

August-September 2013

Direct Line

Newsletter of West Lake Shore Unit, Illinois Retired Teachers Association

WLSU and IRTA...Your Voice in Springfield

www.wlsu.weebly.com September 26 Bus Trip—A Bit of Blarney, p 5

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Representatives Jeanne Ives, Tom Morrison, and Senator Oberweis are touting a master plan for a "total overhaul" of the pension system because they feel the gutting which would be done by the passage of the Madigan plan or any other plan out there would not be sufficient cutting of our earned and Constitutionally promised benefits. Their "final solution," which is backed by the Illinois Policy Institute and Americans for Tax Relief, is to put all educators in 401(K) plans to which the individual would contribute 8% from each paycheck and the state would contribute 7%. As if the latter part of that statement isn't ridiculous enough, Ives and Morrison extol their idea by saying educators would finally be treated like adults and allowed to invest their own money and supervise their retirement accounts. There is no mention of whom educators could use for brokers. Getting suspicious?

Before we all jump up and rally around Ives, Morrison, and Oberweis as they expect we should, let's look at the facts. First, if you have not seen the *60 Minutes* segment about how the 401(K) retirement accounts of many have been wiped out, leaving them bleak futures, working till at least age 70 or 75, or the *Frontline* documentary which can be accessed On Demand if you have Comcast, which explains how fees paid to brokers for 401(K)s can eat up to 2/3 of your savings, please look for them.

Then read Al Popowits' evaluation of 401(K)s which he sent to Ives, and which she initially answered with claptrap from Americans for Tax Relief and then ignored when followed up with Al's rebuttal. It seems her attitude is: Don't confuse me with facts; I have already made up my mind.

Below is Al's rebuttal to Ives.

- 1. "The investor in 401(K)s must accept the market risk for his investments". Explanation: when a teacher is covered by a defined benefit pension plan such as TRS, the pension plan assumes the market risk for the investments. The teacher receives the same monthly benefit regardless of whether the Dow Jones Average falls 350 points (as it did yesterday, June 21) or increases. The reason for this is that the multimillion-dollar pension fund (TRS) absorbs the market risk for down markets. Because of its huge financial resources, the highly professional talent that it hires, and its highly diversified portfolio, it is far more capable than the average teacher to absorb the changes in prices of equity and fixed income investments that occur with the ups and downs of the stock market.
- 2. "Investors must pay the retail rate for managing their money." TRS pays a much lower rate for managing its money than does the average 401(K) investor. The reason is that TRS has hundreds of millions of dollars to manage, and highly competent investment advisors can charge less than one percent in fees and do very well because of the huge sums involved. TRS can also purchase assets at a far lower cost because they buy in large quantities. On the other hand, the 401(K) investors with their piddling sums are charged a far higher fee...some over 4%. That means that the investment must yield a return of 4% just to cover the fees, much less make a profit. Therefore, the return that the 401(K) participant receives is far less than what is received by TRS.
- 3. "The average investor is psychologically unable to make good investment decisions." Money is a very personal thing. It is fraught with emotions. I personally have been investing for over sixty years. My father, who was involved in real estate, began coaching me in the handling of large sums of money when I was sixteen years old. Even with all my experience and training I still must monitor my own emotions when making investments. The average investor is a poor

custodian of his own investments; e.g., he buys when the market is up and sells when it is down; the experienced investor does exactly the opposite.

- 4. "The average investor's financial education and experience is inadequate to the task of managing his money." The average American receives little or no training in the handling of larger sums of money. Many cannot even balance their own checkbooks or pay off their credit cards. Too many make partial monthly payments and pay high interest charges. These are not people who are qualified to make investment decisions.
- 5. **"Financial advisors available to workers with small accounts tend to be third rate..."** I know through experience and hearsay evidence that the quality of the financial advice available to small investors varies greatly from grossly incompetent to not so bad. The really competent advisors earn huge fees handling large sums of money.
- 6. "The investor often "borrows" from his 401(K) during family emergencies..." Frequently insurance policies and 401(K)s (aside from banks) are the only sources of large sums available to the average worker. It is very tempting to borrow from money intended to finance future retirements. When faced with an immediate emergency or an obligation decades in the future, it is not surprising that the average person solves the current problem with resources he sees will not be needed for 20 or 30 years.
- 7. "At the end of his working life the average worker's 401(K) does not provide him with adequate retirement income." The maximum benefit under Social Security is approximately \$25,000, which only a minority of workers receive. If you check with Fidelity and Vanguard funds (which hold millions of 401(K)s) they will confirm that the average account they hold contains less than \$200,000. Even with Social Security this sum will not provide an adequate retirement income. The general rule is that if you want a sum of money to last a lifetime, you should not take out more than 4% annually.
- 8. Given all of the above I can only conclude that those who advocate substituting 401(K)s for defined benefit plans are either mean spirited or do not understand the financial facts of life.

Anyone interested in the 401)K)s as investment vehicles should read the *New York Times* article entitled "Limiting the 401(K) Finder's Fee" in the June 22nd edition. The article discusses the excessive fees paid by investors in administrative and management fees and how major corporations such as Kraft and Caterpillar have been found guilty of neglecting their fiduciary responsibilities to their employees. The importance of fees in the final value of retirement accounts cannot be over stated. According to the graph in the article, the difference between a fee of 0.5% and 1.5% in an initial \$25,000 investment over 20 years (assuming a 7% annual investment gain...which is very optimistic) would make a difference of 17% or \$15,000 in the final return a worker receives; the effect would be even more devastating with a more realistic 5% return. The article also points out the conflict of interest that occurs when uninformed investors seek investment advice from those who sell various retirement plans. These members of the financial investment community are not accountable for the advice they give--particularly in the IRA market place. The article concludes with the comment that "today there are few protections for investors. This needs to change." I don't believe that this is the kind of investment environment into which educators should be forced. **Al Popowits, Legislative Chair**

What is your evaluation of those who advocate 401(K)s for educators? **Don't forget, any contribution active teachers** make to a 401K is a contribution they are not making to TRS which will cause the TRS to be depleted, thus affecting retiree benefits. Write, email, or call and let legislators know. Remember when you go to the ballot box.

Jim Oberweis 217-782-0471 <u>jobeweis@oberweis.com</u> 630-800-1992 Jeanne Ives 217-558-1037 <u>repjeanneives@gmail.com</u> 630-384-1108 Tom Morrison 217-782-8026 <u>repmorrison54@gmail.com</u> 224-210-6959

Continue to contact your legislators with your feelings about the REVENUE problem. Check out our website for contact lists.

If you live outside of Illinois, you can still contact: Michael Madigan at 773-581-8000, <u>217-782-5350.mmadigan@hds.ilga.gov</u> Governor Quinn at 217-782-0244, <u>Pat.quinn@illinois.gov</u> Tom Cross at 217-782-1331, 815-254-0000 <u>tom@tomcross.com</u>

Marge Sucansky, President

Membership Report

Retirees and current teachers continue to be a headache for Illinois legislative leaders. The painful problem would go away if we meekly accepted one of their unfair proposals for "pension reform." They wish us to make deep sacrifices in order to hide their past and present ineptness and chicanery. It is irrelevant to them that we always paid our share, and they circumvented paying theirs. They would rather not dwell on past misappropriations and misdeeds. They want to move forward with us carrying the whole load. They refer to this as "shared sacrifice." The state is like a thief who has robbed your credit card, has run up a huge bill and then demands that you pay what is owed so the miscreant can continue spending.

Retirees and current teachers should not stand for this from their elected representatives. Some retirees, unfortunately, have been swayed by the state's concept of shared sacrifice. They feel we have a good pension and should be willing to give up part of it to help out with the fiscal crisis. The problem here is that allowing our pension to be diminished and/or impaired is only the beginning. They will not be satisfied until our defined benefit pension becomes a thing of the past. Representative Jeanne Ives of Wheaton has categorically stated that even if Madigan's draconian plan is passed, the state will come back in two or five years for more cuts. Also missing is what the state plans to do to raise revenue. Illinois, with the fifth largest economy in the country, has an inadequate tax system where many corporations do not pay their fair share, and income wise, the rich and poor are taxed at the same rate.

Also disheartening are the many retirees who pay no heed to what is transpiring in Springfield. The checks keep coming, so they are content. It's better to not think about what the state wants to do because that is too upsetting. It is better to sit back and let others be in opposition and do the work that needs to be done to save our pensions. We need all current teachers and retirees to keep the pressure on their legislators by writing, emailing, calling or visiting to present our point of view. If we do little or nothing, we will be the losers. For one view of what may lie ahead, read President Sucansky's excellent article in this issue on 401(k)s. If current teachers are removed from contributing in the future to TRS and made to manage their own 401(k) accounts, money will not go to TRS. This will mark the beginning of the end of TRS.

We have waged this battle for the last three years, and we continue to do so. If a bill is passed that "diminishes or impairs" the pensions of retirees, the IRTA will carry the fight to court. Members and non-members can help by contributing to the IRTA's Legal Defense Fund. Send donations to IRTA Legal Defense Fund, 620 N. Walnut St., Springfield, IL, 62702. Make the check out to the IRTA and write "Legal Defense Fund" on the memo line.

This August issue of *Direct Line* is the beginning of our 2014 renewal process. WLSU members who pay IRTA and/or WLSU dues on an annual basis will receive a renewal letter at the beginning of October. The form letter will tell exactly what is owed and how to proceed. Members may check their dues status by looking at the label on this newsletter. If the label has a '13 behind IRTA or WLSU, dues are owed. Those who receive their newsletter online will need to contact Darlene Mc Namara at 773-429-1779 or darcarmac@aol.com or Tom Szot at 630-852-3138 or jtszot@comcast.net for current dues status or to answer any questions regarding membership.

WLSU currently has 1135 members. This is an increase of 4% from one year ago. We did however lose 25 members who were dropped for non-payment of WLSU dues. Over the past year we also had 8 members who passed away. This past June there were 147 new retirees from our 39 school districts in the WLSU area. The previous year there were 140. All 2013 retirees received a letter inviting them to join our fight to save our pensions. Unfortunately, the response has not been overwhelming, and this is reflected in the low 4% increase in membership. It is very hard for the Membership Committee to reach new retirees once they leave their districts. Most school districts have a policy of not giving out home addresses of retirees. The committee must rely on members to contact us with the names and addresses of retired non-members. We also rely on our members to talk to retired friends about joining WLSU/IRTA. Please contact us for any help you may need in your recruiting efforts. Please remember that spouses who were not educators are welcome as associate members. Tom Szot and Darlene Mc Namara, WLSU Membership Committee Co-chairs

MEMBER BENEFITS

This has been a busy year for all as we have placed our energies into maintaining our pensions. This political activity has pushed other issues onto the "back burner." It appears that the pension fight is going to be a long one, and I want to take this opportunity to refocus on other aspects of the work of the IRTA.

As an IRTA member you have the opportunity to save money by utilizing various benefits with companies that IRTA has made connections with through Association Member Benefits Advisors (AMBA). IRTA members can receive coverage for both dental and vision services with plans established through AMBA. While the topic of IRTA investigating major medical plans has surfaced at Member Benefits Committee meetings, as of this writing it has not been seen as necessary to have a major medical plan in place while TRIP meets the needs of our members in this regard. Travel services such as discounts for car rentals with three major chains, Hertz, Avis, and Budget are also available to members.

Indicating that you are an IRTA member can also produce discounts with Verizon and AT&T. Most recently, the IRTA has begun to offer member discounts to Sam's Club. As an Advantage Member you can receive a \$10 gift card with your \$40 membership. As an Advantage Plus Member you can receive a \$25 gift card with your \$100 membership. Please take advantage of these benefits that come as an IRTA member.

Please note that while these benefits are yours to use, you are under no obligation to utilize them. Recently, some of our members have received "cold calls" from AMBA sales personnel. I called the company to inquire about this practice and was told that members would only be contacted if they indicate that they desire more information regarding a service. This practice especially appears to pertain to members who might already utilize dental or vision plans through AMBA. If you receive calls that are unwanted, please feel free to contact Jean Coffey, National Director with AMBA, at 1-800-258-7041 x332. I had conversation with her and she values the privacy of our members and would intervene regarding any future unwanted phone solicitation. **Julie Jeter, Member Benefits Chair**

July 23, 2013

Dear IRTA Unit Presidents,

Based on a recent unit newsletter, some members may have received "cold calls" from AMBA sales personnel. Based on my call to Jeannie Coffey at AMBA in Austin, if cold calls are received the member should call the IRTA office at 1-800-728-4782. The member should try to get information about the AMBA agent involved. Jim Bachman or myself will handle the matter and stop the calls.

Steve Polep

Member Benefits Chair 847-639-1716

IRTA Convention to be Held in October—We need one more delegate!

The biennial IRTA Convention will be held on October 21 and 22 in Springfield at the Abraham Lincoln Hotel. All members are invited to attend and vote on issues of importance. Members are responsible for their own transportation and accommodations (the hotel will provide a special rate), but WLSU will pay for convention meals and registration fees.

We need one more delegate. If you are interested in attending, please contact Marge Sucansky at 630-985-2620 or www.comcast.net as soon as possible as reservations will be due in August.

A Bit of Blarney, Bus Trip September 26, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., departing from North Riverside Mall parking lot, north of Sears

COST is \$79 per member, \$84 per guest, limited to 30 persons on a first-come, first-enrolled basis. No phone reservations.

Deadline: August 23, 2013. Questions? Call Sharon Kman at 630-988-5266

Explore Irish Chicago! Hear the stories and struggles of the early Irish immigrants, starting as the "Hardscrabble" builders of the I & M Canal and evolving to become the movers and shakers of Chicago. Begin with a tour of Old St. Patrick's Church. Founded in 1846 as the first English-speaking parish in the city. Old St. Pat's is one of the few buildings to survive the Great Chicago Fire. Admire the stained glass windows designed and installed by Thomas A. O'Shaughnessy between 1912 and 1922. Lunch is at Timothy O'Tooles. Following lunch we stop at Garrett's Popcorn and then travel to the Irish American Heritage Center. We hope the "Luck of the Irish" will be with you.

City in a Garden September 26 9 a SIGN UP NOW. Ma Hudson Westmont,	m. to 4:00 p.m. Depart ail this form and a chec Illinois 60559. Reserva	with your check for this exting from North Riverside Ick for \$79 for members and ations are limited to 50 peake checks payable to We	Mall parking lot, Nor d \$84 for guests to s ople on a first-come	Sharon Kman, 105 S. e, first-enrolled basis.
Member Name(s)				
Guest Name(s)			 _ Total	<u> </u>
Luncheon Choice:	Fish & Chips	Guinr	ness Beef Stew	
Phone		E-Mail	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	
		e trip is canceled or I/we cancel and waiting list refunds will be p		
WLSU Contact Inform				
President	-	Membership		Foundation
Marjorie Sucansky		Darlene McNamara		Frances Pettersen
630-985-2620	630-852-3138	773-429-1779	630-325-6470	708-246-2128

Member Makes Lenten Pilgrimage

website: www.wlsu.weebly.com

In March Peter and I participated in a pilgrimage to Italy as guest singers in the parish choir of St. Gregory the Great Church of Chicago. The choir was invited by Rev. Pierre Paul, head of the Cappella Giulia, to sing the Solemn Mass in St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City on March 17. The Cappella Giulia, a choir that sings the chants and anthems for mass in St. Peter's when the Pope is not celebrating, is observing its 500th anniversary year. In observance of this milestone, about 60 choirs from all over the world were invited to sing at the Vatican.

We had several opportunities to sing—four masses, two formal concerts, and informal concerts in several other old churches and monasteries, in an ancient Roman theater in Pompeii, and in a garden on the Isle of Capri—altogether eleven performances in nine days. Venues included the cathedrals and churches of Naples, Sorrento, Salerno, and Amalfi, the monastery of Montecassino, and the small church in the beautiful setting of Montorella in the mountains. In Rome we sang in St. Mary Major, St. John Lateran, St. Paul outside the Wall, as well as in St Peter's.

Early in our trip Patrick Godon, our choir director, called our journey "a pilgrimage of connections," an apt name because there were, indeed, many connections. For me three connections were especially meaningful One was the connection of people—Americans and Italians singing. Another was the linking of historical areas. The Amalfi Coast, the site of Ulysses's encounter with the Sirens; the site of churches with Christian relics, and the site of ancient terraces for farming. We could look out at Roman ruins from our hotel.

Of course, there was the spiritual connection. More than ever before, I felt the connection to Christians of the Renaissance, Middle Ages, and even before. Rites and symbols from ancient times are still used in 2013. I thought about the history of the Catholic Church and its relationship to Protestant faiths and about how Western Civilization owes its survival to the monks who preserved ancient learning by copying ancient manuscripts, and finally, how Christians worship the same God, no matter the approach.

It was exciting to be in Italy at the time of the conclave and the election of the new pope. It was truly exciting to be present in St. Peter's Square for Pope Francis's first Angelus. It was amazing to be in the Vatican music archives and be allowed to touch manuscripts from the fourteen and fifteen hundreds. And on a more secular note one cannot forget the gelato and other Italian foods we all enjoyed. It was an incredible, once in a lifetime experience. **Jean Harrison, member**

IRTA Establishes Legal Defense Fund

To be prepared in the event that unconstitutional legislation is passed, IRTA is asking members to contribute to a Legal Defense Fund. You can find information about how to contribute at www.irtaonline.org. on the Home Page. Here is the address for sending donations to the Legal Defense Fund: IRTA, 620 N. Walnut St., Springfield, IL 62702. *Please write "Legal Defense Fund" on the check memo line.*

Trudy O'Reilly Honored at WLSU Spring Luncheon

In honor of National Teacher Appreciation Week for 2013, a former student of a WLSU member chose to honor all those present and specifically two teachers at the WLSU Spring Membership Luncheon on May 2nd at the Willowbrook Holiday Inn

Trudy O'Reilly, a high school Spanish teacher, was honored by Carol Brown, a 1971 graduate of Niles West High School. Carol was taught, mentored, and inspired by Trudy, and after college became a translator/interpreter and taught Spanish and English in Mexico. She is currently employed with the Archdiocese of Chicago and works closely with the Mexican communities of Pilsen, Cicero, and Berwyn, promoting higher education and scholarship opportunities among those academically gifted, bilingual public school students. Carol's presentation at the luncheon was a complete surprise to the unsuspecting Trudy, who had not seen Carol in 42 years.

Carol included all present in her praise of public school education and the teachers who devote themselves to their students, and presented all with a pen labeled "Don't make me use my teacher's voice." Her personal gift to Trudy was a beautiful etched-glass plaque which extolled all the traits of a good teacher and a pledged gift of \$1000 to the IRTA Foundation for Needy Teachers.

Finally, Carol has established a scholarship for the school year 2014-2015at Dominican University in honor of Trudy for a student in the field of Spanish Education.

Terese Klinger was, also, honored for her years of teaching, including her leadership as department head at Niles West High School in Morton Grove, and as a teacher of Spanish, French, and German. She was the department chair at the time Trudy O'Reilly, a WLSU member, was beginning her teaching career.

In her closing remarks at the luncheon, Carol thanked WLSU president Marjorie Sucansky and the Executive Board of WLSU "for this opportunity to acknowledge all those wonderful teachers who left an indelible and unforgettable lifelong impression on their students—which is why during National Teacher Appreciation Week—I chose to honor, in addition to my friend, Trudy O'Reilly, all of you retired teachers present here today. And also to thank you for the laudable job you are doing to support those causes near and dear to IRTA." **Bill Karlblom –Public Relations**





Trudy, Carol, and Terese

Legislator Visit Committee

The Legislative Committee has created a sub-committee of interested members who would like to get trained to visit legislators. Our goal is to build a network of relationships with legislators as their constituents who are willing to offer our 1000's of collective years of experience in the field of education. We would like to have a rational dialogue with

legislators, especially the new unjaded ones, to present the facts and contradict all the propaganda that has been spread about pensions and the unfunded liability. Eventually, we hope they would listen to our ideas about such things as charter schools and high stakes testing. Kate Singletary, of the Legislative Committee, will be conducting training for anyone interested in being on the Visiting Teams. Our latest training was on July 19, but more will follow. If you are interested, please contact me at sucansky@comcast.net.

September 12 Membership Meeting Be sure to attend this important meeting at Plymouth Place, starting at 10 a.m. Gary Elmen, president of IRTA and Rich Frankenfeld of TRS will be the speakers with information you will want to hear about the state of pensions.

HELP WANTED: WLSU is in need of a recording secretary. The job requires attendance at 9 meetings during the year and access to the internet. Please join the WLSU board in this position. Contact Marge at sucansky@comcast.net.

Mark Your Calendar

August 6	Executive Board Meeting	Plymouth Place	9:30 a.m.	
September 12	Membership Meeting	Plymouth Place	10:00 a.m.	
September 26	Bus Trip	Bit of Blarney	9:00 a.m.	
October 17	Executive Board Meeting	Plymouth Place	9:30 a.m.	
October 21-22	IRTA Convention	Springfield—Abraham Linco	Springfield—Abraham Lincoln Hotel	
December 6	Membership Luncheon	Willowbrook Holiday Inn	11:15 a.m.	

In Memoriam

For each of our recently deceased members, WLSU donates \$25 to the IRTA Foundation for Needy Teachers

Bernice Schloeder

Medical Alert Scam

Another scam targeting seniors has been reported in Michigan and other states. A call implies that someone has signed you up for a Medical Alert System and all you need do is verify your address for delivery. If a senior does agree to the system, he is often billed a monthly charge. In some cases, as soon as he accepts, he receives other calls asking for personal information, including credit card information. And if he asked who ordered the system for him, the caller says that she cannot say who ordered it. This should be enough to alert the consumer that this is more than likely a scam. The Better Business Bureau advises consumers to just hang up on these types of calls; do not press any buttons; and if someone does talk with you, ask for their company's physical address. If the caller won't give out an address, but wants yours, you may be pretty sure that the call is a scam

This summary was taken from an article "Medical Alert Scam Targeting Seniors" by Susan Tompor which appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, June 30, 2013. **Barbara Grabowski, FYI Committee**



IRTA State & Local Unit Membership Form

620 North Walnut Street • Springfield, IL 62702 • 1-800-728-4782 e-mail: irta@irtaonline.org • webpage: www.irtaonline.org

□ Dues Deduct − I hereby authorize the Teachers' Retirement System to deduct my IRTA dues in monthly installments at an initial rate of \$2.00 or as subsequently established by the Delegate Assembly.

Association Dues are Not Tax Deductible

the Delegate Assembly.		Association Dues are Not Tax Deductible	(non-certified) Annual - \$25 Life - \$125
(Signature required for Dues Deduction) Please print or use your return address la	Social Security # _	(Only required for Dues Deduction)	Local Unit Dues First Year Free
NAME LAST	FIRST	MI	DOB
ADDRESS	CITY	STATE ZIP	RETIREMENT YEAR
PHONE () E-MAIL			SCHOOL DISTRICT RETIRED FROM

Please mail to IRTA.

State Dues

☐ Annual - \$35 ☐ 5 Years - \$150

□ Dues Deduct - \$24 a year (see left side of form)

Life - \$400
Membership Free for the
Calendar Year of Retirement

Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities. Voltaire :



Marjorie Sucansky, President 2942 Crabtree Avenue Woodridge, Illinois 60517

Direct Line mailers: Trudy O'Reilly Rosemary Pietrzak

DIRECT LINE

"Investing in the FUTURE of retired teachers"

Membership Meeting September 12 Bus Trip Coupons Inside