



NEWSLETTER

SERVING ALL AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS RETIREES IN NORTHEAST OHIO
AN ORGANIZATION CONCERNED WITH RETIRED EDUCATORS AND THEIR NEEDS
THE HALLE BUILDING, 1228 EUCLID AVE, SUITE 300, CLEVELAND, OHIO 44115

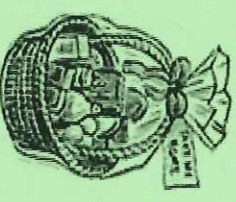
Get 279-R news on
the CTU website:
www.ctu279.org

March 2025 President's Report

Scholarship Committee Request: Basket Raffle Items Needed!

The popular Scholarship Basket Raffle will return at our annual luncheon on **Thursday, June 19, 2025**. Please mark the date in your calendar.

The Scholarship Committee will begin collecting donations of items for the baskets at the monthly meetings. They would appreciate any help from 279-R members who have items to donate.



If you have any new, unused items that you would like to donate to the basket raffle, please bring them to the March 18, April 15, or May 20 meetings. Gift cards are much appreciated, too.

Remember, 100% of proceeds from the basket raffle, the monthly raffles, and scholarship donations go into 279-R's Scholarship Fund for Cleveland State University. Thank you in advance for your help with this project.

Donations to Scholarship Fund

Thank you to those who continue to donate to the scholarship fund. Recent donors include **David Hancock**. Thank you---we appreciate your support!

Remember, all scholarship donation checks must be made out to: 279-R NEO AFT. On the memo line of the check, write Scholarship Fund.

If we missed listing your scholarship donation, please contact us at **216-482-2281**. All scholarship donations go into the 279-R Scholarship Fund at Cleveland State University.

How to Contact Us

Our direct numbers are: Membership Information **216-482-2281**, Pension Line (STRS or SERS) **216-482-2282**; other calls **216-482-2280**. If no one answers, please leave a message spelling your last name, and phone number. You will receive a call as soon as possible. We encourage 279-R members to access our retiree link from the CTU website. The website address is listed under the letterhead of this newsletter. Check it periodically for other news and updates.

Enjoy the spring weather, and have a happy St. Patrick's Day!

Hazel Hicks, 279-R President



After the long, cold, snowy winter of 2024-2025, we eagerly welcomed March 1, the official first day of meteorological spring, and look forward to March 20, the spring equinox and first day of astronomical spring.

The cold weather didn't deter 85 hardy members who attended our February monthly meeting despite temperatures in the teens! We heard an impressive speaker, Randell McShepard, one of the co-founders of Rid-All Green Partnership Urban Agriculture and Youth Education. His non-profit turned an empty, forgotten area in Cleveland's Kinsman neighborhood into an urban farm where they grow produce to bring healthy, local food to area institutions and citizens.

Rid-All partners with collaborators to educate youth and adults on environmental stewardship, training others to reclaim fallen urban fields and transform them into productive plots of land that offer healthy local food. They have built two green houses, four hoop houses, and an aquaponics fishery. They created and sell "black gold," a super nutritious soil made from discarded produce, wood chips, coffee grounds, and leftover brewery hops.

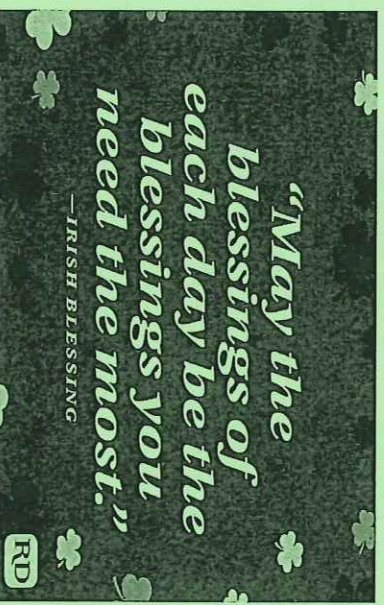
The organization has a restaurant that is open on Tuesdays and Fridays. It now owns and runs the Farmer Jones Indoor Farmer's Market at 16701 Broadway Avenue in Maple Hts. The Rid-All organization has received national and international notice for its innovative, inspiring work.

For more information about this remarkable organization, go to their website at www.ridall.org.

279-R Election of Officers

The 279-R Nominating Committee will present its slate of candidates to serve as officers on the Executive Council for the 2025-2027 term at the March 18 General Meeting. The Nominating Committee members are Chairperson Carmine Stewart, Artis Arnold, Marsha Denis, and Martha Harris.

According to the Nominations and Elections procedures in the 279-R Constitution and By-Laws, if there are no other nominations, the slate presented in by the Nominating Committee shall be declared elected by general consent, and balloting will not be conducted. If there are additional candidates for any office, a secret-ballot election will be held in April, under the direction of the Nominating Committee.



Legislative/Political Update

The first two months of the New Year have certainly proven to be a roller coaster ride, both on a federal and state level. And like the movie Groundhog Day, we seem destined to repeat the chaotic years of the first Trump administration and the attacks on education and our communities coming out of Columbus.

On a federal level, Dan MacDonald and I participated in a Zoom meeting with AFT President Randi Weingarten and our former U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown regarding the passage of the Social Security Fairness Act. Both President Weingarten and Senator Brown praised our efforts over the last twenty years in getting this law passed. The repeal of both WEP (Windfall Elimination Provision) and GPO (Government Pension Offset) will benefit many of our members and over 3 million people nationwide.

While many of the details have yet to be worked out and that may take up to a year, people impacted are advised to check your status at www.ssa.gov. The front page of the website will have updated information on the Social Security Fairness Act and pertinent information. President Weingarten ended our meeting with a call for all retirees to organize and be vigilant to protect social security, Medicaid, and Medicare around any attacks from the Trump administration.

We have already seen President Trump issue executive orders and Elon Musk order directives dismantling federal departments, laying off federal workers, and cutting prescription drugs.

Their recent call to eliminate the Department of Education would have a disastrous impact on students with disabilities and students in poverty. Talk of laying off postal workers and privatizing the post office surely will be felt by everyone. While details on how these will affect our members has yet to be seen, and many initiatives are being challenged in court, it is abundantly clear that President Trump is following the Project 2025 playbook and both the Republican-controlled House and Senate will do nothing to stop him.

Our strength is in our membership and we continue to organize around protecting our members, our schools and our communities in the upcoming months. Stay tuned.

On a state level, Governor Mike DeWine and the Ohio General Assembly opened the year with attacks on Labor and Education.

The Governor's budget strips public education of over **\$100 million**, and attacks seniority and continuing contract status for teachers.

In the Ohio Senate, Senate Bill 1, a higher education bill attacking collective bargaining and the right to strike and limiting professional rights of professors, was passed and moved to the Ohio House where it will likely pass. A Right-to-Work bill is being circulated to prohibit public sector union rights.

As these bills and the budget make their way through the General Assembly, 279-R along with the OFT and AFL-CIO will be participating in **Lobby Days on May 20-21**.

We are looking into getting a bus to take interested members to Columbus and hope to have more details in our April Newsletter. For now, **mark your calendars for MAY 20-21! We need you!**

Finally, while no state and federal elections are scheduled for November, school boards, local elections, and school levies will be on the ballot. School board elections have become increasingly critical in recent years.

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Please keep informed and active around these issues, and let us know if we can help in any way.

As always, I would encourage everyone to sign up for weekly legislative updates at:

<https://www.honestyforohioeducation.org>.

The site includes a legislative tracker and a communications tool that makes it easy to contact your legislators.

David Quolke, Legislative Chair



Scholarship

The winners of the February 50/50

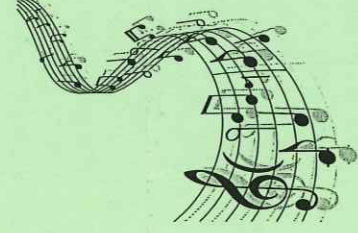
Scholarship Raffle were

Janice Capezzuto and Juanita Flinner.

The winners of the Consolation Baskets were
**Lynette Evans, Judy Gilson,
and Theresa Ormandy.**

Thank you to 279-R members for your continued generous support of our scholarship program.

Z. Harold Davis, Jr.



To join 279-R's singing group, the Melodeers, please contact **Donita Rollins** by phone at

216-409-8259

or by email at

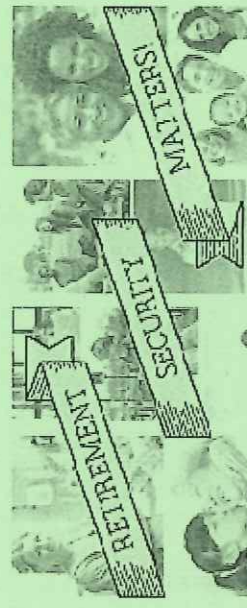
cobbd52@sbcglobal.net.

Practices will be held at the

Beachwood Branch

of the Cuyahoga Library,

25501 Shaker Blvd. in Beachwood.



STRS February Board Meeting Report

Although there were no matters presented that required immediate Investment Committee action at this time, the following topics were presented: Updates and review of the Asset-Liability study by STRS Consultants, the Meketa group; Summary of Investment Activity report for December 2024 and January 2025; Initial Proxy Voting Summary Policy; Meketa Quarterly Performance Review as of December 31, 2024; Semiannual derivatives exposure as of December 31, 2025.

The review of the asset/liability study seeks to incorporate STRS Board guidance on minimum and maximum constraints on 2025-2026 Investment portfolio, and output for the Health Care Plan.

The committee's next step is to solicit feedback from trustees on potential policy asset allocation options, which would allow opportunity for additional measures and considerations.

(continued on next page)

The A/L study is to be completed and adopted in March 2025.

Decoupling Retirement and Health Care Plans

Historically, retirement and health care plan assets have been invested by the same strategic allocation. Consultants have separated the assets and liabilities of these plans for modeling purposes, with the goal of answering the question: Do the different liability projections require different strategic allocations?

The conclusion: There are no material reasons why the two plans cannot be invested by the same strategic allocations. Optimal allocations appear to be nearly identical.

December Returns and Activity

Total fund net return was =1.4% finishing the first half of fiscal 2024 at +3.6%. The total 2024 calendar year net return was +9.98% (annualized +8.21 per STRS).

January preliminary fund net return was +1.9%. Preliminary total fund net return for fiscal year to dates is +5.6%. Preliminary total investment assets ended January at approximately \$97.8 billion. Higher by \$2.5 billion in fiscal year 2025.

The executive search committee is continuing its finalization process and selection of a permanent Executive Director, as well as a Chief Investment Officer, amid discussion concerning the 2025/2026 budget.

Edward Gin was named Deputy Executive Director of Finance and Chief Financial Officer. Interim Chief Investment Officer transition is in progress. Aaron DiCenzo was named to be the Interim CIO of STRS, effective April 1, 2025.

2024 Tax Info

The final 2024 tax reconciliations are complete. Tax statements were available to recipients through their online personal accounts in January, and paper versions were mailed ahead of the January 31 deadline.

The next STRS board meeting is scheduled for March 19-21, 2025.

Rob Walters

SERS Message:

“We Are Different”

This message is from SERS Executive Director Richard Stensrud and the SERS Retiree Focus, Winter 2025.

There are five state retirement systems in Ohio, but SERS stands apart from the other systems.

Membership includes public school employees in positions that do not require a teaching or administrator's license or registration; employees of private employers who provide services common to the normal daily operation of a school under a contract; and non-teaching employees of certain public institutions of high education.

Our membership is not the only aspect that makes us different.

Unlike our counterparts, SERS is 76.61% funded for pensions over a 21-year period. It has \$18.5 billion in assets, is the 58th largest public pension fund in the nation, and uses a three-year highest Final Average Salary to calculate pension benefits.

Our most important role during the year is advocating for you [SERS members].

We do this in a number of ways: individual meetings with legislators, attending legislative Ohio Retirement Study Council monthly meetings, and in our interaction with media and representatives from

other organizations. As retirees, your work has been invaluable to the successful operation of schools across the state, and we want everyone else to know that too.

We deliver the message that SERS is transparent, accountable, engaged, and most of all sustainable.

Over the last 10 years, our investment returns are in the top 2% of all pension systems on the Wilshire pension fund universe, and over the last four years, we have the highest returns with the lowest risk of all the plans. This year, our private equity returns have been recognized by the American Investment Council as having the 7th best returns over the last 10 years compared to all other public pension plans.

SERS is financially sound, and we continue to make progress on our funding while delivering your benefits.

Finally, the Board voted to approve a 2.5% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) increase for eligible recipients in 2024. This was greater than the CPI of 2.3%. At its September 2024 meeting, the Board approved another 2.5% COLA increase for eligible benefit recipients in 2025.

We are undeniably different. We try to prove that every day---not just to legislators and advocacy groups---but to you, our membership.

**Submitted by Dan MacDonald,
Executive Director**



John Roberts III passed on January 11, 2025. Send online condolences at www.calhounfuneral.com.

JoAnn Roux passed on January 21, 2025. Send condolences to Valerie S. White at 2752 Myrtle Street, Arcadia, LA 71001.

Shirley Lyon's daughter, Nichole Saxon, passed on January 25, 2025. Send condolences to Shirley at 26205 Seville Drive, Apt. 102, Beachwood, OH 44122.

Rosella Markusic Quayle passed on February 2, 2025. Send online condolences at

www.johnsonromito.com.

Carolyn Johnson passed on February 2, 2025.

Send online condolences at

www.calhounfuneral.com.

Teresa Green, former 279-R President, fell and broke her hip and femur. Send get-well wishes to her at 500 Walton Way #122, Roswell, GA 30076, or call her at 440-655-3060.

Theresa Ormandy 216-741-6764
Please call the Sunshine Committee when there is an illness or death in our 279-R family. However, please DO NOT CALL the committee with other questions, issues or information.



Spring is the time of year
when it's summer in the
sun and winter in the
shade.
Spring is when you feel
like whistling, even with a
shoe full of slush.

Cleveland Teachers Union, 279-R
The Halle Building
1228 Euclid Ave., Suite 300
Cleveland, OH 44115

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Hazel Hicks
Staff:
Pamela Hummer
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DONATIONS TO 279-R SCHOLARSHIP FUND

We appreciate your continued support of 279-R's annual scholarships for Cleveland State University students. If you can help us assist students, please consider donating to the 279-R Scholarship Fund by sending a check made out to **279-R NEO AFT**, in memory of or in honor of any person you choose. **Thank you!**

Z. Harold Davis, Jr.

YES, I want to make a donation to the 279-R Scholarship Fund. I am enclosing a check **payable to 279-R** in the amount of _____.

Write **"SCHOLARSHIP FUND"** on the memo line of your check and mail to **279-R, The Halle Building, 1228 Euclid Avenue, Suite 300, Cleveland, OH 44115.**

Your Name: _____

My donation is in honor of (circle or write in name/names):

Morris Bayer, Sam Goldstein, Olive Mary Schreiner, George Taylor,
Edgar Whitley, all of the preceding, and/or (please print):



**The next 279-R meeting is on TUESDAY, March 18, 2025
at 11:30 a.m. at Local 120 Pipefitters Hall,
6305 Halle Drive, Valley View 44125.**

**Women's History Month Speaker: Chichi Knemere,
on Disparity of Black Women in Cleveland**

Looking ahead to **Tuesday, April 15, 2025:**
Spring Planters for Sale from CMSD's West Park Greenhouse
& East Tech High School's Agricultural Program

Alzheimer's Awareness

An estimated 6.9 million Americans age 65 and older---about 1 in 9---were living with Alzheimer's dementia in 2024; 73% were age 75 and older. It kills more than breast and prostate cancer combined. While there has been some promising research, as of yet, there is no cure.

To help reduce the risk of Alzheimer's/dementia as you age, reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease, which has been linked with an increased risk of Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia. Healthy lifestyle choices, those same choices that prevent many other diseases, are recommended: Exercise regularly. Manage stress effectively. Engage in social activities. Stop smoking. Have a healthy diet. Get quality sleep. Maintain a healthy weight-height ratio.

Did you know that a good attitude can help, too? Greater mental well-being that includes optimism and a positive attitude is associated with reduced risk of dementia, according to a report from the Global Council on Brain Health (GCBH).

There's a difference between normal age-related memory slips, such as forgetting where the car keys are, and more serious signs of memory loss, such as forgetting what car keys are used for. Early symptoms of Alzheimer's disease include frequent memory loss, confusion about locations, taking longer to accomplish normal daily tasks, trouble handling money and paying bills, loss of spontaneity, and mood and personality changes. If you have a decline in your memory or thinking that affects your ability to perform any of your daily routines, ask your doctor for a screening.

For more information, facts, and resources, go to the Alzheimer's Association website at www.alz.org.

