

## PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVES

*Larry D. Ridgeway, AURA President, 2016-2017*

I hope your New Year is off to a good start and that those resolutions are still being honored. Your AURA Board has been focused on ways we can best serve our members. While there are more than 2,800 retirees of Auburn University and Auburn University at Montgomery receiving benefits through the Retirement Systems of Alabama (RSA), only a little over 400 are currently members of AURA. Obviously, we need to do a better job of convincing folks of the value of our \$25 annual membership dues.

As most of you know, AURA has traditionally had two general membership meetings each year – a fall dinner usually in October and an annual luncheon meeting at Saughatchee Country Club in May. We have included some pictures from our fall meeting and a Save the Date announcement about our annual May meeting in this newsletter.

A brief membership survey was conducted at our dinner meeting in October. Asked to rank what should be AURA's top priorities, respondents reported that continued adequate funding and protection of our retirement benefits was most important. Following closely were keeping quality health care benefits at the lowest possible cost and advocating for a cost of living allowance (COLA).

In response to what other activities or services AURA should provide, members indicated they wanted more social and/or educational programs and assistance with questions related to Medicare, taxes, end-of-life planning, and other issues relevant to retirees.

Recently, we had our initial Legislative Forum with two of our local legislators (pictures and a brief recap in this newsletter). We received good feedback from those in attendance and plan to have meetings

on this and other topics of interest in the future. If you have suggestions for topics or issues you would like AURA to pursue for meetings, please let us hear from you.

It appears that a significant majority of our members have access to the internet and email communications. We are pleased to announce that AURA has recently launched a listserv to send out electronic communications to our members. Our first attempt was a reminder about the Legislative Forum. We will be following up soon with those members whose emails bounced to get correct email addresses.

We have also recently updated our website and encourage you to review it and provide suggestions for improvement. Simply google "aura auburn" and the Auburn University Retiree Association pops up. Check the website often for the latest news on AURA activities.

We now collect membership dues on a calendar year basis. Check the membership form on the back of this newsletter, and if you have not paid your dues for 2017, please do so. Encourage your retired AU/AUM colleagues to consider joining as well (membership form on website). Our success in advocating for the interests of retired educators will only improve with greater numbers in our ranks.

If you have ideas or suggestions for me or the AURA Board, I hope you will share them with us. Our contact information is included elsewhere in this newsletter. I wish for all of you a healthy and happy 2017. ♦



# **AUBURN UNIVERSITY RETIREE ASSOCIATION (AURA) BOARD OF DIRECTORS FOR 2016-17**

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- **Rich Penaskovic, *Secretary***  
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## **ONE YEAR REMAINING**

- **Gene Akers**  
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- **D'Linell Finley**  
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- **Sandy Johnson**  
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## **TWO YEARS REMAINING**

- **Gerald Johnson**  
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- **Larry Ridgeway**  
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- **Karen Sharpless**  
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## **THREE YEARS REMAINING**

- **Larry Benefield**  
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- **Dennis Drake**  
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- **Rich Penaskovic**  
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- **Kim Trupp**  
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# **PEEHIP Premium Assistance for Retirees with Limited Incomes**

Recent increases in our PEEHIP premiums have resulted in a significant burden for some education retirees who have limited incomes. AURA members should be aware of the fact that there is premium assistance available for retirees who qualify.

PEEHIP provides premium assistance to PEEHIP members with a total combined family income of less than or equal to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) as defined by Federal Law. To qualify for the FPL assistance, PEEHIP members must furnish acceptable proof of total income based on their most recently filed Federal Income Tax Return. Certification of Income Level will be effective for the plan year only, and re-certification will be required annually during Open Enrollment. The premium reduction does not automatically renew each year. The premium reduction will apply only to the hospital medical premium or HMO premium and only applies to active and retired members. The FPL premium discount is not available to members who are on a Leave of Absence, COBRA or surviving spouse contract.

Visit [http://www.rsa-al.gov/uploads/files/PEEHIP\\_FPL\\_App.pdf](http://www.rsa-al.gov/uploads/files/PEEHIP_FPL_App.pdf) to determine who qualifies. Please share this information with friends and former colleagues who may have difficulty in affording their increased PEEHIP premiums. ♦

## **SilverSneakers**

Medicare-eligible members enrolled in the PEEHIP Group Medicare Advantage (PPO) Plan administered through UnitedHealthcare should have recently received their SilverSneakers member ID cards in the mail. SilverSneakers is a fitness program designed for all levels and abilities providing access to exercise equipment and group classes at more than 13,000 locations nationwide.

Silver Sneakers locations near you were included in the mailing with your ID card. The amenities available at each site were also listed. You may enroll in as many participating locations as you like at any time.

Simply take your ID card to one of these locations, ask for a tour and start working out. Participating in SilverSneakers may lead to greater strength, improved mental health and increased community engagement.

Visit [silversneakers.com](http://silversneakers.com) to find locations and classes. If you have questions about the program, call 1-888-423-4632 (TTY: 711) Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. ET.

# FALL DINNER MEETING

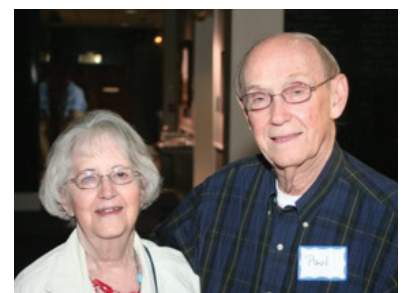
AURA held its annual fall dinner meeting on October 13, 2016, at the Auburn University Alumni Center.

A catfish dinner with all the trimmings was followed by an informative and entertaining talk by AU's Head Softball Coach Clint Myers.

Janice Charlesworth, AERA Executive Secretary, provided an AERA update and status report on United Healthcare's rollout.

Upon the recommendation of the AURA Board, Dr. Tom Vocino was nominated as a candidate for the District 10 AERA Director position to replace Dr. Gerald Johnson.

*Photos by Dr. Larry Wit*



# LEGISLATIVE FORUM

January 25, 2017 | Harris Center at the Auburn  
Parks and Recreation Department

Senator Tom Whatley and Representative Joe Lovvorn met with a group of about 40 AURA members to preview the upcoming 2017 session of the Alabama Legislature. Dr. Gerald Johnson introduced the speakers and moderated the session.



After providing brief remarks regarding their background and experience, each speaker spoke about their expectations for the upcoming session. Both voiced strong support for maintaining our RSA pension and healthcare benefits. Among other topics discussed were redistricting, prisons, tax proposals, gambling issues including prospects for a state lottery, protecting the Special Education Trust Fund, and the possibility of a COLA for education retirees (the first in over 10 years).

Senator Whatley and Representative Lovvorn then responded to a variety of questions from the audience. AURA members expressed their appreciation for the legislators' forthright responses and clear support for the issues important to our membership.

Other forums on this and topics of interest to our members are planned for the future. ♦



## AURA ANNUAL MEETING

*Please mark your calendars for AURA's annual meeting at noon on Friday, May 19, 2017, with lunch at Saugahatchee Country Club.*

The spring newsletter in April will provide the details and instructions for making reservations. The annual meeting includes the installation of AURA officers and new Board members and the presentation of the Wilford S. Bailey Award.

All members are encouraged to attend.

## FIT AS A FIDDLE: A 50+ LIFESTYLE AND HEALTH FAIR

**March 4, 2017 • 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.**

**Harris Center (across from the Auburn post office)**

AURA members are encouraged to join the Auburn Parks and Recreation Department on Saturday, March 4 for the fourth annual Fit as a Fiddle 50+ lifestyle and health fair from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

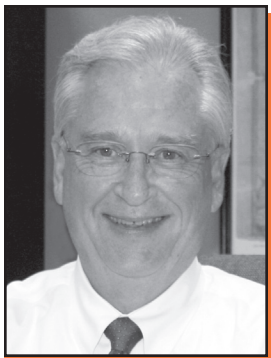
Auburn's 50+ citizens will be able to explore exciting new opportunities to live out a healthier lifestyle by visiting interactive booths around the Harris Center. The morning will be filled with advice from doctors, fitness experts, health food stores, senior communities and more. In addition to becoming fit as a fiddle, seniors will have the opportunity to win various door prizes. The fair is FREE for all 50+ seniors.

AURA will have a booth at the fair to provide information about AURA's activities and to solicit new members.

# Report of AURA Legislative Affairs Committee

## *“AURA Prepared for 2017 Legislature”*

*Gerald W. Johnson, Ch., AURA Legislative Affairs Committee, W 2017*



The Alabama Legislature will convene February 7th for the 2017 regular session of no more than 30 days within 105 calendar days. The expectation is that a Special Session, 12 legislative days within a 30 calendar day span, will be called by the Governor, to take place within the regular session, to borrow funds through a bond issue to fund prisons. Thus, the 2017 regular session may well be an extended one.

The 2017 Legislature will again face all the problems of balancing the state's two major budgets with insufficient revenues. Again, the General Fund (GF) budget will be more difficult to balance than the Education Trust Fund (ETF) budget. The Legislature will have the same options as in past sessions—increase revenue through increased taxes (gasoline), additional fees or a lottery or cut programs and attempt to balance the GF budget by raiding the ETF or “reforming” retiree health and retirement programs.

In addition, proposals will be made to increase revenue by taxing retirement income or provide greater funding discretion by consolidating budgets, a loss for the ETF, or unearmaking taxes, also a loss for the ETF. Changing our defined benefit retirement program to a defined contribution program and converting our PEEHIP health insurance program to a private policy program will, also, be around in some form.

Fortunately, for education retirees, the 2017 Legislature, overall, seems to be less disposed to further cut public education or divert education funds for other uses or dismantle or cut retiree health care and retirement programs.

Whatever the case, we, AURA and the education retiree community, are better prepared for the 2017 legislative session than for any session over the past decade. The session begins with a commitment that retirees will be the number one priority for inclusion in the FY 18 budget. Legislation to provide a COLA in the form of a 13th Check based on a formula of \$24 times years of service with a minimum, has already been introduced. Legislation to establish and fund a COLA Trust Fund will be introduced.

AURA has activated its Legislative Affairs Committee and, in collaboration with AERA, has established a Local Advocacy Network to participate in the upcoming legislative session. (Larry Ridgeway, Dennis Drake, Linda Jo Connell, Gerald Johnson, Richard Penaskovic, Barbara Witt and Stan Wilson.) Members participated in an AERA regional Advocacy Training session in preparation for the session.

In addition, AURA hosted, as reported in this Newsletter, a very positive forum for members with our local representatives, Sen. Tom Whatley and Rep. Joe Lovvorn.

Over the past two years, under the leadership of Larry Ridgeway, AURA President, and Janice Charlesworth, AERA Executive Director, substantial progress has been made in advocating for the welfare of education retirees. The active participation of AURA members, and all education retirees, in the upcoming legislative session can bring this progress to fruition. This is how the democratic representative process works.

AURA is the only association that exists to support and protect the interests of AU retirees. AURA, in partnership with AERA can and will make a difference. Membership in AURA and your participation in the efforts of AURA to protect and advocate for retiree interests are essential for legislative success. ♦

## Appreciation to Monarch Estates

For the past several years, AURA's monthly Board meetings have been held at the Eagle's Nest at Monarch Estates. While we have appreciated a private room with ample parking and at no cost to us, we have decided to relocate our meetings beginning this month to Trinity Lutheran Church where the acoustics will be better for our discussions.

The AURA Board would like to thank the administration and staff at Monarch Estates for their generosity and hospitality in hosting our meetings over the years. We encourage anyone considering moving from their home to visit Monarch Estates for a tour.

# For your dues status, check the newsletter address label!

If “p-2017” shows after your name, your dues have been paid through December, 2017.

*If you have not paid your AURA dues for 2017, you will find an “n” after your name. Please complete the form below and mail it with your 2017 dues payment:*

## AU-AUM Retiree AURA Membership Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_ AU \_\_\_\_\_ AUM \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

_____ Single Retiree .....	\$25.00	_____ Surviving Spouse.....	\$10.00
_____ Retiree and Spouse .....	\$25.00	_____ Sponsor.....	\$25.00
_____ Retiree & Retiree Spouse .....	\$25.00	_____ Gift Contribution \$_____	

If you have any questions, please contact Sandy Johnson at [sandyjj130@gmail.com](mailto:sandyjj130@gmail.com) or Larry Ridgeway at [larryridgeway23@gmail.com](mailto:larryridgeway23@gmail.com) .

**Make your check payable to AURA and mail to: AURA • P.O. Box 1436 • Auburn, AL 36831-1436**

