



AASRA NEWSLETTER

Affiliated with NRTA, a division of AARP
November – December, 2021

Jerry's Reflections



Long time no talk to. It's good to be back. It's been a while since we sent out a newsletter. Financial considerations prevent us from mailing one to you now. Print this copy and pretend you got it in the mail.

Quite frankly, COVID threw me and most of our AASRA Board of Directors for a big loop. Besides the problems associated with not being able to do things the way we always had, there were the personal demons that had to be faced. I struggled frequently with a sense of isolation, with a sense of despair, with melancholy.

I knew that I was not unique. Like you, I read constantly about what was happening with the pandemic and how others were dealing with the same feelings I experienced. I watched as family, friends and acquaintances struggled with the disease. Some still struggle, some died. The isolation and melancholy deepened.

During the pandemic I attended, in person, services to celebrate two past Presidents of AASRA. Garry York and Roger Tabar were both members of the Board for years and made valuable contributions to our organization. For me, their deaths highlighted the vulnerability we all share.

The AASRA Board tried to mount social media campaigns to connect with members during at the height of seclusion. I don't know if those were successful efforts or not. Two of our Annual Meetings have been conducted virtually. Because

we cannot be sure of future events, we are planning for our third consecutive virtual convention.

In other ways, we are returning to a new normal. We hope the AASRA Board of Directors will soon be able to meet in person or in a hybrid model. Along with others, I was able to meet recently with ASRS Director Paul Matson. We learned about how some upcoming changes will benefit the system. I've attended virtual and in-person unit meetings.

The one thing that has remained constant is our effort to protect the Arizona State Pension System. During the last legislative session, we faced one of the most serious threats to ASRS to date. John Kavanagh, a member of the House of Representatives, sponsored HB2138 that would have changed several key provisions of the current ASRS structure. Those changes would have a major impact on the viability of the system.

Responding to prompts from our Legislative Liaison Joe Carter, it was your efforts during COVID that led to the defeat of the bill in the legislative committee. Your phone calls, emails and letters made a difference in how those committee members viewed the bill. Thank you for your timely response.

We have already begun preparing for the next legislative session beginning in January. **We anticipate that organizations who do not have our best interest in mind will again attempt to impact ASRS. Their efforts may be better organized this time, so be prepared to respond quickly.** We will keep you informed.

Thank you for being a member of AASRA. For 70 years, it is the collaboration within this organization that has led to improvements in public pension funding in Arizona. **Without you, we are powerless. We appreciate you.**

Jerry

Mary Henderson – President Elect

Mary Henderson was elected as AASRA President Elect at the AASRA Convention in June. She is a Saguaro Unit member, a Saguaro past president, and District 3A Vice President which includes Phoenix/Scottsdale and Saguaro units. She is busy with the responsibilities of the being a President Elect. Welcome Mary and thank you for tackling another position.



A Name for the NEWSLETTER?

Have you ever wondered why the NEWSLETTER is always referred to as the NEWSLETTER in our Constitution and Bylaws? Why was it just called NEWSLETTER? On the masthead it has become AASRA NEWSLETTER, shall we stay with that or **shall we give a REAL name to the newsletter?** What about Voice, News, Dispatch, or ???? Two names have been taken by the Arizona Education Association (AEA) and AEA-Retired, which are Advocate and Conduit.

Do you have an idea for a name identity for our NEWSLETTER? Extra, Extra read all about it in the



!! Send your ideas for a name or just to say keep it NEWSLETTER to azredsunset@cablone.net, your NEWSLETTER editor. You can do this as an individual or talk it over in your unit and send in the unit's idea or thoughts.

ASRS IS AN EARNED BENEFIT. The value of Arizona State Retirement System Fund as of June 30, 2021 is \$49.1 billion. ASRS expects a 25% return for the fiscal year. It has a diversity of investments, which includes bonds, credit, stocks, real estate and cash. It is about 74% funded. At the July 30, 2021 meeting the Board lowered the investment return assumption from the current 7.5% to 7.0%. This will be phased in over three years to keep the future contribution rate stable.

ASRS Health Program – Open enrollment for your health insurance ends November 30. Use the booklet sent in October or go to www.azasrs.gov for more information. Remember you can buy dental insurance without participating in the medical insurance. The Permanent benefit will cover this expense.

BE ADVISED: The ASRS will never call you to collect data from you over the phone.

Janet Fee, ASRS Liaison

The Retirement System Equation

A formula that is very important at the ASRS, but one that most of us would not learn about outside of retirement fund management:

$$C + I = B + E$$

Contributions plus Income equals Benefits plus Expenses. This is -the essence of how your retirement system is funded!

A description of these four factors:

Contributions

This refers to the deductions that you and your employer equally pay. These contributions are collected with every -payroll and then invested by the ASRS.

Income

Income refers to all the interest, dividends, and capital gains that are generated by investing the contributions. This income is generated because the contributions collected are invested by the

ASRS in various bonds, stocks, real estate and other investments in order to create a diversified investment portfolio that maximizes expected returns while minimizing expected risk. Over the ten year period ending June 30, 2020, our average annual rate of return has been 8.9%, placing the ASRS in the top 10 percent of our public pension plan peers in terms of total returns. We will report our June 30, 2021 returns as soon as they are finalized.

Benefits

Benefits refers to the various payments that are made to retirees, long-term disability recipients, and members who withdraw/refund, typically paid in the form of pensions, health insurance supplements, disability payments, and refunds. These payments are the reason the ASRS exists, and everything else we do – investment management, accounting, systems development, member services, strategic planning – is done to support a cost-effective system of paying benefits to our members.

Expenses

Expenses refers to the investment and administrative costs of managing the retirement system. The lower the cost of providing all the various retirement, health insurance, disability, and other services, the better. To ensure focus on this area, the ASRS engages an independent external company (CEM Benchmarking Inc.) to measure ASRS customer service and ASRS administrative costs. The results for the most recent year indicate that the ASRS again has low costs and high service - with an ASRS service score of 92 versus the peer average of less than 79, and with an administrative cost of \$72 per active and retired member versus the peer average of \$105, resulting in the ASRS being approximately 31 percent less administratively expensive than our peers. This low-cost, high service model has been achieved by a combination of organizational philosophy, long-term planning, action orientation, and a marginal cost versus marginal benefit approach to decision-making and resource allocation.

We believe that this model has served members well and will continue to do so. It is the core of

maintaining a sustainable benefit plan for our members, and we look forward to being a part of your future retirement!

ASRS News from website, Sept. 30, 2021

2022 Convention Will Be Virtual



The Board of Directors voted at the September 27th Board meeting to have a virtual Convention/Annual Meeting in June. The Board felt that even though it's looking better for meeting in person, it is hard to predict what might happen in the new year with COVID variants. We also discussed that some members may still feel uneasy about returning to an in-person setting.

The Convention is planned for **Tuesday, June 7th, from 10:00-2:30 with a half hour break from 12:00-12:30**. It will be much like last year with speakers, business meetings, and a Time of Remembrance service. Even though the Board realizes that meeting virtually doesn't



allow for the same level of camaraderie, it is still a nice way to stay connected to our members across Arizona.

The Convention Committee will be meeting after the new year to make further plans and discuss ways to help support the Scholarship Committee.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the Convention Committee team for doing such a wonderful job in putting together the 2021 event. **I hope all members will mark their calendars and plan to join us!**

Barb Weber, 2022 Convention Chair

2022 Convention will be coming to your computer, tablet or phone!



is proud to partner with AASRA to provide you a number of helpful benefits.

These benefits available through your association include:

- Cancer coverage
 - Hearing solutions
 - Life Insurance
 - Emergency air and ground evacuation
 - Deeply discounted Restaurant.com gift cards
 - Deals on electronics and other products
- ...and much, much more!

To find out more, visit www.myAMBAbenefits.info/aasra or call 800-258-7041

18 months. She stopped working to care for her son during treatment and recovery. Her one vision during this time was to see him walk through the doors of kindergarten as a healthy five-year old. Her vision became a reality in 2017 when he started kindergarten with his peers. It was at that time that Barbara realized the incredible role that educators play in children’s lives. She became a paraprofessional in her son’s school library and after two years of working at the school, realized her life’s calling was to be a teacher. Her goal is to be a 3rd grade teacher at a Title 1 school after completing her student teaching next semester. She emphasized repeatedly how much the generosity and kindness of AASRA has meant to her and her family.

Alice Reule, Scholarship Foundation Executive Secretary

Donate to the AASRA Scholarship Foundation

Why donate? You are contributing to a fund which will provide scholarship assistance in the amount of \$2,000 to a student usually in their final year in student teaching at one of the state universities.

A donation gives a “warm fuzzy feeling” knowing that you are impacting a college student’s life in a positive manner. You will receive a donation letter for your tax purposes as the Scholarship Foundation is a 501(c)(3) charity.

It was suggested by a member, if every member of AASRA would donate just \$10 we would have funds to cover the scholarships each year and even raise the amount to at least \$2500. Just a thought.

Fundraising for the AASRA Scholarship has been hard during these trying times. Donations are greatly needed. Won’t you give to impact a future educator?

Please make out your donation checks to **AASRA Scholarship Foundation**. Mail the check to our foundation treasurer: Marge Threewit, 1413 W Piute Ave, Phoenix, AZ 85027-4616.

Thank you for your support of the AASRA Scholarship Foundation.



Barbara Anderson: NAU Scholarship Reception



On Friday, October 1, the annual NAU Scholarship Reception was held in Flagstaff. Marge Threewit Scholarship Foundation Treasurer and Alice Reule Executive Secretary of the AASRA Scholarship Foundation attended the two-hour event. **Barbara Anderson, the NAU recipient from Tucson**, was in attendance along with her husband and two delightful sons.

Why did she go into education? She was in public relations and marketing for 20 years until her older son was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia at

What's Been Happening

3A VP Report 1-25 & 9-27 2021

Saguaro Unit has continued to meet in person at Rudy's BBQ backroom but will start Zoom meetings in February. They have had several speakers from Hospice of the Valley (Ryan's House - donated food and collected gift cards for the residents; Many types of dementia; and Lee Fernwault from the Department of Education speaking on "Troops to Teachers" program. Phoenix-Scottsdale is not currently meeting. July- Saguaro had a planning session and began meeting in September. Phoenix/Scottsdale hasn't resumed meetings.

District 3B VP Report, 9- 27-21

Westside met in person on September 1st at the Glendale Main Library. Jerry Holmes spoke to members about the support AASRA receives from AARP and the work of the ARSC , the advocacy group that helps to protect our pension system. He also presented the President's Award to Joe Carter and Barb Weber.

Jerry also introduced Mary Henderson, AASRA's President-Elect, Mary is the Past President of the Sahuaro Unit and will be transitioning to AASRA State President during the coming year. Westside President Margery Webb introduced Liz Draco who is the new AMBA representative.

Northwest met via Zoom on September 9th. Member Debbie Shelton introduced Marie Brennan, Director of the Deer Valley Education Foundation. Marie is the recipient of the *Mary Anne Vath Beacon of Light Award* for 2021. The Northwest Unit gives this award annually to a member of the community who goes above and beyond in their support of public education. Marie spoke to members about several programs that she oversees. Hall of Flame Museum was the latest program.

District 6 VP Report 9-27-21

Pima County Unit has 174 members. 70 of these members hold lifetime memberships. There are also 117 members belonging to AASRA.

PCSRA continues to hold monthly meetings from September to May using the ZOOM platform. We are looking forward to resuming our in-person luncheons when the pandemic allows.

The September 9th meeting offered our members the opportunity to hear Vivian Harte of the League of Women Voters of Greater Tucson. Ms. Harte presented a very informative program about voter suppression activities taking place in Arizona and elsewhere. However, all news was not bleak. There are some states with legislative activity meant to encourage voting.

Our major fundraiser, of course, is collecting for a scholarship for a deserving education student at the University of Arizona.

PCSRA's Book Club is still going strong. Book Club members meet monthly to discuss the "Book of the Month".

District 7 VP Report 9-27-21, District 7 is composed of two units; the **Huachuca Area** and the **San Pedro**. HASRA members represent school retirees from schools situated in the Southwestern portion of Cochise County, Arizona. The San Pedro Unit draws most of its membership from schools found in the Northwestern corner of the county. San Pedro has begun meeting again this fall. Huachuca Area is reorganizing after losing its long serving leader.

District 8 VP Report 9-27-21 Copper Center Unit and Graham-Greenlee County Unit have not resumed meeting. Each of them is having leadership and membership concerns.

Katrina Unit (District 1 with few AASRA members), Sedona area, met in October eating lunch with getting to know us time. Members traveled to Rainbow Acres. It is a Christian community with heart that empowers persons with developmental disabilities to live to their fullest potential with dignity and purpose. It provides exceptional housing, life-enriching programs, and loving, holistic care in a safe, vibrant, inclusive ranch-style community. The Lago Trust founded by Jim and Barbara Lago furnishes homes and property for new residential communities.

Yuma County Unit (Dist. 4) has not met in years, but has ADD members who are still a part of AASRA.

Kingman Area Unit (District 5) meets regularly and has an active membership. This fall it held its annual school supply drive.

East Valley Unit (District 2) – June, 2021 Report

East Valley has maintained a membership of 123. We met our goal giving 2 -\$1000.00 EVSRA scholarships. The scholarships were awarded to the ASU College of Education for the 2020-2021 school year. Our Scholarship Committee raised money for the scholarship fund by holding a December Holiday Basket Raffle and a Spring Bookmark Raffle.

Goal for 2021-2022: 2 -\$1000.00 scholarships All events and programs cancelled due to Covid pandemic.

Pinal County Unit had no report.

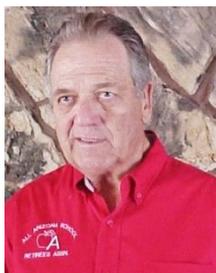
Remembering Two Presidents



Garry York (8-20-2020), a member of Westside Unit, served as AASRA President in 2001- 2003. After serving as president, he became the first executive director of AASRA handling the

chores of the office enabling future presidents to give more time to units and members plus allowing outlying area leaders to become AARSAs president. Garry served on the Scholarship Foundation Board and handled the selection of recipients. He had an impact on shaping the today's AASRA. He taught in the Cartwright District and served as a Cartwright Board member after he retired. Gary always had a smile and a joke to share.

Roger Tabar (8-25-2021), served many years as president of the Huachuca Area Unit. Roger began his AASRA service as the Community Participation Chairman, and became a President Elect. Roger was



installed in 2017 as AASRA President, but had to resign because of health conditions before he chaired his first Board meeting. He continued to be active in his local unit. He raised exotic livestock in Cochise County. Roger was a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army and served two tours in Vietnam.

NRTA Advocacy Conference

Along with other AASRA Board & Unit members, I recently attended “virtually” the National Retired Teacher Association (NRTA) National Advocacy Conference. Last year there was no conference, but in previous years the conference was held in person in the Washington, DC area.

Representatives from nearly all states attend the conference. Because of NRTA's subsidiary nature to AARP, much of the conference is spent talking about AARP's legislative priorities.

This year those priorities include: Prescription Drug pricing, tax credit for family caregivers, adding dental, hearing and vision benefits to Medicare, expanded paid leave, expanded health coverage subsidies, expansion of Home and Community Based Services (HCBS), expanded Medicaid coverage, and support for federal auto-IRA pension programs and expanded tax credit.

More information on AARP targets can be found at <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/politics/advocacy/2021/01/1090303-2021-federal-legislative-priorities-brochure-final.pdf>

At past Advocacy Conferences, NRTA representatives from various states would swarm out of the conference on the last day to prescheduled appointments with federal legislators. At those appointments we would lobby for that year's AARP priorities. This year most of those appointments were held virtually with members of Congress. Many, if not all, of Arizona's House members were contacted.

AARP's foci are not the only issues that are discussed at the Advocacy Conference. The first working day is devoted to *public pension advocacy*. *Despite the problems we have in Arizona with*

outside organizations attempting to alter ASRS, I am always reminded of how good a system we have compared to other states.

NRTA contracts with various research firms and think tanks in order to acquire current data and information on pension issues in all the states. The most current information is shared by presenters at the conference and the opportunity is provided to talk with and listen to other state leaders on their efforts at pension advocacy. Each state pension system is unique, as are the problems they face.

This year was not any different except, because of the virtual nature, there were no informal moments to inquire further or share with reps from other states. Column space limits my ability to distribute all the links provided, but here's two.
<https://www.nirsonline.org/reports/pensionomics21/>

The National Institute on Retirement Security (NIRS) shows that public pensions, such as ASRS, allow retirees to continue to be major economic contributors rather than dependent on state support.
<https://www.clubvita.us/collaborative-research/longevity-inequality-in-the-us>

Club Vita shows that **recipients of Defined Benefit pension plans, such as ASRS, live significantly longer than the general US population.**

I will attempt to insert more pension information in future AASRA newsletters. For now, especially during the Arizona Legislature session, please look for informational emails from Joe Carter or myself. As you know there are several organizations that would like to change many of the underlying tenets of ASRS. It is only through your endeavors that we can hope to push back against those misguided attempts at change.

Jerry Holmes – AASRA President & AARP Liaison

How the Units Managed

During the months the country was locked down, some units kept on making contacts with their members. Others just shut down. Some slept and are waking up!

Those units that kept in contact had Zoom meetings and speakers. **Northwest** made a great effort and its members showed their appreciation by going online. Some of the programs were: ASRS, Lincoln, Legislative updates, and Western Spirit Museum. **Westside** had Zoom meetings and had glitches happen. The September meeting was a hybrid – 14 in person at a library and 3 on Zoom. The unit is working hard in getting board members. Sending out emails was a trial with the internet provider. **Pima County** - Even during the pandemic stricken year of 2020, with slightly over 150 active PCSRA members came through for their community. It had 23 individuals report 13,508 hours volunteer hours and monetary contributions for the 2020. Newsletters helped the members feel connected. The unit met by Zoom. The Book Club discussed some very interesting books. Programs on education in Pima County and Mission Garden Outreach Coordinator brought the Old Pueblo to life. **Saguaro** was back planning for the rest of 2021 and for 2022. **San Pedro** has been having meetings this fall.

The bigger units worked hard and some were more effective than others. Many of the smaller units just stayed home. Some called each other, sent emails, and briefly talked about meeting. Members have lost interest, don't want to go out in public and some have faded away.

It is time to REBUILD. Members, Units, and AASRA Board must **work to retain, recapture, and recruit members.** Don't give up. We just restart our engines and work to help grow our membership. There is a membership form on the last page of this newsletter. **It takes all of us to REBUILD the units and AASRA.** Boost Membership Now. Carry a membership form.

Let's Make AASRA Grow!





AASRA Members: **DONUT we'd do without YOU!**

Thank you for being a member of AASRA and showing how you care! Unit Presidents found ways to stay connected with using ZOOM for their meetings or new places to meet. The care of giving continues! Encourage others to become members and promote our goals.

THANK YOU for all you do **around** AASRA!



Membership Dues are DUE!



AASRA annual dues are due by January 1st!

Thank you for being on Auto Dues Deduct (ADD)!

If you would like to apply for ADD, no need to pay yearly!

Submit a new Application form.

Send dues and/or applications to

State Treasurer, Katie Elgar, 2519 W Night Owl Ln Phoenix, AZ 85085

Checks are made out to **AASRA**.



ALL ARIZONA SCHOOL RETIREES' ASSOCIATION (AASRA)

Membership Application Date: _____

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail _____ Phone: _____

Check desired MEMBERSHIP

_____ \$30 Annual Dues (Checks payable to AASRA)

_____ \$36 Pima County Unit (Tucson)

_____ \$12 Friends of AASRA

_____ **ADD- Auto Dues Deduct** (preferred) ASRS pension recipients only

 ADD- Last 4 digits Soc Security _____

 ADD- Signature _____

Mail to: Katie Elgar, AASRA Treasurer

2519 W Night Owl Ln Phoenix, AZ 85085-5016

Unit _____ or _____ "Member at large" or

_____ Put me in a unit.