

ERS To Award Small COLA and One Across-the-Board Bonus

By Chuck Freedman

In anticipation of the recent Annual Meeting (April 20, 2023) of the ERS Board of Trustees, our Board and Legislative Team requested an opportunity to address the Trustees in person before they voted on post-retirement benefit adjustments. Sadly, the ERS staff was not able to accommodate our request. In lieu of providing oral testimony, we submitted the following statement, requesting that it be placed in the packet of information provided to the Trustees. We are not aware of whether that request was honored. Here in their entirety are the remarks we would have made, had we had the opportunity:

“Madame Chair, members of the Board, Director Potvin, and executive staff:

We in GSRA thank you for your continued accessibility and openness for discussion, including your inclusion of this statement in your board meeting information packet. We believe that ERS and GSRA have achieved greater understanding in the last few years for the benefit of our mutual members. We were extremely pleased that Jim Potvin, Angie Surface and Kelly Moody could attend both our lunch for the joint retirement committees and dinner for retirement chairs, vice-chair Franklin, Homer Bryson of your board, and TRS executives.

We also appreciate ERS’s efforts the last few years to obtain prefunding for COLAs and for funding the most recent benefit adjustments for FYs 2023 and 2024. We understand and hope these will continue for the foreseeable future.

Last month we sent you the results of a recent survey of our mutual members. We hope that you had time to read and digest those results. These hard, factual data clearly demonstrate that the great majority of ERS beneficiaries have had a marked decline in purchasing power in their postretirement years, many a significant decline. Almost half of the respondents have experienced a reduction in their standards of living in at least half of twelve areas queried. These experiences included delayed paying rent/mortgage and/or utility bills, delayed filling prescriptions and/or obtaining medical services, and – most telling – having to return to work to make ends meet.

We remind you that your retirees *planned* for their retirement years based on assurances of annually compounding COLAs, which have not materialized significantly in recent years.

More than ever, retirees need your additional help in restoring the annual 3% COLAs as speedily as possible. Establishing the mechanism for prefunding COLAs has been a huge step for doing that. Your advocacy in obtaining full funding will be most appreciated.

We understand from our legislative sources that, as we have advocated, the funding for the '23 and '24 benefits is intended be both spread equally among all retirees. We also understand that will mean roughly \$500 per eligible retiree.



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We hope you understand the same. This will be in keeping with Governor Kemp's and the General Assembly's distributing across-the-board pay raises to targeted groups.

We also request that the distributions be done as soon as possible so as to provide needed relief as soon as possible. For FY 2024, this would be consistent with what you have done in most prior years.

And, to ensure the best possibility for continued funding, we request that the appropriate amounts be added to the ADEC.

We thank you for considering these requests. As GSRA continues its mission of protecting the promised retirement benefits for our members, we will welcome the Board standing with us to accomplish the statutory intent of "...maintaining essentially no less purchasing power for a beneficiary in his post-retirement years..."

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,
Beverly Littlefield, President
Georgia State Retirees Association"

As most of our members have learned by now, the Trustees voted to provide a one-time, across-the-board supplemental payment of approximately \$500 to each eligible beneficiary, with some exceptions. These supplemental payments are funded from the \$26.7 Million appropriated through the FY'23 Supplemental budget. The one-time payment will issue by the end of June 2023. The Trustees also authorized an annually compounding Cost of Living Adjustment of 0.50%, effective July 1, 2023.

The Trustees have deferred a decision on how or when the agency will make a distribution of any post-retirement benefit adjustment as a result of an identical appropriation of \$26.7 Million in the FY'24 budget.

So, we still have more questions than answers, but will continue our work over the summer, advocating for an across-the-board adjustment of approximately \$500 to be paid from the FY'24 appropriation, as soon as possible. We will of course begin strategizing on ways to obtain a meaningful COLA for FY'25 and keep you posted on developments as they happen. And, as always, we value your support through your membership.

The ERS COLA advisory can be accessed using this link: [ERS COLA Benefit Adjustment 2023](#)

Find your Georgia Legislators

Use this link to easily determine your current state legislators by entering your address.

[Open States - Find Your Legislators](#)

GSRA 2023 Annual Meeting Update: Make Reservations NOW!

By Kip Mann

The **GSRA Annual Meeting is still scheduled for October 9-10, 2023** on the politically insensitive Columbus Day Holiday, so we've changed our slogan for the Meeting from "Spend Columbus Day in Columbus, GA" to "Spend Indigenous Peoples' Day in Columbus GA". Some of us older people are slow to update our thinking or may revert periodically... **APOLOGIES!**

Be that as it may, here's information on the upcoming meeting.

Hotel Reservations may be made online by clicking on the following link for the Marriott Hotel across from the Columbus, Georgia Convention and Trade Center (or The Columbus Ironworks as some of us remember). The room rate for GSRA Members is \$169.00 which includes all occupants of the room entitled to a breakfast in the hotel at no extra charge each morning. (This is a great deal so plan to eat well at breakfast.) The link is as follows:

<https://www.marriott.com/event-reservations/reservation-link.mi?id=1681154462219&key=GRP&app=resvlinkour>

Click on the above link ^ and you'll be taken to their own registration website fixed exclusively for GSRA by Marriott. Remember to request south tower rooms which are train free and north side tower rooms for those train aficionados for train wakeup call in the A.M. (ALL ABOARD!) For those needing a telephone # 706-324-1800 ext. # 2 also works for reservations just mention GSRA rate which includes free breakfast each day.

People have already been calling so do this quickly. If plans change you can alter your reservations until our cutoff date of **September 8th, 2023**.

Space has been reserved at the Ironworks for the meeting and a contract has been signed. Negotiations for the catering contract are being finalized and will be resolved soon. Information regarding the catered events will be forwarded as they are firmed up. At this point we plan to definitely have a reception with possible meal options located in the Convention and Trade Center or elsewhere.

It is our intent to have all these decisions made and a Registration packet provided to all members, partners, and sponsors the first week of May. Stay tuned!!!

Pension Deduction Raffle Winners

By Allan Hill

At the April Board meeting, GSRA IT guru Kevin Burke generated a random drawing from all the GSRA members enrolled in Pension Deduction to pick five winners for the Pension Deduction Raffle. And the winners are:

David Dunn of Chickamauga
Rita Hendrix of Cairo
Audrey Dixon of Atlanta
Beverly Loggins of Clermont
Dianne Dean of Waycross

The Raffle was made possible by a generous donation from one of our members to encourage more people to sign up for the pension deductions, and that effort has paid off as more members continue to sign up. Remember that by enrolling for pension deduction, you help sustain the financial stability of GSRA, ensure your ongoing membership so that you never

have to worry about renewing, and costs you only \$1.67 a month. And it's so easy to do. Simply complete the [Pension Deduction Authorization Form](#) and submit it to GSRA. It's a win-win for you and for the Association.

Thank you to our anonymous donor, and congratulations to our five winners, who will each receive a check for \$100 from GSRA.

REMINDER

The Department of Administrative Services (DoAS) has contracted with Alight Solutions LLC to manage verification of dependent coverage for Dental and Vision insurance coverages. Alight Solutions is sending letters to enrollees, including retirees, to give advance notice of the need to have available certain personal information and documents. Some of you may have already received a notice. They will be used as part of the periodic dependent re-verification process.

Alight Solutions is verified as an agent of DoAS. This is a legitimate inquiry and not a scam. Failure to respond to requests for information could result in loss of coverage/benefits.

Local Chapter News

ABC

The ABC of Douglas Chapter had their quarterly meeting at the Covered Wagon Country Buffet on April 17, 2023. Debbie Scarborough, the AIS Benefits Representative from the Association Member Benefits Advisors, presented the program and helped to sponsor the meal. Chapter President Jenny McIver reported a total of 15 attendees, but some of them left before a group picture could be taken. The ABC chapter in Douglas serves retirees and active state employees and educators in Atkinson, Bacon, and Coffee Counties. For more information on the ABC of Douglas Chapter, send an e-mail to Jenny McIver at mciver10@hotmail.com.



Some of the members in attendance at the ABC Chapter meeting in Douglas

Coosa Valley Chapter

The Coosa Valley Chapter, representing retirees and active state employees and educators in Chattooga, Floyd, Bartow, Gordon and Polk counties, met April 18, 2023 at the Sara Hightower Regional Library in Rome. According to Chapter President Dinah Brock, twenty-one regular and new members attended along with GSRA President Beverly Littlefield, President Elect Robert Riddle and GSRA Legislative Liaison Chuck Freedman. Chuck provided a very candid assessment of the situation we are facing concerning getting our COLA's restored, and what the GSRA leadership has accomplished to help us achieve that goal. Chuck also took time to address questions from the members in attendance.

Their next meeting will be August 15, 2023 at 10am. For more information about the Coosa Valley Chapter please contact Dinah Brock at ddbrock@tds.net.



Chuck Freedman answers questions from members of the Coosa Valley Chapter

CSRA Chapter

On April 25, 2023 GSRA Board members Sadie Rogers, Melissa Belk-Teague, Allan Hill and Beverly Littlefield met with thirty-four current and potential members in Evans, Columbia County, to explore revitalizing the former chapter of the Central Savannah River Area. There was much positive energy, and the chapter even signed up a new member! Several members stepped up to serve in leadership positions: Clara Brown, President; Keith Watson, Vice President; Beverly Martin, Treasurer; Sandra Schumann, Membership. The Chapter will cover Appling, Burke, Columbia, Glascock, Hancock, Jefferson, Jenkins, Lincoln, McDuffie, Richmond, Taliaferro, Warren, Wilkes Counties.

For more information about the CSRA Chapter, please contact President Clara Brown at claraabrown1010@gmail.com.



A group of enthusiastic members met to revitalize the CSRA Chapter in Evans

Southwest Georgia Chapter

The Southwest Georgia chapter met on April 12th at Albany State University's West campus. Twenty-four attendees, including five first timers, were in attendance. Special guests included Robert Riddle, the GSRA Present Elect and Chuck Freedman, GSRA Legislative Liaison.

Robert shared his professional background, why he volunteered to join the GSRA leadership team and how he wants to grow the association's membership.

Chuck discussed this year's legislative session and several bills that impact the lives of our retirees. Following his presentation Chuck responded to questions from the membership and discussed how we can get involved in the legislative process.

Their next chapter meeting is planned for July 12th. The Albany-Southwest Georgia Chapter serves 17 counties and meets on the 2nd Thursday of the first month of each calendar quarter. For more information about this chapter, contact Chapter President Robert Pollock at bobpollock111@yahoo.com.



The Southwest Georgia Chapter poses for a picture with their special guests

Valdosta Chapter

Valdosta Chapter President Ray Josey reports that eighteen people, including some new prospective members, met on April 13, 2023. The Valdosta Chapter serves GSRA members in Berrien, Brooks, Cook, Echols, Lanier, and Lowndes counties. The attendees participated in a discussion led by the chapter leadership on the 2023 Legislative Session and how it impacts the GSRA and the Employees Retirement System and how the new GSRA postcards are being used to recruit new members. Several members shared their experiences at the 2022 GSRA Annual Meeting and encouraged everyone to attend the 2023 meeting in Columbus this October. The chapter recognized James Camon for his long-time service as past Treasurer and elected Cynthia Pearson as their new Treasurer. The group also discussed the importance of improving relationships with our local legislative delegation and possible programs for future GSRA meetings. For more information on the Valdosta Chapter, contact Ray Josey at crjosey@mchsi.com.



Some of the members attending the Valdosta Chapter meeting in April

Tri-County Chapter

The Tri-County Chapter held its second quarter meeting on April 25th in the Meadows Classroom at the Roosevelt Warm Springs Institute with thirty-three (33) members in attendance. The meeting began at 11am with an opening prayer before welcoming special guests State Representative Debbie Buckner and GSRA State President-elect Robert Riddle. Representative Buckner gave a recap of the legislative session and answered questions on various topics affecting retirees. She reminded folks that this was the first year of the two-year legislative term and proposed legislation that did not get an up or down vote returns to its committee of origin for possible action in the 2024 session. She also pointed out that Governor Kemp has until May 18th to sign bills into law. Robert Riddle shared GSRA's strategic goals, legislative priorities, and ongoing initiatives. The Tri-County Social Committee provided a delicious lunch from Dinners Ready by Chad. The Tri-County local chapter consists primarily of members living in Meriwether, Talbot, and Upson counties. Members in Harris, Troup and Pike Counties are welcome as well. The next chapter meeting is tentatively planned for Tuesday, August 29th at Doodlum's Barbecue Restaurant in Woodbury. For more information about this chapter contact Chapter President Joy Evans at jjjevans@mindspring.com.



State Representative Debbie Buckner addresses the Tri-County members while Robert Riddle looks on.

Welcome new members!

MARCH				
Name	County		Name	County
Mary Adkins	DeKalb		Gwendolyn Johnson	Baldwin
Robi Brook	Hall		Teresa Johnson	Union
Martha Cabaniss	Coffee		Leslie Marshall	Rockdale
Joseph Chambers II	Out of State		Gwendolyn Price	Clayton
Vergil Coberly	DeKalb		Lisa Reid	Out of State
Janice Connally	Fulton		Patricia Row	
Cynthia Dunlap	Gwinnett		Johnnie Rudd	Paulding
Myra Flournoy	Jefferson		Phillip Smith	Newton
Sharon Hall	Baldwin		Richard Sorrell	Jones
Tryllis Hallford	DeKalb		Janice Ward	DeKalb
Michael Horton	Oglethorpe		Deborah Watson	Newton





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APCU serves State and Federal workers, retirees and their families in Georgia. Visit APCU's exhibitor table at GSRA. For more information, visit apcu.com, or call us at (404) 768-4126 or Toll-free at (800) 849-8431.

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This credit union is federally insured by the National Credit Union Administration.

APCU partners with Members Wealth Management, a financial services program, to help our members with financial planning, investments, insurance, as well as retirement and estate planning strategies.

APCU has invited Shavon Roman, a Managing Associate with Members Wealth Management, to offer a great workshop, "Money Talk 101," at GSRA. This seminar is designed to facilitate conversations around financial milestones for retirees.

Topics will include:

- ★ The importance of setting financial goals
- ★ Understanding your current financial position
- ★ Preparing for a successful retirement
- ★ Income tax considerations
- ★ What your loved ones need to know



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