the voices of educators who have tirelessly advocated for equity in retirement benefits."

"We've been advocating for the repeal of WEP/GPO for decades, and this victory would not have been possible without the unwavering support of our members, staff and other education associations, such as MoASSP, MASA, and others," said Maria Walden. "It's a powerful reminder

of what we can achieve when we come together and make our voices heard."

"The repeal of the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) through the signing of the Social Security Fairness Act is a tremendous benefit to public employees across the country. There was a lot of hard work from organizations throughout the United States, but certainly the Missouri Retired Teacher's Association (MRTA) was at the forefront for our state. We truly appreciate their leadership on this important piece of legislation."

**Doug Hayter, Executive Director
Missouri Association of School
Administrators and MRTA Member**

As MRTA members and supporters celebrate today's passage of H.R. 82, they also acknowledge the work that lies ahead in ensuring the smooth implementation of this historic legislation.

"This is a momentous milestone," Walden emphasized. "We will continue working closely to ensure a smooth implementation of this legislation. MRTA remains dedicated to advocating for the rights and benefits of all retired educators and education employees."

Thank you to our over 30,000 members that answered the call to action to make this day possible. "This is a day to celebrate, but the journey continues," Walden concluded. "Together, we have achieved something truly remarkable," Walden remarked. "We will remain steadfast in our advocacy efforts to honor the past work of our members and inspire the future of Missouri's educators."

The Social Security Administration urges all retirees who have previously filed for social security benefits and are partially or completely offset at this time to take no action except to verify your current mailing address and direct deposit information.

JOIN OUR VOICE – There is strength in numbers, and the world is run by those who show up! Thank you to all our members for making this victory possible. Renew your membership with MRTA today!

"This is a monumental win for Missouri's retired teachers and public school personnel," said Randy McClain, Legislative Chair of MRTA. "The signing of H.R. 82 proves the power of collective action and what can be achieved when we stand together for a common cause. This victory honors the voices of educators who have tirelessly advocated for equity in retirement benefits over the years."

Our staff, board and members have remained unwavering in their commitment to righting the wrongs of the WEP and GPO provisions, and today we see the fruits of their dedication.

Every letter written, every conversation held with lawmakers, and every phone call made to Congress has brought us one step closer to this moment. It is a reminder that when we come together with purpose and determination, we can overcome obstacles and achieve meaningful change.

This victory also sends a powerful message about the value of retired educators and the need for a system that honors the work and service we've given throughout our careers. We celebrate this historic achievement, but we also know that our fight for fairness and equity doesn't end here. We will continue to be a voice for all public school employees and ensure that their retirement security is protected for years to come."

-Randy McClain, Legislative Chair of Missouri Retired Teachers Association and Public School Personnel

Educators Rising – Missouri Competition

Friday – March 7, 2025

8:30 AM to 4:00 PM

On the Campus of Westminster College – Fulton, Missouri

Your Opportunity to Help Recruit the Next Generation of Teachers

Westminster College will host an Educators Rising Competition on Friday, March 7, 2025. Dr. Tami Ensor, Associate Professor of Education, serves as Missouri's Statewide Coordinator. She is expecting 250 to 300 middle school and high school students to attend this year's statewide event. There will be four levels of participation: Middle School (Grades 7 & 8); High School Junior Varsity (Grades 9 & 10); High School Varsity (Grades 11 & 12); and Collegiate (Undergraduates Only).

What is Educators Rising? It is a series of performance-based competitive events in which aspiring educators demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and leadership in education. With a blend of individual and team events, competitions are authentic, engaging opportunities for rising educators to stretch their creativity, commitment, and professionalism.

Dr. Ensor is requesting our assistance in recruiting 45 volunteers to serve as judges and/observers for the following events: Children's Literature (Pre-K & K-3); Creative Lecture; Lesson Planning; Ethical Dilemma; Public Speaking; Interactive Bulletin Boards; Job Interview; and Others. Resource materials and scoring rubrics are provided. Some of the topics require preparation before the March 7th event. Judges will not need to be there the entire day.

To volunteer, please contact: Dr. Tami Ensor (tami.ensor@wcmo).





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