

# Connections

A Publication of VEA-Retired



## President's Column

By Lola V. McDowell

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We have had a busy year! Many of us attended VEA's Educators of Color summit and had a table where we were able to recruit some pre-retired subscribers. Others went to Lobby Day, visited our legislators, and participated in the rally. It was exciting to witness and see so many retirees there supporting our active members. In addition, our membership committee is busy organizing retired chapters.

We elected three new VEA-Retired Council members in January and they have officially begun their terms: Meg Gruber (CD1), Angela Peterson (CD3), and Stella Johnson (CD4). Robert Rigby, Jr. (CD8) was appointed at our March meeting, and we anticipate making appointments to the CD6, CD7, and CD10 seats in September. Holly Jackson-Conrad, Jeff Cobb, Vashti Mallory, Connie Coates, and Karen Beasley all ended their terms on July 31. We appreciate their hard work and excellent ideas for recruitment and involving retirees in Union activities. Each was given a beautiful apple award engraved with their name as a token of our appreciation for their efforts.

We're also excited about how visible we were at the VEA convention this year. We had several retired members working at our table, spreading the word about VEA-Retired. Thank goodness for our retired volunteers! Many of us were sporting new swag items and our delegation was unified with our very own chair covers. We stood out on and off the floor. The retirees were mentioned in every speech with accolades from each candidate and guest speaker, with several noting, "We stand on your shoulders."

If you or somebody you know wishes to purchase new VEA-Retired swag, our pop-up shop will be open again on or about October 10th. (We'll send an email with more details when the shop opens.)

Five retired delegates attended the NEA Retired Annual Meeting (RAM) and NEA Representative Assembly in Philadelphia. They were Eddie Fifer, Vashti Mallory, Lola McDowell, Dot Walton, and Barbara Wilson.



As I have said before and will continue to say, we are active and visible in the Union and community and will continue to do our part for our Union as VEA-Retired!

**Retirees at the Fund Our Schools rally in Richmond.**

**2023-24 VEA-Retired Council**

[vearetired@veanea.org](mailto:vearetired@veanea.org)

**Lola McDowell**  
*President*

**Malia Huddle**  
*Vice President*

**Kathy Davis**  
*Secretary-Treasurer*

**Dot Walton**  
*Retired Member at Large,  
VEA Board*

**Dennis Pfennig**  
*Immediate Past President*

*Congressional District  
Representatives:*

**Holly Jackson-Conrad, 1<sup>st</sup>**

**Jeff Cobb, 2<sup>nd</sup>**

**Sid Neighbours, 3<sup>rd</sup>**

**Vashti Mallory, 4<sup>th</sup>**

**Connie Coates, 5<sup>th</sup>**

**Vacant, 6<sup>th</sup>**

**Barbara Wilson, 7<sup>th</sup>**

**Karen Beasley, 8<sup>th</sup>**

**Eddie Fifer, 9<sup>th</sup>**

**Vacant, 10<sup>th</sup>**

**Allison Batty, 11<sup>th</sup>**

## **NEA Retired Annual Meeting and NEA Convention**

*By Eddie Fifer*

The 2024 NEA Retired Annual Meeting (RAM) was held June 30-July 1 in Philadelphia. This very interesting gathering takes place each summer in the days leading up to the NEA Representative Assembly (RA).

*A Tale of Two Cities* comes to mind, but this was a tale of two conventions. The NEA Retired Annual Meeting was quite normal. All of our official business, including the elections and new business items, was handled successfully.

However, the NEA Representative Assembly was a different story. When the Virginia delegates met prior to the first session of the convention, we learned that negotiations with the NEA staff were not going well, and that a strike was possible. The first day of the convention seemed to be going well until President Fedderman had the entire Virginia delegation follow him off the floor to a private room. He prepared us for a possible strike the next day.

We were instructed to take everything with us when we left the convention that day. At the end of the first session, NEA President Becky Pringle made an announcement that confirmed what President Fedderman told us, that a strike was possible. The next morning, the Virginia delegates met as usual. but as we were en route to the convention, we were told the strike had started. The buses turned around and went back to the hotel.

For the remainder of our time in Philadelphia, the Virginia delegates met to give our collective opinion on each of the 100+ new business items. This information was to be sent to the NEA executive committee for deliberation. We also learned that voting for amendments and officer elections would be conducted via mail.

One might say that the RAM and NEA RA were the best of times and the worst of times, but the work of the Union didn't stop, and we accomplished what we went there to do.



**Eddie Fifer, Dot Walton, Vashti Mallory, Lola McDowell, and Barbara Wilson representing VEA-Retired at the RAM in Philadelphia were pictured with Princess Moss, NEA VP, and Sandra Hatley of North Carolina, who made the winning bid on our auction item.**

## Nominations Open for Distinguished Service Award

VEA-Retired is now seeking nominations for the 2025 Martha Wood Distinguished Service Award. Named in honor of its first recipient, this annual award is meant to recognize retired members who have made significant contributions to the growth of the active and retired Association, promotion of public education, and the welfare of public educators since retirement.

Nominees must have been members of NEA/VEA-Retired for at least five consecutive years as of January 15<sup>th</sup> of the award year and cannot hold a position on the VEA-Retired Council at the time of nomination. Additional information and nomination forms are available at [vea.link/distinguished-service](http://vea.link/distinguished-service). Please contact us at [vearetired@veanea.org](mailto:vearetired@veanea.org) with questions. Nominations must be received at VEA by the close of business on January 8, 2025. The award will be presented at the 2025 VEA Delegate Assembly in Abington.

## 2024 VEA-Retired Elections Results

*By Meg Gruber*

VEA-Retired elections took place in January 2024 via electronic ballot. All elected officers and council positions will be for two-year terms beginning August 1, 2024, and ending July 31, 2026. Delegates to the VEA and NEA conventions were also elected along with their alternates. They are to attend the 2024 and 2025 conventions.

The elected VEA-Retired Council members are: Lola McDowell, president; Malia Huddle, vice president; Kathy Davis, secretary-treasurer; Dot Walton, 2<sup>nd</sup> VEA Board retired member-at-large; Meg Gruber, CD1; Sid Neighbours, CD2; Angela Peterson, CD3; Stella Little Johnson, CD4; Barb Wilson, CD5; vacant, CD6 and CD7; Robert Rigby, CD8 (appointed); Eddie Fifer, CD9; vacant, CD10; Allison Batty, CD11.

The elected retired delegates and alternates are:

VEA Delegates		NEA Delegates	
Allison Batty	Cheryl Knight	Eddie Fifer	
Ralph Booher, Jr.	Vashti Mallory	Meg Gruber	
Connie Coates	Sid Neighbours	Vashti Mallory	
Samuel L. Eure	Angela Peterson		
Eddie Fifer	Dennis Pfennig	Barbara Wilson	First Alternate
Elizabeth Goodson	Cathy Smith	Samuel L. Eure	Second Alternate
Meg Gruber	Barbara Wilson	Sid Neighbours	Third Alternate
Malia Huddle			
Ruby Grandison	First Alternate		
Elizabeth Ann Johnson	Second Alternate		
Rena Davis	Third Alternate		

**About VEA-Retired**

- We are the fastest growing division of VEA
- Council members are elected by VEA-Retired membership
- We elect our own delegates to the VEA and NEA assemblies
- We have active local chapters across the state
- VEA-Retired members are eligible for the same NEA Member Benefits they had while working
- Information is published in *Connections, Virginia Journal of Education*, and is available on the VEA website
- Contact us at [vearetired@veanea.org](mailto:vearetired@veanea.org) for information on local chapters

**Share your stories!**

If you or your local retired chapter would like to have an article in the next issue of *Connections*, please forward it to [vearetired@veanea.org](mailto:vearetired@veanea.org) by October 16, 2024.

**About the State**

**Elizabeth River Retired Educators**

*By Malia Huddle*

The members of ERRE are staying busy. This regional chapter meets the second Thursday of each month at local restaurants in the area. Our members are from Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach. At each meeting, members bring non-perishable items for the Greenbrier YMCA food pantry and books to support the Little Library they previously donated to New Mount Olive Church. The Chesapeake Sheriff's Department attended the August meeting to make Senior ID cards for those members who reside in Chesapeake. Undersheriff David Rosado shared information on the 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Senior Support Services Seminar that the department would be hosting on September 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> and invited all to attend. In July, members enjoyed a wonderful presentation on Medicare benefits and supplemental programs. The group enjoys lunch and fellowship as they serve their community.

If you're in the area or want more information, reach out to incoming chair Malia Huddle at [vearetired@veanea.org](mailto:vearetired@veanea.org). We'd love to have you join us!

**Fairfax Education Association – Retired**

*By Allison Batty*

I hope everyone enjoyed the summer. FEA Retired members were busy, meeting with Fairfax County Public Schools HR Benefits to stay apprised of any changes with our benefits program, and with Fairfax County Public Schools Superintendent, Dr. Reid, to keep communications open to see how we can help each other.

We held elections at our spring meeting for FEA Retired Council. The Council members elected Allison Batty for president and Dave Thomas for VP. Council members that have been re-elected are Lynda Vincent and Adrienne White. We began the summer with a social at Paradise Springs Winery and it was a lovely day to relax and enjoy each other's company.





**Richmond Education Association – Retired**

*By Vashti Mallory*

The Richmond Education Association-Retired continues to be active as we strive hard to recruit members to REA-R, VEA-R and NEA-R.

At our June meeting, we elected the officers for 2024-26. The newly elected officers will begin serving their two-year terms at our October 2024 meeting: JoAnne Jones and Vashti Mallory, co-chairs; Karen Winston and Holly Jackson-Conrad, co-secretaries; and Susan Damron (REA-R member), treasurer.

There was also discussion about our need to do fundraising activities. REA-R members Lucius Alford and Dorothy Rice have agreed to take on this project. We want to create a Facebook page and Lucuis has agreed to look into that.

After the brief meeting we moved into our end-of-the-year REA-Retired Program Recognition and Reception, which honors members who have recently retired from their employment with Richmond Public Schools and to give a special thanks to them for being loyal members of the Richmond Education Association during their years of employment. Susan Damron made opening remarks. The program also included greetings from Dorothy Rice, REA-R co-chair; Nerilis Suarez, president of REA; Divine Munyengeterwa, REA Uniserv director; Lola McDowell, president of VEA-Retired; and James Fedderman, president of VEA. The special guest speaker was J. Austin Brown, Principal Director of High Schools. Vashti Mallory did a tribute to retirees. We were blessed with a wonderful meal contributed by Lucius Alford. The honorees were presented with certificates of appreciation, VEA-Retired pins and REA-R pens. We had an enjoyable celebration.

Our next REA-Retired meeting will be held on October 8, 2024.

**Share Your Stories**

**We want to hear stories from around the state of what you or your local retired chapter are doing. If you would like a story in the Connections, send it to [vearetired@veanea.org](mailto:vearetired@veanea.org) by October 16, 2024.**

**The Connections will come out four times this upcoming year - fall, winter, spring and summer.**

## ACTIVE IN RETIREMENT

By Dennis Pfennig

The VEA-Retired Council met in Richmond in March and, in addition to regular business, we were addressed by all six candidates seeking election to statewide VEA office. The council listened and endorsed. All three candidates it endorsed went on to win their respective seats at the VEA convention. To further illuminate retired presence at meetings, the council authorized the purchase of seat covers boldly printed with *VEA-RETIRED*. These were placed on the chairs assigned to the retired delegation at the 2024 VEA convention in Hampton. Participants could not miss the 17 retired delegates, always in their seats, focused and engaged. Whether it was new business or old, retired delegates had and shared opinions. Toward the close of business April 13, Lola McDowell presented outgoing VEA President James Fedderman with a gift from VEA-Retired in gratitude for his support over the past four years, and Dennis Pfennig presented the same to retiring VEA Executive Director Brenda Pike in recognition of her five years of service.

One of the goals of the Hampton gathering was to raise money for political action, specifically the VEA Fund for Children and Public Education. President Fedderman announced to the 422 convention delegates that as of the final day of convention, retirees had contributed \$16,891 to the VEA Fund, \$4,787 of that being contributed by the 17 retired delegates (pictured below). If you are not signed up for Easy Pay, consider doing it today! Money talks!



### VEA-Retired Membership Organizing Grants

Would you like to start a local or regional VEA-Retired chapter in your area? Your VEA-Retired Council would love to help you. Heck, we'll even provide up to \$500 to help you get started. We've created a starter kit with sample bylaws, ideas, and instructions to make it as easy as possible. We'll assign a couple members of the council to serve as mentors to help you along the way.

Grant application forms can be obtained by contacting us at [vearetired@veanea.org](mailto:vearetired@veanea.org). It's a great way to stay connected to your profession and to your VEA/NEA family!

## VEA Board of Directors

By Dot Walton

Highlights of the Board meeting and agenda items requiring Board action are as follows:

- The VEA Board of Directors met on July 3, 2024, at the Inn at Penn, 3600 Samson Street, Philadelphia, PA. It was a short meeting with most agenda items and reports received with little to no discussion. Written reports were provided by the VEA president, VEA vice-president, VEA executive director, VEA-Retired president, and SVEA president as well as the department/staff reports.
- Executive Director Report
  - Net gain of 627 in membership. Membership has increased every month since October.
  - Provided Board members with a collective bargaining timeline (Jan. 2021 to present).
  - Sale of headquarters building update
    - Headquarters has been cleaned out of all items so it presents better
    - There were two parties looking at the building in the week prior to the RA. Both parties are looking to remodel.
    - Need to continue to look for creative solutions to financing
- Actions Items:
  - Election of Committee Members
    - 2024-2025 Executive/Budget Committee
      - Leslie Houston, Ben Sizemore, Stephanie Lovelace, Travis Maxwell, Darrell Turner, and Kathy Butler
    - 2024-2025 Legislative Committee
      - Leslie Houston, Ben Sizemore, Rosina Simmons, and Darrell Turner
  - Commission Appointments
    - Fitz Turner Commission for Human Relations and Civil Rights
    - Professional Rights & Responsibilities
  - LGBTQIA+ Ad Hoc Committee transition to a standing committee
  - UniServ Grant Application Approval
  - Approval of the 2023 IRS Form 990
- Informational Items:
  - VEA Board Orientation/Training – September 20-21, 2024
  - All Committee Day – September 21, 2024
  - VEA Board Meeting – October 18-19, 2024



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## **Do you have a new email address or have you moved?**

We don't want to lose touch with you! If any of your contact information changes, please consider letting us know in one of two ways:

1. Complete the contact update form at: [vea.link/vear-update](http://vea.link/vear-update)
2. Email your information to: [vearetired@veanea.org](mailto:vearetired@veanea.org)

We appreciate your help!