

The Publication Dedicated to Retired Florida Educators & School Personnel



FREA BULLETIN

Volume 51, Issue 1
Spring 2024



The Joy, and the Strength, of Belonging

Here at the FREA Office, we receive newsletters from most of our local FREA Units. It is always a pleasure to see what our members are doing and the positive impacts that FREA members continue to make on the lives of those around them. Occasionally a message in one of those newsletters contains a theme that resonates so strongly it needs to be shared with all FREA members. Thank you to Donna for allowing me to share this very timely message with all FREA members.

Anne



Donna Heald

Leon Wakulla REA President's Message

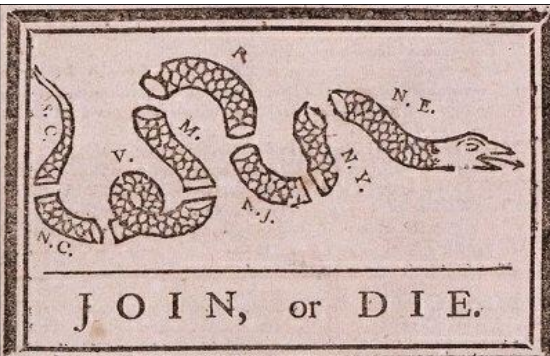
In May 1754, Benjamin Franklin published one of the first political cartoons in history. The cartoon showed a snake cut into 8 pieces with the words "Join or Die". The pieces represented the British colonies in America, and Franklin was concerned about the threat of the French and their Indian allies to the loose confederation of British colonies. ([The Story Behind the Join or Die Snake Cartoon.](#))

Fast forward to 2024, where the USA is becoming a country increasingly divided along several lines. Social Scientist and researcher, Robert D. Putnam, set out to find out why. He found that America has seen a decline in social networks because people weren't participating in clubs, groups, etc. He says that social networks have value because they produce social capital = trust.

In addition, social networks give participants the power of working together with others to change or resist change, and the opportunity to build trust in getting to know one another. His research showed that once common activities such as dinner parties, club activities, team participation, even church attendance have declined. Recently the Village Square hosted at an IMAX a screening of "[Join or Die](#)", a documentary based on his research that illustrates how this is happening, and possible responses.

How do we continue to build community? As an LWREA member, you already have a group with which to work - fellow retired educators! We can build our community by encouraging each other, by inviting those who might not be members, by demonstrating your community involvement through volunteering.

As LWREA President, I have as my theme an African proverb: "If you want to go fast go alone; If you want to go far, go together." That is what "Join or Die" really means. Together we have more strength and a greater voice. Together we can accomplish things that we might not accomplish alone.



Together we can build trust because we get to know and work with others toward common goals for the common good.

Going together with you.

Donna Heald, President, Leon Wakulla REA. (Reprinted with permission, LWREA Newsletter, March 2024.)



If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

African proverb

FREA Calendar

April 5	2024 Convention Registration Deadline
May 13	FREF Trustees meeting
May 13	Executive Committee Meeting
May 13	Benefits Meeting
May 13	FREA Board Dinner Meeting
May 14	State Committee Chairs Meeting
May 14	District Directors Meeting
May 14	Convention 2024 Opening Session
May 16	Convention 2024 Closing Session



Edwinna Williams
FREA President

Dear Florida Retired Educators and Associate Members,

Seventy years and growing is an incredible accomplishment! We must be doing something right over time. The amazing volunteers working united over the decades to improve the retirement chapter of our lives is a key factor. To each of you I say THANK YOU!

As the saying goes, “time flies when you’re having fun!” The past two years have flown by so fast as your president. These years have been full of challenges and many wonderful experiences. I am honored to have served Florida Retired Educators Association (FREA) as your President. In May we install a new President, and vote for a new President – Elect

Nominee. Harriett Jenkins, from Vero Beach will be our new President. I am grateful for the opportunities we have had to work closely together during my term. She is well prepared to meet the challenges and she will work hard for FREA. However, every president and officer of FREA, will continue to need our members’ support and meaningful involvement to achieve our goals. Harriett always reminds us of her mantra, “team work makes the dream work.”

Our local units are full of dedicated volunteers working to provide fellowship, information, and great experiences to our education system retirees and associate members. With active members involved in FREA, we will continue to grow and achieve great success. Our past presidents and boards have provided incredible leadership and insight for our association and many continue to serve.

Our legislative committee members are committed to guarding our pensions and advocating for the educators still in the classrooms and schools across the state. Our organization has been the voice of many educators who can’t afford to speak the truth for fear of losing their jobs. I am so impressed by the years of service to FREA by dedicated volunteers like Larry Carmichael, Linda Edson, and George Ellis. Our FRS Pension fund is very strong at over \$190 billion; and managed very well by the State Board of Administration (SBA) led by Lamar Taylor.

All of our state committee chairs are optimistic, thoughtful, and have contributed meaningful insight to the Board of Directors. I am thankful for their contributions and dedication. We have worked as a team serving our FREA. I hope in the future when YOU may be asked to serve in a leadership role you will step up and accept the job.

I appreciate the FREF Trustees and their dedication in awarding classroom grants and scholarships to future Florida educators. Also our dedicated state office staff supporting our membership through the years.

Our Executive Committee has worked hand in hand with the Board of Directors to enhance our retirement years and explore new ideas and programs to better serve our membership. I want to thank you all so much for your hard work and invaluable support you have brought to our association all year long. It has been a great two years, and it is because of the generous dedicated volunteers! I have always believed that “many hands make light of much work.” We can all look forward to working together with the new Board and Officers.

I hope to see you at our convention in May at The Saddlebrook Resort in Wesley Chapel, Florida. As I mentioned above, FREA turns 70 years old this year; it will be our Platinum Celebration. What a wonderful opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate the sensational volunteer organization we have become over the years. We have earned the right to brag on ourselves for our progress, commitment, and growth. I am impressed with our 70 years of growth by individual volunteers generously giving their time and talents to our beloved organization.

In closing, I want you to know I am grateful for the opportunity you have given to me to be a part of such a caring organization. As I turn the page of this chapter of my life, thank you for the wonderful memories, friendships, and leadership experiences. I count it all as a blessing to me.



FREA Executive Committee	
President	Edwinna Williams Escambia CREA edwinnarae@gmail.com
President -Elect	Harriett Jenkins St. Lucie CREA HarriettMJenkins@aol.com
State Director	Anita Schmitt Escambia CREA anitaschmitt53@gmail.com
Secretary	Melanie Waite Santa Rosa CREA melanie7896@gmail.com
Treasurer	Gayle Hodges Orange CREA gayle.hodges1991@gmail.com
Executive Committee Rep. 1-5	Donna Harper harper2paint@gmail.com
Executive Committee Rep. 6-10	Pat Watkins patdanwat@msn.com
Ex-Oficio	
FREA Executive Director	Anne Fagan anne@frea.org

Dear Members,

We are all aware that effective communication is the essential key that moves an organization forward in the right direction for all stakeholders. Communicating effectively with members and partners on every level sets the tone for successful meetings, programs, events, work, and all other planned tasks on a day-to-day basis. Just as we use certain house keys to open certain house doors, there are a few thought-provoking keys I shall name “expert keys,” which are guaranteed to open doors in effective communication. So, let us simply open three (3) of those doors:



Harriett Jenkins
FREA President-Elect

Communicate Effectively with All People Assigned to You. Assess the environment, membership, culture, and experiences and determine to communicate effectively.

You may say, “People are all the same.” People are not the same. We all purposefully came from diverse backgrounds, experiences, traditions, and levels that make us the successful organization that we are today and will continue to be tomorrow. Each difference makes the difference.

Learn From Effective Communicators. Distinct qualities of a “good educator/volunteer” include skills in communication. Whether we volunteer in our schools/communities, meet with legislators across the state and/or facilitate workshops in our local Units, we can soar to higher heights when we implement effective communication skills that have proven to create desired results. Four (4) phenomenal communicators who developed effective communication plans include Mary McCleod Bethune, a lifelong educator and founder of Bethune Cookman College; Marva Collins, founder of Westside Preparatory School and sought after educator trainer; Barack Obama, the two term 44th US president and world-famous community organizer; and Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft and a worldwide philanthropist. Each afore-mentioned communicator developed an effective communication plan that can be successfully practiced today. Effective communicators always reach their desired goals.

Recognize the Divine Privilege of Communication. We all are given the privilege of speaking, talking, and sharing. Every person who is deaf or hearing impaired will tell you that when things get muffled around them, there is an agitation that begins. You may see a perfectly peaceful person suddenly agitated because he/she did not understand. The difference in people is communication skills. Everything we want good to happen in our lives is on the other side of effective communication.

Communication is the essence of life. Most importantly, effective communication is a beautiful lifetime gift. It is a gift that keeps on giving. Let us continue to wrap up this most beautiful gift very carefully while planning to attend and celebrate our upcoming Platinum 70th Anniversary at the 2024 Convention in lovely Saddlebrook Resort Wesley Chapel. We will strategically prepare to move full speed ahead by making the absolute BEST of the BEST happen for FREA each day! Working together, we will continue to allow the “expert keys” of effective communication to open countless seen and unseen doors that lead to a guaranteed successful future.

Harriett

Harriett Jenkins
FREA President-Elect

Communication
builds trust.
Trust generates
commitment.
Commitment fosters
teamwork.
Teamwork delivers results.
Jon Gordon



YOUR FREA MEMBERSHIP UNLOCKS DISCOUNTS & SAVINGS

FREA is working harder than ever to support its members and to provide new and innovative ways to enhance your membership. Part of this initiative is providing discounts and benefits to promote physical and financial health for members in Florida!

My top priority is serving member's needs and fostering the growth of FREA. As AMBA continues to support FREA through our partnership, I eagerly anticipate meeting more of our valued members.

If you have any questions about your benefits or would like AMBA to be part of your next event, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Lexie Mowery



Lexie Mowery
AVP of Operations for
East Market

Medicare Alphabet Soup Getting You Down?

Contact me to help you with a benefits question, or to have Your Local AMBA Representative contact you. Lexie.Mowery@amba.info or (561)722-1239

1954—Some things never change...





Greetings from FREF!



Extravaganza Tickets— Get 'Em While They're



Can you use some extra cash? You have a chance to win between \$100—\$600. For just \$10, you earn two chances to win the following cash prizes:

\$500 - 1st Prize
\$300—2nd Prize
\$200—3rd Prize

Extravaganza Tickets at Convention

\$100 Cash Prize to a winner in each FREA District Between now and the end of April 2024, you can buy tickets through your local units. Get your tickets *now*, to better your chances of winning.

Extravaganza tickets will be sold at the 2024 FREA Convention. **There is a catch!** They may only be purchased with a check, NO CASH. Convention tickets will only be entered into the large drawing, not the individual district drawings. Therefore, you will not have as many opportunities to win. **Tickets will be sold by Registration, as well as the basket room.**



Convention Basket Alternatives

One of our main FREF scholarship fundraisers is our basket room at convention. Last year, Convention was held in Panama City. Due to the travel distance, FREF decided to offer alternatives to basket donations. It turned out to be very successful, therefore in addition to baskets, we are offering these alternatives again this year.

As much as I love seeing the creativity in the unit baskets, the ultimate goal is to not only raise money for scholarships but to make it more convenient for units to participate. For those who still wish to bring baskets, please do so. Here are the alternatives:

1. Your unit can send a check to FREF at the FREA Office for at least \$50. I will make a display for your \$50 & assign a number (just like baskets), and whoever wins your item number will get \$50 cash.
2. Your unit may wish to donate a group of gift cards (with a total of at least \$50 in value). You can either arrange those in a display and bring them with you or send them to FREF at the FREA Office and we will make a display. Each Unit's donated gift card/s will be assigned a number and awarded just like the baskets.
3. You unit may wish to donate \$50 worth of Lottery scratch-offs. You can either arrange those in a display and bring them with you or send them to FREF at the FREA Office and we will make a display. Each Unit's group of lottery tickets will be assigned a number and awarded just like the baskets.
4. Give your unit basket to a neighboring unit member who will be driving up.

Should anyone have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at (941) 722-4692 or at brogdon1@msn.com.



Build a "They Continue to Care" Legacy for your departed loved one.

When loved ones pass, family members may donate to FREF in their memory. (i.e. include in obituary, "In lieu of flowers, please donate to FREF".)

Your loved one's legacy will live on in the Foundation.

Convention 2024 ~ Celebrating the Margaret Poppell Literacy For Life Project



Convention 2014—Kim Dixon, Principal of Otis A. Mason Elementary School of St. Johns County, left, stands with FREA President Thelma J. Mosley as she receives over 600 books in the name of the Margaret Poppel Literacy for Life Project. Fortunately Kim drives a Suburban.

Convention 2014: What Do Over 600 Donated Books Look Like? This!

Convention 2024: Let's Celebrate over 20,000 Books Donated Since 2011!

We are asking each FREA Unit to bring ONLY 5 books to the FREA Convention. These books will be donated to a Veterans facility near Saddlebrook. We will have labels for each FREA Unit so that the recipients will know where the books came from. They can be either for adults or for children.

“How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.”

~Anne Frank

In 1986 Margaret Poppell may have retired from teaching, but she never retired from improving the lives of others through her love of literacy. Those who knew Margaret well speak about her passionate commitment to and hardworking support of the causes she supports. Margaret made a true difference for so many, devoting her life to adult literacy and the support of others in need. She served as the Literacy Chairman for Florida Retired Educators Association for many years. In 2011 Margaret's legacy of promoting literacy was assured with the creation of the Margaret Poppell Literacy for Life Project.

The Literacy for Life project, named after Ms. Poppell who we unfortunately lost in 2014, honors her work and dedication to improving children's literacy, and was originally designed to supply new books to grades K-5 throughout Florida. With the changing times that we live in, the project was expanded in 2023 to include giving books for all ages to Veterans facilities. All Units in FREA create their own literacy programs to collect and distribute books to organizations who serve children and veterans in their areas.

Starting in 2011, a book drive was held on the state level, and at the annual FREA Convention, books were collected and given to the recipient of that year's Book Drive. In 2014, there were over 600 books brought to Convention. Fortunately the recipient came to Convention in a Suburban, and was able to take all the books with her. It was decided at that time to not do any more collection at Conventions, but to have the Units run the project on their own. And run it they have. To date, over 20,000 books have been donated to various schools, children's programs, and Little Free Libraries around the state of Florida. We are proud to expand the program to include our Veterans who are in facilities.

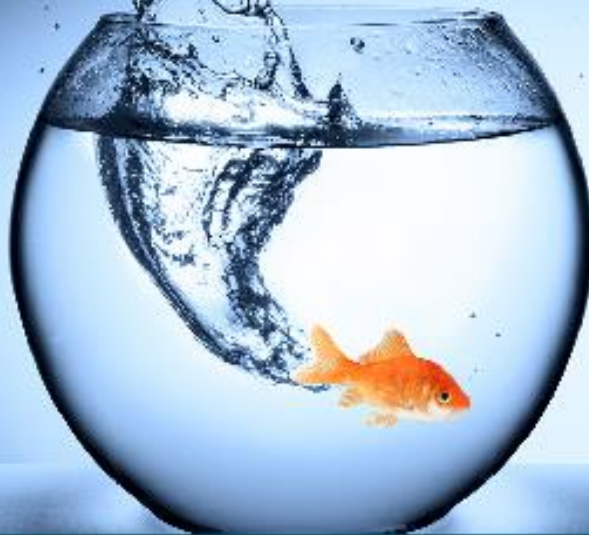
“I want to say thank you to those who dreamed of this project and to attach my name to it was a double honor...It doesn't matter where they are distributed - that there are books for the students is what is important. Let's help keep books available.

I love it that so many of you share my passion!

THANK YOU!”

Margaret





OUTGROWN YOUR BENEFITS?

TIME TO EXPAND YOUR COVERAGE.

You can, with these benefits and discounts from FREA & AMBA:

- Dental & Vision Plans
- Long-Term Care
- Emergency Ground and Air Transportation Coverage
- Cancer, Heart, Stroke, Accident, and Disability
- Insurance
- Medicare Solutions
- Final Expenses Whole Life & Guaranteed Acceptance Life Insurance
- Tax-Deferred Asset Protection
- Hearing Benefits
- Legal Services
- Identity Theft Protection
- Professional Liability (for retirees returning to the classroom)
- Connect America
- Hospital Stay Coverage



1.877.556.4582

myambabenefits.info/frea

Florida Retired Educators Association



AMBA



FREA Convention 2024 Registration is Now Open

[Registration Information for 2024 Convention](#)

We had to reinvent the registration wheel this year due to the variety of room types available at the Saddlebrook Resort. And, there is NO online registration. Attendees have the choice of a Deluxe Guest Room, a 1br/1ba Suite, a 2br/2ba Suite, or a 3br/3ba Suite. Add in the different offices held by attendees, and the discounts that FREA and FREF pay to those officers, and the variety of room costs per person increases exponentially.

So...This year we have a [2024 Convention Registration Booklet](#). It contains worksheets and schematics, and information on everything to do with Convention. We are challenging your math skills, hoping that you can use the formula supplied to complete the registration. If not, or if you have, but are not sure about your calculations, give the FREA Office a call; Diane or Anne will be happy to help.

If you would like to have a hard copy of the Registration Booklet mailed to you, please email us at info@frea.org



Cecelia Solomon
Info Services Chair

ALL ABOUT UnitS!

The Return of Convention Unit Displays

Before COVID, all Units would bring to Convention a display to show what great activities they had done, and events they had created. These displays were one of the highlights of our Convention. Everyone would gather around the displays, visit, and talk about their last year of Unit fun and activities.

Some displays were quite complicated and deluxe. (One year we even had a working Lionel train set.)

Our Convention Committee simplified the Unit display idea, and we are so looking forward to seeing your creations at Convention 2024!

- ★ Every FREA Unit create a 36" X 48" tri-fold display board decorated with your name, photos, graphics, and anything else that will adhere to the actual board itself. Don't be afraid to label, label, label!
- ★ To keep things simple, nothing goes ON the table but the display boards (larger Districts could have 2 tables).
- ★ The display boards will come to Convention and be displayed by District in the FREA/FREF Gathering Room.
- ★ Each District will have an 11x14 sign like the one at the right, to identify their display area and Units.
- ★ At the end of convention, units retrieve their display boards to use at their own meetings or when they attend events in their community.



FREA Membership Report

DID YOU KNOW?

Many of you know that I love spreadsheets and data, but did you know that I have been collecting data on the number of members in each of our units for 12 years. Each year some units gained and some lost, but our total unit member numbers kept moving down. FREA overall numbers rose each year while our units got smaller.

BUT I am so glad to let you know that your efforts have turned that downward trend UP. Congratulations! Data shows that our total number of unit members is 181 members higher than last year. Your hard work is making a difference.

Thank you and let's keep the trend going!

Reminder to all FREA Officers and Members: At the 2024 Delegate Convention, FREA delegates will be asked to approve the FREA State dues increase of \$10.00, to take place as of July 1, 2024. For those members whose dues increase on their join anniversary, the increase is after July 1, 2024, on your anniversary date. Please realize that this was not an easy decision, knowing the inflation struggles we are all living with. Inflation does not discriminate, and FREA's costs have risen too. The FREA Office still runs with only two paid personnel to administer to over 11,000 FREA members. Our all volunteer Board and Membership continue to work tirelessly for our members. We appreciate your support!

Would you like to save \$10.00? Pay your 24-25 dues early, before the proposed dues increase!



Jody Scruggs
FREA Membership
Chair

FREA Volunteer Services Report

By Phyllis Omilak, Ed. D., FREA VS Director

Greetings to all of our outstanding FREA Volunteers! Now is the time of year that our Unit Volunteer Service (VS) reports are due to be sent to your District VS Chairs and then on to the State VS Chair. These reports reflect the amazing effort that each of you has put into making your community and the entire state of Florida a better place for all of us. Thank you!

Please use the VS forms required. The forms have been emailed to you and can also be found at frea.org/forms. Following are some very important dates when Volunteer Services reports are due.

UNIT Volunteer Services Reports: Due to District VS Chairs by March 15

- Volunteer hours reported by members from January 1 to December 31, 2023, plus number of members reporting.
- The name of one Unit Volunteer of the Year (VOY) Nominee for District Volunteer of the Year,
- Information about unit's participation in the Margaret Poppell's "Literacy for Life" Project if you participated,
- The Unit's one winning 5th Grade Essay Contest entry information with FREA "Permission to Publish" form. This form must include the student's photo and the parent or Guardian's signature.

District Chair Volunteer Services Reports Due to State VS Chair by April 1st.

- The selected District Volunteer of the Year (VOY)
- The selected District 5th Grade Essay Contest entry. This to be chosen by a member committee of judges.
- Total of the Volunteer hours from January-December for the District

We especially want to thank Carson Ealy, Jr. from District 2. Carson currently serves as Gadsden Unit's President-elect, Madison Unit's treasurer, and the Legislative Team Member from District 2. He will gather as much VS information as possible, but we really need a District 2 VS Chair.

We also need a District 4 VS Chair. Laura Shuyler, Sumter CREA President, can no longer serve as District 4 Chair, but will continue to be Sumter Unit VS Chair.

If you have any questions or would like to serve as a District Volunteer Chair, please contact Phyllis Omilak at omilakp@gmail.com. **If you are serving as a Unit Chair in Districts 2 or 4, please send all unit forms to me.**

We are here" To serve, not to be served"! Thank you for your service!



Phyllis Omilak
Volunteer Service
Chair

Our Nominees for FREA District Director and FREF Trustee

All Nominees are running for a 2nd or 3rd Term (if Trustee).
If you would like more in depth information, please contact the FREA Office for their biography.



District 1 Director—Donna Harper
Unit—Escambia CREA
Term served—1
Retired: Escambia School System
Position at Retirement: Visual Arts
Multi-Media



District 4 Director—Margaret Williams
Unit—Citrus CREA
Term served—1
Retired: Citrus School System
Position at Retirement: High School
Vocal Music.



District 5 Director—Don Leech
Unit—Nassau CREA
Term served—1
Retired: Baker, Duval, Union Systems—
currently working for Valdosta State
University—Leadership Professor



District 7 Director—Pat Watkins
Unit—Manatee CREA
Term served—1
Retired: Manatee School System
Position at Retirement: Media Specialist



District 6 Trustee—Bob Stephens
Unit—North Pinellas REA
Term served—2
Retired: Pinellas County School System
Position at Retirement: High School
Athletic Director



District 7 Trustee—Karla Brogdon
Unit—Manatee CREA
Term served—2
Retired: Manatee School System
Position at Retirement: High School
Guidance Counselor



District 8 Trustee—Debra Dykes-Kornhaus
Unit—Orange CREA
Term served—1
Retired: Orange School System
Position at Retirement: ESOL Language
Arts Instructor

Nominee for FREA President-Elect

Carrie Frye retired from Seminole County School District in 2010 after 48 years of service in education. During her professional career, she served in public schools as a teacher, curriculum specialist, guidance counselor, assistant principal and as assistant director of an Army Education Center in Korat, Thailand. She taught in five US states, in Thailand for two years, and ten years of her experience were at an American School in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.



Carrie, oldest of 11, is originally from rural Louisiana where she received a BA in elementary education from Northeast Louisiana University. She acquired a M. Ed. from the University of Arkansas while residing in Athens, Greece. Her second masters (guidance/counseling) from Troy State University, AL.

After serving as state president, Carrie currently serves as Executive Secretary for FL State Organization of Delta Kappa Gamma International Society, on the International Nominating Committee for DKG, Liaison for DKG US Forum in FL, member of DKG state legislative committee, and district representative for FREA legislative committee. She travels to Tallahassee Capitol at least three times a year to advocate for public education/educators and rights of women and children.

During her career, Carrie was the recipient of numerous honors including Seminole School District Counselor of the Year, Teacher of the Year at four schools, Phi Delta Kappa Educator of the Year, Chamber of Commerce Outstanding Teacher and Florida's Delta Kappa Gamma top honor, the Sara B. Ferguson Achievement Award.

Carrie's community involvement includes serving as Director Emeritus on the Board of Directors of Winter Park Playhouse, one of only two professional live musical theatres in FL. She is an active member of Delta Kappa Gamma (Key Women Educator Society), American Association of University Women, Seminole County Retired Educator Association, FL Retired Educator Association and P.E.O.

Carrie and her husband of sixty years, Bill, have lived in Thailand, Greece, and Saudi Arabia and traveled the world. She enjoys travel as she finds it educational and the people around the world intriguing.



Linda Edson
FREA State Legislative
Co-Chair

FREA... ...Keeping an Eagle Eye on Your Pension!



George Ellis
FREA State Legislative
Co-Chair

FREA Legislative Priorities

- FRS - Protecting and Enhancing Retiree Earned Benefits
- Ensuring Accountability and Equity for all schools taking state funds
- Health & Wellness for a Retirement with Dignity for Florida seniors

Our FREA legislative team of 15 unit and state members visited with numerous State Senators and State Representatives in Tallahassee in late January. Our task was to advocate for FREA legislative priorities. We were warmly received and felt very good about the work we did. This has not always been the case.

The Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) bills SB242 and HB151 were actively discussed in committee work and are currently in conference with the decision makers in both houses.

The House voted unanimously for the COLA to be reinstated but the Senate would not take up the matter. Conference is now being held to discuss the financial implications for the state budget. COLA is a big ticket item, but legislators do recognize the value it holds for those currently working or retired in the Florida Retirement System (FRS).

Rewarding, attracting and retaining, state and municipal workers, educators, and first responders is at the heart of the bills. Reinstating COLA means the legislature can finally make good on the promise that they would put back funds they took, and the COLA they halted, in 2011. We are not naive and know that money talks and it is always hard to push our priorities for better benefits when legislators try to balance what we want against other state programs and priorities.

Education bills SB7000/7002/7004 sought to balance the playing field for K-12 districts and reduce numerous regulations that charter schools, private schools, and homeschooling do not have to contend with. Both houses appeared to support steps to make this happen.

We met with Lamar Taylor of the State Board of Administration (SBA) He is the Chief Investment Officer and is in charge of investing the Florida Retirement Trust funds. We were assured that FRS funds are earning solid returns and that any concerns about retirement programs do not affect current retirement benefits.

We also met with a group of AARP Legislative leaders and their volunteers. They advocate for many different bills affecting seniors, education, unions, COLA, etc. Their work targets attending committee meetings in progress, rather than our FREA focus on meeting with legislators in their offices. A show of numbers at meetings is the AARP approach. FREA's approach is to meet in small constituent groups with our legislators, to advocate directly, and share information in support of our goals. Both approaches are effective in their own way. AARP knows that when our priorities align, we will add our voices to theirs, and vice versa.

In Summary:

We are cautiously optimistic that the COLA bills, even if modified, can make a positive impact. Because the number of people receiving benefits is numerous, it will most likely be a last minute decision on the funding cost. The education bills to reduce district regulations seems to be on track to pass. Session closes March 8th.

Therefore, we are optimistic that our legislative efforts on FREA members and all FRS retirees, made a difference. Our hope is that later in May, those bills affecting our FREA legislative priorities will be announced, and then scheduled for implementation July 1st, with the Governor's signature.

Thanks again to the legislative committee for their persistence and hard work in units all year long and for their advocacy work at the State Capitol. A special thank you to all of the FREA unit members who wrote letters and cards to your Senators in support of the current bills that help us meet our goals. Linda Edson has been at the forefront regarding these efforts. She is still spending countless hours at the Capitol seeing legislators, but the conference sessions about key bills are closed to the public. And last but not least, thank you to the FREA members who support our efforts by donating to the Legislative Fund when you renew your FREA dues.

Cupid's Crew Delivers Thousands of Smiles

Cupid Crew is an annual event sponsored by AARP through the Wish of a Lifetime program. On Valentine's Day cards and roses are distributed to senior citizens who are isolated or in need of some kindness and recognition. The cards and roses were provided to FREA units by AARP at no cost. The inside of the cards is blank and needs a message written and/or some decoration, and that can be a fun and creative way to earn volunteer hours! This year was limited with limited local REAs. The goal was to learn what worked, and didn't work. Read on for reviews of this year's event! The lessons we have learned this year will help us next year with all FREA Units participating! (Many more pictures to be displayed at Convention.)

Escambia CREA – So many roses arrived, and it was a good problem to have! First, I checked with the other Unit in our area thinking we had received theirs in error, but we had not. In fact, they too received far more than they ordered. Both units were able find recipients for the extra roses. All were extremely grateful. Wonderful project! Donna Harper, District 1 Director and ECREA member

Santa Rosa CREA - Cupid Crew rose committee distributed 525 roses. We ordered 2 sets of 75 roses, for a total of 150. We received 300 Valentine cards, which were high quality and we liked that they were blank on the inside so that we could either personalize a message for some of our sick/shut in members, or reproduce a generic message for the remainder of the recipients...What a wonderful program! We, here in Santa Rosa County REA, are already looking forward to participating in 2025! Bonnie Justice, SRCREA President

Citrus CREA - The Gardens Assisted Living Center in Crystal River had a wonderful Valentine's Day. CCREA paired with Crystal River Women's Club for this community project. We gave roses and cards to each resident, and they gave treat boxes made and filled by Women Helping Women, a group of special needs adults that the Club sponsors. The roses were placed on the lunch trays or at place settings. It was a huge success and partnering with the Women's Club made it even more special. Margaret Williams, District 4 Director and CCREA member

Nassau and Duval CREA's worked together to deliver 75 roses each. We worked together and started small so both units could experience and feel comfortable with the process. Dr. Don Leech, District 5 Director and NCREA member

Hernando CREA - Cupid Crew was a big undertaking in Hernando County with 1200 roses trimmed and ribbons attached. Cards were colored, messages and stickers added. My tired feet and hands were soon forgotten when I hand delivered those roses and cards to residents of assisted living facilities. Many of residents could not understand why strangers would be giving valentine gifts and messages to them. Their smiles were infectious! Wonderful way to honor and acknowledge our seniors! Emily Berry, District 6 Director and HCREA member

Manatee CREA - On February 14th the MCREA Cupid Crew was revved up and ready to go. There were some complications when it came to the amount, delivery, and distribution of the roses... It was a wonderful experience. Many thanks to AARP's Wish of a Lifetime for the valentines and roses. We were very proud to be a part of this heartwarming endeavor. Thanks to MCREA's Cupid Crew members Karla Brogdon, Pat Comkowycz, Donna Estevez, Carole Kay Monaco and Phyllis Omilak. Also a big thank you to my very dependable husband, Dan Watkins. I look forward to being a Cupid Crew member next year and encourage each of you to join us. Pat Watkins, District 7 Director and MCREA Cupid Crew Captain! Just one last suggestion: Remember next year to thank the wonderful staff who helps distribute the roses. They spread love every day. Phyllis Omilak, FREA Volunteer Services Chair and MCREA member

Polk I and Polk II REA's - Things went well after I figured out exactly what it was we were supposed to do! Our biggest concern was making sure we had people to participate and help with the cards and the flowers, thank you



to the leaders and members of both Units for helping with participation! ...Things went well - very well! I was very pleased with the participation. In fact, when we arrived at the Bartow Community Center, they were having a Valentines party for the residents there and that was absolutely wonderful. The people were so cordial and there were many smiling faces. Also, it was a mixture of ages, both mature and younger people in the convalescence home there. I felt like it was an extremely worthwhile event and I'm looking forward to next year. Linda West, District 8 Director and PCREA II member



St. Lucie CREA - Today was a huge success for St. Lucie CREA, FREA, the St. Lucie County Community, and Cupid Crew! We are thankful and appreciate the contributions of this generous program as we look forward to working with them again next year. Our "mark of love" was left for all to see and know that we are an organization that cares and remains focused on making a positive difference everywhere we go! Bonita Williams, District 9 Director and SLCREA member



Broward CREA - BCREA delivered door-to-door to our local members who are homebound and cannot come to meetings, and to two retirement/assisted living homes at each end of the county - John Knox Village in Pompano Beach and Oakmonte Village of Davie. We delivered a total of 250 roses. It was so rewarding for the recipients AND our volunteers. We shared love, and joy, and have many heartfelt stories to tell! Thank you so much, Sue Colton District 10 Director and BCREA member.



FREA Office – Thank you to all who were part of this Pilot Program for Cupid's Crew. Next year we hope that all FREA Units will participate. There were many lessons learned this year, and that is why we went with a limited number of Units. I think the biggest lesson is, when it comes to the delivery of the flowers, expect the unexpected. The accounts above were edited due to available space, but there were definite commonalities in the challenges everyone faced. Too many roses, arrival dates fluid, and delivery to wrong addresses. If you were unaware, the roses arrived from Colombia. The distance, time zones, delivery glitches, all created the interesting situations that all participants so gracefully dealt with. Natasha Hartsfield, the point person in this project, wanted you all to know that you were appreciated and that the amount of love and smiles that FREA members sent did not go unnoticed. Please see her thank you letter to you below. She is very much looking forward to FREA's full participation next year. *Anne*

FREA Members: Thank you for being a part of the 2024 Cupid Crew! In this nationwide effort, we delivered 170,000 Roses and well over 200,000 cards. In Florida, we delivered 21,000 roses and more than 6000 cards. We could not have made this impact without the help of the tens of thousands of volunteers like you! Together, we turned Valentine's Day into an extraordinary celebration of love and connection. Whether you delivered roses, made cards with an organized group, or even just spread kindness in your community, you generated hundreds of thousands of unforgettable moments and Cupid Crew spread love like never before. From all of us at Wish of a Lifetime, Thank you!

At Wish of a Lifetime, our mission is to shift the way society views and values our oldest generations by fulfilling older adults' dreams and sharing their stories to inspire those of all ages. We envision a world in which society embraces aging and the inherent wisdom that accompanies it, where older adults are celebrated for their accomplishments and sacrifices, and where intergenerational connections are part of our daily lives. Please take a look at our website to understand the guidelines of our wish selection process, and I encourage you to nominate someone who deserves a wish of a lifetime! <https://wishofalifetime.org/submit-a-wish/> Best, Natasha

Want to be a part of next year's FREA Cupid's Crew? Planning starts in August. We will have detailed information in the Summer FREA Bulletin on how to be a Team Leader, Belong to a Team, etc.. If you are a Member at Large, check to see if there is a Unit in your area so that you can join in and Share the Love!

The Serenity of Saying 'Never Again'

After almost kicking the bucket, I wrote my anti-bucket list. By STEPHEN RANDALL

FIRST OFF, let me confess that my 2016 was what fans of children's literature call a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad year. I lost a job I'd had for 34 years. (New investors took over and rewarded loyalty the way a Real Housewife keeps an ugly secret about a fellow Housewife.) And before I could start the "fun with severance" part of my life, I was diagnosed with cancer, the bad kind. It was a bit touch-and-go, and I was MIA from social activities for about a year. But things worked out, and I rejoined the world with some severance left. My reception by the denizens of my old life was joyful yet annoying.

They were happy to see me, but they expected that my year of uncertainty would have blessed me with something every retiree is somehow obligated to have: a bucket list. Given the wisdom my friends assumed I'd gained from a serious illness, they wanted to know how I would 'make the most of my life,' what wonderful adventures lay ahead, what far-flung country was next on my list, what mountain I wanted to climb.

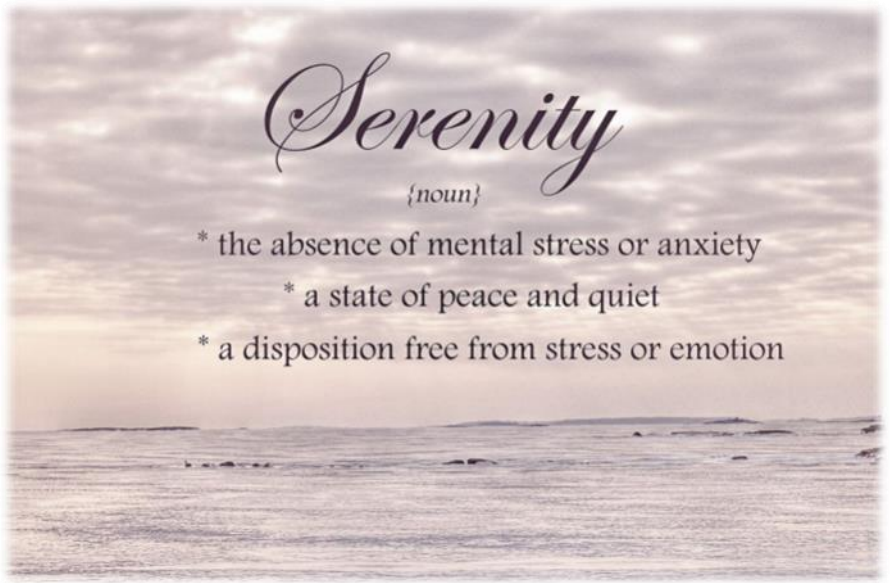
I hadn't been a shut-in previously-I once got shot with a rubber bullet during a riot, went to the Oscars and had other mild adventures in my life. But that was the past. It was more important to my friends that I embrace the future, maybe with a new electric bicycle. "Do you realize what you'll learn about yourself jumping out of an airplane?" one friend insisted. "Swimming with the sharks changed my life," said another. "Don't you want to face your fears?" I'm pretty sure that "adventures" conducted by a heavily insured company with a paid chaperone are less about facing your fears and more about getting shark selfies. And anyone who learns something about themselves while strapped to a pro skydiver and landing in an empty field probably didn't know much to begin with.

My bad year had taught me a lot, and probably chief among those things is that there's much to be said for ordinary life. Yes, the Eiffel Tower is magnificent, but so is the sandwich shop on the corner. Family, music, walks in the neighborhood-I love those things. TV is pretty darn good, too. And you can watch the Eiffel Tower on that it appears more often than drug commercials. Yes, the great chef Anthony Bourdain did enough globe-trotting in his final decade to fill everyone's bucket list several times over, but then we know what happened next. Maybe those adventures aren't as fulfilling as advertised. "You'll be bored," friends say. But when given the choice between nothingness and boredom, boredom looked pretty good.

I've faced fear from a hospital bed. Here's what I learned: I hate fear. It's a toxic emotion. So, I suggest you put the bucket list in the shredder. Do what I've done: Create an anti-bucket list. It's easy. Plane travel? It's over. Anything you watch on shows like The Amazing Race or Survivor-forget it. Things that might cause stress or fear or make your back ache? Getting up too early or staying out too late? Why? Really, why? Look, I respect my friends with bucket lists, even the ones I secretly suspect are likelier to talk about them than act on them. The ones who do follow through often end up in pain and smelling like Bengay, but they do get legitimate bragging rights. Good for them, I guess. They have their goals, and I hope they can accept that I have mine. I look at my anti-bucket list daily and see a stress-free life full of comfort, fun and a genuine appreciation for what I have. At least for me, it's a good way to live.

Stephen Randall, 73, is the author of a novel, *The Other Side of Mulholland*, and former deputy editor of *Playboy*.

[AARP website, Jan 2024](#)



In Memory

November 1, 2023 ~ March 6, 2024

"How does one become a butterfly?" she asked pensively.

'You must want to fly so much that you are willing to give up being a caterpillar.'

'You mean to die?' asked Yellow, remembering the three who fell out of the sky.

'Yes and No,' he answered.

'What looks like you will die, but what is really you will still live.'

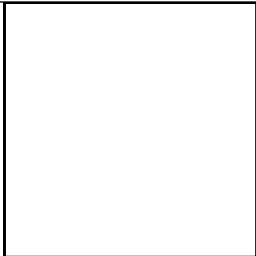
Trina Paulus

First Name	Last Name	Unit Member
Myra	Saunders	Bay County REA
Brozene	Temple	Bay County REA
Carol	Mizell	Bay County REA
Doris	Featherstone	Bay County REA
Faye	Ramer	Bay County REA
Glenda	Fussell	Bay County REA
Richard	Nallick	Bay County REA
Sally	Redfern	Bay County REA
Marvin	Mc Cain	Bay County REA
Wanda	Wallace	Bay County REA
Barbara	Garner	Charlotte CREA
Elizabeth	Joyner	Citrus CREA
Carol	Otts	Escambia CREA
Francis	Palma	Escambia CREA
James	Turek	Escambia CREA
Jack	Tison	Holmes CREA
Judy	Jones	Indian River REA
Earthine	Plair	Indian River REA
Patricia	Murphy	Indian River REA
Rinda	Tuck	Indian River REA
Jean	Bass	Indian River REA
Albert	Thomas Jr	Jefferson CREA
Nancy	Benjamin	Jefferson CREA
Elsie	Broomfield	Lake CREA
Rhea	Wilson	Leon/Wakulla REA
Betty	Gordon	Miami-Dade CREA
Elbert	Gentry	North Pinellas REA
Florence	Renton	North Pinellas REA
Helen	Wilcox	North Pinellas REA
William	Word	Orange CREA
Nancy	Buchanan	Palm Beach CREA
Kay	Brown	Palm Beach CREA
Freddie	Robinson	Polk REA Unit II
Giovanna	Deveny	Sarasota REA
Irna	Walker	Seminole CREA
Merrick	Harding	South Pinellas CREA
Gail	Weston	South Pinellas CREA
Edgar	Tomberlin	Sumter CREA
Pauline	Blalock	Suwannee/Lafayette REA
Willie	Veal Jr	Suwannee/Lafayette REA
Laverne	Dorminey	Suwannee/Lafayette REA
Linda	Wheatley	West Jackson REA
Patricia	Segrest	West Jackson REA

Members at Large		
Annie	Koesy	Birmingham
Jules	Abber	Boynton Beach
Walter	Holcomb	Bunnell
Sandra	Schneider	Cary
Helen	Roberts	Clayton
Joan	Kessler	Cordova
Beatrice	Rabinowitz	Delray Beach
Nehoma	Garte	Delray Beach
Patricia	Murchison	Gainesville
Rebecca	Choco	Hernando
Anthony	De Stefano	Juno Beach
Elbert	Gentry	Largo
Joe	Craig	Ocala
Anthony	Di Veto	Ocean Ridge
Barbara	Schmid	Plantation
Lueretha	Mc Cray	Riverview
Paul	Franklin	Roswell
Sharon	Tabler	Spring Hill
Willard	White	St Simon Is
Earl	Keller	Valdosta
Gloria	Pfund	Vero Beach



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There is strength in numbers, and FREA needs YOU to make our voices stronger together!

We are a Non-Partisan, Non-Political organization. We support those who support our Mission, and include all voices in our membership.

www.FREA.org/AboutUs

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The Last Word



Our Mission Our Vision

Our mission is to shift the way society views and values our oldest generations by fulfilling older adults' dreams and sharing their stories to inspire those of all ages.

We envision a world in which society embraces aging and the inherent wisdom that accompanies it, where older adults are celebrated for their accomplishments and sacrifices, and where intergenerational connections are part of our daily lives.

Nomination: Wishes are submitted via the online [Application Form](#). Anyone can submit a wish, and all applications are reviewed carefully by our wish team. Become a Wish Nominator by submitting an application for a deserving older adult in your community!