

Remembering Former GSRA President Russell Hinton

Retired State Auditor and GSRA President for 2015 Russell Hinton died May 1, 2020. Russell, who was born on October 19, 1952, worked for the Department of Audit and Accounts his entire 38 year state career, the last thirteen of which he led the department as State Auditor. In this article, retired State Auditor and also past GSRA President Claude Vickers pays tribute to his friend and colleague.



Retired State Auditor and past GSRA President Russell Hinton

In November of 1992 Governor Zell Miller asked me if I would consider taking the job of State Auditor of Georgia. I jumped at the chance. I knew what the job entailed. I knew how important it was. I knew that with it came a large responsibility. I knew a lot of the people in the department that I would be working with, most of them by their reputation.

As I looked around the room on my first day at the Department, I saw an amazing group of individuals. After that first meeting, I knew that with that group, being State Auditor was going to be a wonderful experience.

One of that group was Russell Hinton. He was quiet, thoughtful and as I came to learn, was very knowledgeable. I was even more impressed when I learned that he graduated from the University of Georgia Cum Laude. I also knew that I was going to have to run hard to stay in front of him so that I would look like I was leading him and his peers.

As the next few years went by and as I worked with Russell, I gained even more respect for his ability to work with others and to lead them. There were several individuals in the Department with impressive credentials, abilities, knowledge and a desire to make the Department develop a reputation for excellence and to be a place where they wanted to work. Russell was one of those and this carried him to the next level in the Department, State Auditor. His loyalty was unquestioned, as was his integrity.

As I watched him lead the Department for the next several years, I was glad I could say it was a privilege to have worked with him.

The State of Georgia was blessed to have him for too short a time.

Lawsuit over SHBP Insurance Subsidies Dismissed

GSRA has received questions from some retirees who have retired with fewer than 30 years of state service and who have not received the “full” state subsidy for their State Health Benefit Plan medical coverage. A retired GSRA member who is an attorney has reviewed the on-going litigation regarding this issue and provides this status.

In December of 2017, three state retirees filed a class action lawsuit against the Board of Community Health for its action in cutting the health insurance subsidy for retirees with at least 10 years of service.

The case was filed in Fulton Superior Court and alleged a breach of contract and failure of a duty to provide promised benefits.

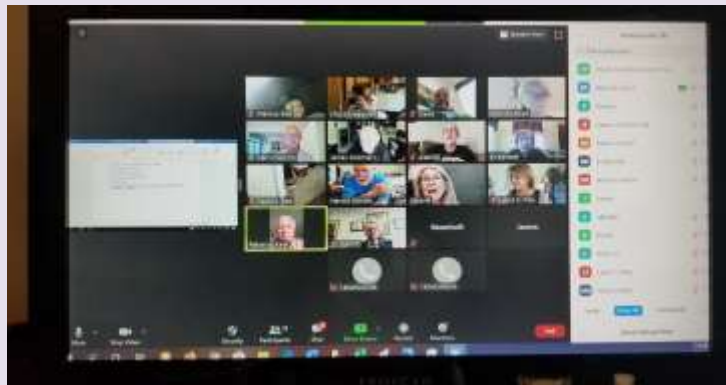
The Superior Court dismissed the case in August of 2018 and the retirees appealed to the Georgia Court of Appeals. On October 30, 2019, the Court of Appeals agreed with the trial judge and affirmed the dismissal, finding that the state was immune from the lawsuit, based on the doctrine of sovereign immunity. The court also ruled that the retirees had no clear right to future health insurance subsidies.

The retirees have petitioned the Georgia Supreme Court to review the matter and that case is pending under Supreme Court docket number S20C0521. The Court of Appeals decision can be found on that court’s web site and is referred to as Court of Appeals docket number A19A0802 (*Kelly et al v. Board of Community Health et al*).

GSRA Joins the Zoom Generation

While GSRA has used remote meeting applications for its board meetings for years, most board members have continued to travel to Covington and Macon in recent years to attend the meetings in person. With the advent of Covid-19 shelter-in-place and social distancing requirements, however, GSRA has been exploring new options for a better remote meeting experience.

The screenshot below shows various GSRA board members participating at the May Board Meeting, which was conducted exclusively via the Zoom application. Members were enthusiastic about the Zoom meeting experience, and GSRA hopes that this will help not only during the pandemic, but also will enable us to attract more outstate members to serve on our board and committees and make it easier to keep in touch with local chapters in a more meaningful way.



Tillery to Chair Senate Appropriations Committee

Lieutenant Governor Duncan recently appointed State Senator Blake Tillery (R-19th District) as Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee. He previously served as Vice-Chair. He replaces the late Senator Jack Hill as Chairman.

Senator Tillery represents the 19th Senatorial District which includes Appling, Jeff Davis, Long, Montgomery, Telfair, Toombs, Treutlen, Wayne, Wheeler, and portions of Liberty and Tattnall counties. He was first elected to the Georgia State Senate in 2016 and is currently serving his second term as a State Senator.

Prior to his election to the Georgia State Senate, Senator Tillery served as Chairman of the Toombs County Board of Commissioners. Senator Tillery was named one of Georgia Trend Magazine's "40 under 40" and is a graduate of the Leadership of Georgia, class of 2015.

Senator Tillery is a Double Dawg, having received his B.S. and Law Degrees from the University of Georgia. He and his wife Ashlee are residents of Vidalia, where Senator Tillery is the managing partner of Smith and Tillery, P.C.

GSRA congratulates Senator Tillery on his appointment as Appropriations Chair. We look forward to working with Senator Tillery on issues of importance to active and retired state employees.

If you know Senator Tillery and/or live in his senatorial district, please join GSRA in congratulating him on his appointment. Be sure to remind him that you are a member of the Georgia State Retirees Association.



Jim's View: Let Me Introduce Myself

As we were discussing potential articles for upcoming newsletters at the May board meeting, it was suggested that we should spotlight at least one board member each newsletter as a way for the GSRA membership to learn more about the members of the Board.

Even though I'm actually serving my second term, this month's *Jim's View* will be about me, Jim Somerville. I currently serve as President of your GSRA.

I retired on October 1, 2010 after a 34 year career with the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD). EPD is a division within the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. I began my EPD career in 1978 as part of the Water Protection Branch. I ended my career as the Chief of the Program Coordination Branch of EPD where I had managerial responsibility for 330 employees. I thoroughly enjoyed my career with EPD.

Although I was born and raised in Brookhaven, Pennsylvania (a small town near the Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania state lines), I attended the University of Georgia (UGA) where I received a degree in Biology.

I have lived in Cobb County since 1977. My wife Fran (a native of Albany, Georgia) is a retired educator, serving mostly in Cobb County schools. I have two grown children. My son Britt is a Radiologist living in West Hollywood, California. My daughter Jamie lives in Cobb County and works for a mobile medical testing company.

In our spare time, Fran and I like to travel, work in our flower garden, or be in Athens cheering on the Dawgs. In addition to my time with GSRA, I served two terms on the UGA Alumni Association Board of Directors.

Jim

Get to Know Your GSRA Organization Members

In an effort to provide membership more information about the various GSRA Board and Operating Committee members who perform the ongoing work of the organization, we will feature one or more board and/or committee members in the newsletter each month. This month, Rhonda Floyd, GSRA's new Administrative Aide and Laura Pike, GSRA's new Event Planner, are featured.



Rhonda Floyd, GSRA Administrative Aide

Rhonda Floyd joined GSRA on February 1, 2020 as the new Administrative Aide after retiring with 30 plus years from the Department of Family and Children Services. While with DFCS, Ms. Floyd was the Operations Manager for Clarke and Oconee Counties and the Region 5 Contract Liaison. Prior positions with DFCS included Personnel Representative and Office Manager with Elbert County DFCS.

Ms. Floyd holds a degree in Accounting and in addition to her duties with GSRA, she also serves as the Executive Secretary with the Georgia Professional Human Services Association and is a member of the Elbert County DFCS Advisory Board. These positions allow her to remain an advocate for both retired and current state employees. Ms. Floyd is the voice on the GSRA phone and looks forward to speaking with each of our GSRA members.



Laura S. Pike, Event Planner

Laura S. Pike served the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) for three decades and retired in August 2016. She began her career in December 1988 as a Court Service Worker in Thomasville, GA. Ms.

Pike received her Bachelor of Science Degree from Valdosta State University in Criminal Justice in 1987 and graduated from Valdosta State University in 2000 with her Master's Degree in Criminal Justice Administration.

In 1997, Laura was promoted to Training Coordinator with the newly formed DJJ Office of Training and was instrumental in developing the implementation of statewide training. Laura has conducted training across the Southeastern United States for both law enforcement and social services professionals. She returned to the Division of Youth Services in the role of Juvenile Program Manager in 2002 and was promoted to the position of District Director in 2012, providing exceptional leadership and oversight to staff and community supervision offices in 23 counties in Southwest Georgia.

Laura is extensively involved in many professional organizations, including Georgia Juvenile Services Association (past President, long time Board member), Board Member of the Marguerite Neel Williams Boys & Girls Clubs of Southwest Georgia; Thomas County Board of Directors for Easter Seals of Southern Georgia, Inc.; Criminal Justice Advisory Board Member for Southern Regional Technical College; Advisory Board Member of the Tree House Children's Advocacy Center; Certified Literate Community Program/CLCP Board member; Children & Youth Coordinating Council Juvenile Justice Training Network, National Major Gang Task Force, Georgia Gang Investigators Association (GGIA), Board Member of the Thomasville Kiwanis and Women's Forum (Executive Board Member) of Thomasville/Thomas County. She is very active in the community and at First Baptist Church, Thomasville, where she has taught Sunday School/life groups, led international and domestic mission trips (Thailand, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Alaska), sings in the choir and the Praise Team, and serves on numerous committees.

Laura is excited by the opportunity to serve Georgia State Retirees Association in the role of Event Planner and is looking forward to the growth of our organization. Laura is blessed with two sons: Miles & his wife Ashley and Matthew & his wife Hillary. Laura resides in Thomasville Georgia and enjoys hiking, kayaking, bass fishing, and socializing with friends



Take a new look at an old friend
Choose an Anthem Medicare Advantage plan.



Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield is the trade name of Blue Cross Blue Shield Healthcare Plan of Georgia, Inc. Independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. ANTHEM is a registered trademark of Anthem Insurance Companies, Inc.

Y0114_18_32445_I 09/01/2017 74123GASENABS



LIVE LIFE, UNINTERRUPTED.

KEEP LIVING YOUR WAY.
You can, with these benefits and discounts from **GSRA & AMBA**:

- Dental & Vision Insurance
- Long-Term Care
- MASA (Air and Ground Ambulance Plan)
- Cancer, Heart & Stroke Policy
- Accident Policy
- Medicare Supplement Policy
- Easy Issue Life Policy
- Hearing Benefits
- Discounts on Travel, Dining & more

Learn more: 1-877-556-4582
myambabenefits.info/gsra

GSRA **AMBA**
ASSOCIATION AMERICA RETIREE ASSOCIATION

GEORGIA STATE RETIREES ASSOCIATION

YOU ARE OUR PRIORITY

OUR MEMBERS FORM **THE FOUNDATION** OF THE COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE.

Since 1926, we've guided ourselves on helping members build a solid financial foundation for their own families.

We're not salespeople, we're solutions people. That's why nobody can serve our members like we can.

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) 768-4125 or toll-free at (800) 847-9431.



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 Shawn 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

APCU
AMERICAN PUBLIC CREDIT UNION
A MEMBER OF SERVICES

SERVING U.S. POSTAL SERVICE EMPLOYEES ★ STATE & FEDERAL WORKERS IN GA ★ RETIREES & THEIR FAMILY MEMBERS

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



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

SHBP retirees give UnitedHealthcare® Medicare Advantage plans over 96% satisfaction.*

Visit us online anytime
Learn more at www.UHCRetirees.com/shbp
Toll-free 877-755-5343, TTY 711, 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. local time, 7 days a week.

UnitedHealthcare®

*2017 UnitedHealthcare Customer Experience Survey scores for Group Medicare Advantage plan members. Plans are insured through UnitedHealthcare Insurance Company or one of its affiliated companies, a Medicare Advantage organization with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in the plan depends on the plan's contract renewal with Medicare.
H2001_180921_041543_M

SPR144291