



# Newsletter

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www.MyGSRA.com

June 2019

## GSRA 2019 Annual Meeting

Make your plans now to attend the Annual Meeting in Helen at the Unicoi State Park Lodge. You will have the opportunity to attend interesting general and concurrent sessions on Monday, October 7<sup>th</sup> and again on Tuesday, October 8<sup>th</sup>. As always, we'll provide time for fun and fellowship at the Monday evening Welcome Reception, featuring light fare, cash bar and live entertainment.

Another great reason to attend this year's Annual Meeting – It's Oktoberfest in Helen! A shuttle van will be available at no cost to provide transportation from the Lodge to Helen and back.

**Look for the official email announcement and details coming in July**

## GSRA Requests Governor Consider GSRA Nominees for Next ERS Board Appointment

Former ERS board chair Lonice Barrett's term on the board expires July 1. His predecessor will be appointed by Governor Kemp. Mr. Barrett has served 7 1/2 years with distinction. He served through difficult revenue times and some more abundant revenue times. During his service the board fiercely protected the integrity of the pension fund which is now slowly rebounding from the great recession. Mr. Barrett guided the board when, for the first, second and third times it granted retirees one-time, non-compounding adjustments. While appreciated, these adjustments were not COLAs.

Mr. Barrett's board membership was the cap of a remarkable career in the Department of Natural Resources - in which he rose to be Director of the Parks and Historical Sites Division and then to be Commissioner -- and responsible positions as executive staff to both Governor Purdue and Governor Deal.

The choosing of an individual to fill the board seat to be vacated by Mr. Barrett offers GSRA members an opportunity to better get its message out and to positively influence decision makers. GSRA's first attempt to accomplish this goal is to request Governor Kemp, when making his appointment, to consider eight individuals

proposed with pride by GSRA. This list is truly diverse in terms of geography, gender, and ethnic background. Every individual had an impressive career. All were managers, including two agency heads. All have greatly contributed to the success of GSRA.

Those GSRA leaders who consented to have their names submitted are:

- Bobbie Jean Bennett, Bethlehem, former Commissioner of Personnel Administration and administrator of State Health Benefit Plan and Flexible Benefits, and member ERS board; founding member, past GSRA president and secretary and full-time GSRA P&O committee participant.
- Lynell Hayes, Thomasville, former psychiatric care nurse and shift supervisor; Thomasville chapter president, long-time GSRA board member
- Barbara Heard, Union City, former human resources director including all employee

- benefits administration; South Fulton chapter president
- Steve Herndon, Marietta, former executive management of juvenile justice programs; past GSRA president, past NW Metro chapter president, GSRA P&O committee participant
  - Kip Mann, Athens, former management of human services and juvenile justice programs; past GSRA president, past Athens chapter president, GSRA P&O committee participant
  - Ernie Melton, Lake Hartwell, former director of Statewide Systems Services for Administrative Services; founding member, NE Metro chapter past president, long-time GSRA board member
  - Bob Pollock, Cordele, former regional director and county director of family and children's services; Albany chapter president, long time GSRA board member

- Claude Vickers, Newnan, former State Auditor, Executive Director of Georgia Public Broadcasting, and member ERS board; founding member, past GSRA president, GSRA P&O committee participant

The list was submitted this week.

### Seeking Board and Committee Members

GSRA is currently seeking interested members to serve on the GSRA Board and/or as committee chairs or members. Interested parties please contact [help@mygsra.com](mailto:help@mygsra.com) for more information.

**There's never been a better time to serve!**

## GSRA and ERS Reach Historic Agreement

The Employees Retirement System and GSRA have reached an historic agreement whereby the ERS will provide to GSRA contact information for certain retirees in its data base. This will be done through soliciting, in a few different ways, the retirees' permission for ERS to release the information. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed on June 4 and 5 by ERS Executive Director Jim Potvin and GSRA President Jim Sommerville, respectively, and culminates more than three months of discussion and negotiation. It was a collaborative team effort engaged in a climate of good will.

The MOU was initiated by ERS after House Retirement Chair Tommy Benton, at the request of GSRA, introduced HB 391 requiring ERS to provide GSRA contact information for all ERS retirees.

This is a major accomplishment for GSRA, which has been sought for over ten years. The sad fact is that the vast majority of ERS's 52,000+ retirees are not aware of GSRA, and GSRA has exhausted all public and private avenues to make itself known to retirees. As stipulated in the MOU, ERS will now send an email -- drafted by GSRA and approved by ERS -- to all of its retirees with email addresses

(over 30,000) describing the purpose of GSRA and the benefits of GSRA membership and requesting permission for ERS to provide retirees' contact information to GSRA. ERS will provide contact information only for retirees who give ERS permission to do so. ERS will also publish periodic newsletter articles about GSRA -- again drafted by GSRA -- and will add a question to ERS's online web portal also requesting retirees' permission for ERS to release their contact information to GSRA.

You can read the full MOU [here](#). GSRA hopes that these measures will enable it to at least double its present membership.

GSRA transmitted its agreement with the final MOU draft via this [cover letter](#). As you can read, GSRA had hoped that ERS would agree to some additional provisions which GSRA believes would greatly increase the number of retirees for whom ERS would be providing contact information. But in the collegial spirit of teamwork, GSRA has agreed to the current provisions as a start. At the appropriate time we will assess the extent to which implementing the MOU's fulfills GSRA's membership objectives.

## GSRA Leadership Meets with DCH Officials

On June 3rd, GSRA President Jim Sommerville, GSRA Board Member B.J. Bennett, and Legislative Liaison Chuck Clay met with Department of Community Health (DCH) Commissioner Frank Berry and key members of his staff. We appreciate the time that DCH devoted to our discussions. The most important item to come out of the meeting was that Commissioner Berry did not anticipate or expect any changes to the SHBP benefit structure or options/vendors available in the upcoming calendar year. We asked the Commissioner to evaluate modifying the Medicare Advantage Plans by including the prescription drug copays in the participant's out-of-pocket maximum cost in the same way that copays are included in all SHBP options offered to the under age 65 participants.

GSRA pressed the Commissioner to increase the transparency of the agency's activities especially as it relates to the State Health Benefit Plan (SHBP) and its Advisory

Council. We also stressed to the Commissioner that GSRA would like to be able to comment and provide input to DCH before any changes to the SHBP are implemented especially as it pertains to premium increases and changes to the tier system for prescription drugs.

The Commissioner seemed agreeable to working on providing more transparency and seeking input from GSRA on matters relating to the SHBP.

NOTE: The Commissioner did not mention the just announced waiver of the employer contributions (state departments and school systems) for June 2019 in order to improve Georgia's financial position as it closes the fiscal year. Nor did the Commissioner mention a decrease in the State's contribution rate of 1% (from 30.454% to 29.454% of salaries) for state agencies. We have reached out to the Commissioner for additional information on these matters.



### Jim's View: COLA Restoration Remains Our Focus

Summer is here and I wish and hope each one of you will have a great summer full of vacations and relaxing times. Summer is a time to recharge our batteries in preparation of a busy fall and winter.

While the members of the GSRA Board are also recharging their batteries this summer, we are also continuing our efforts to achieve our goal of the restoration of the 1.5% semi-annual cost of living adjustment (COLA). As you know in late May, representatives of GSRA met with Governor Kemp in his office to discuss the COLA issue. As a follow-up to that meeting, we are scheduled to meet with representatives of his office early next month to continue our discussions about how we can restore the annual COLAs in a fiscal prudent manner.

In addition, through discussions with some senators and representatives, we are sensing that there is growing support on both sides of the aisle for restoring the COLAs. We are working to identify those legislators that will support our cause and that are willing to work with other legislators and the Governor's office in support of restoring the COLAs. To

that end, we are attempting to meet with as many legislators as we can this summer.

We have also reached out to the new Chairperson of the ERS Board to request a meeting. We also expect to meet with the new State Treasurer and ERS Board member Ms. Lynn Riley to bring her up to speed on the issues facing GSRA members.

I encourage you to reach out to your representative and senator to urge them to support the restoration of the COLAs for all state retirees. As you go about your everyday activities, if you have an occasion to meet any state representative or state senator, I urge you to engage them in conversation about the lack of COLAs for state retirees.

I assure you that GSRA will continue the fight until the State lives up to its promises and commitments that it made to its employees as part what Speaker of the House Ralston said was a covenant the State has with its employees.

Thank you for your past support of GSRA and I know that we can count on your support of GSRA in the future.

Jim

## Local Chapter News

### Central Metro

Central Metro's April meeting featured local area legislators, Representatives Mary Margaret Oliver and Mathew Wilson. Both legislators discussed the 2019 legislative session.



Representatives Mathew Wilson and Mary Margaret Oliver address Central Metro members

### Rome

GSRA Membership Chair Kip Mann and Membership Committee member Bob Pollock traveled to Rome June 12<sup>th</sup> to meet with existing Rome local chapter members to reactivate the chapter and elect new officers. The new officers elected were: President – Dinah Brock; Vice President/President Elect – Shirley Mosely; Treasurer – Steve Moore; Secretary Ruth Black; Membership/Communications – Dave Hoitt.

Former chapter officers were in attendance to prove to new chapter officers that there would be life after their time as officers expired. A lively discussion was held among those in attendance and then the new officers met to formulate their plans, agreeing to meet the next day to plan their next chapter meeting.



Rome members who met and elected new officers

### Valdosta

Valdosta local chapter members gathered for food and fellowship at Mama June's buffet on May 23<sup>rd</sup>. Featured speaker for the meeting was local area legislator, Senator Ellis Black, who talked about the 2019 legislative session and retirement issues.

At the conclusion of the meeting, long time chapter member Mike Giles won the door prize.



Senator Ellis Black and local chapter member Mike Giles



## Take a new look at an old friend

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## Endorsed GSRA Benefits

The Georgia State Retirees Association (GSRA) makes many member only benefits available to its members. GSRA endorses the following member benefits:

- Long Term Care / Home Health Care Policy
- Life Insurance
- Medical Air Services Association (MASA)
- Travel Discounts
- Car Rental Discounts
- Tax-Deferred Annuity
- Cancer Treatment Policy
- Medicare Supplement Insurance
- Identity Theft Protection
- Hotel Discounts
- Computer Discounts

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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 Haman, 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

## UnitedHealthcare® is proud to be a sponsor of the GSRA Annual Meeting.

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