

## THIRD ANNUAL MEETING A HUGE SUCCESS!

It was 'Standing Room Only' for GSRA's third Annual Meeting on October 21 at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center in Forsyth. Over 500 retirees flooded the large auditorium for the proceedings. In his opening remarks to the crowd, President Claude Vickers reminded everyone of the importance of local chapters and announced that the total number of GSRA Local Chapters has grown to 13 statewide. He asked representatives from each chapter to stand and be recognized. President Vickers remarked after all local chapter attendees stood up that if YOU were not standing with them, it's time for you to join your local chapter. If you don't have one yet in your area, then start one yourself! It's easy. Just send email to [membership@mygsra.com](mailto:membership@mygsra.com) or drop a line to the address at the bottom of this page. One of the GSRA Board members will contact you and help you to organize a local chapter in your area.

GSRA was proud to feature at this meeting a panel discussion by six 2010 candidates for Governor: Thurbert Baker, Roy Barnes, Ray McBerry, DuBose Porter, David Poythress, and Austin Scott. Candidate Jeff Chapman had planned to appear as well, but was unfortunately sidelined by a case of the flu. Nathan Deal, Karen Handel, Eric Johnson, and John Oxendine had other commitments and could not attend. Our moderator, Rick Wingo, did a superb job of keeping the session on track. The candidates answered questions on issues of the most concern to all state retirees, and thanks to timekeeper Tom Turner, the 2-hour discussion proceeded with great efficiency. We have requested written responses to our questions from all eleven candidates and will make them available to GSRA members as they are received. Generally speaking, the candidates' statements seemed to support retirees' positions on pension and health insurance benefits. Many thanks to all who submitted questions for the candidates, and we especially thank all the candidates themselves for appearing on the panel.



*GSRA Members 'pack the house' for the Third Annual Meeting.*



*Candidates' panel discussion. Left to right: Thurbert Baker, Roy Barnes, Ray McBerry, Dubose Porter, David Poythress, Austin Scott.*

## ERS Board Chair Russell Hinton Reports Bad News to Retirees



*Russell Hinton, State Auditor, Chair of the Employee Retirement System Board of Trustees and Member of the Teachers Retirement System.*

Next on our Annual Meeting agenda was Russell Hinton, Chair of the ERS Board of Trustees, and member of the Teachers Retirement System Board. Mr. Hinton provided background information on the status of the ERS pension fund and stated that the prospects were grim for a Cost of Living Allowance for next year. He is working with the ERS Board of Trustees, however, to explore the possibility of an overall COLA policy for all pension funds administered by the ERS.

Auditor Hinton also explained issues around the court suit, Willis vs. ERS, and why decisions required a relatively long time. He announced that the Board of Trustees had a vacancy and invited suggestions for the member, which will be appointed by the Board of Trustees.

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## SHBP Division Chief Nancy Goldstein Answers Questions about Health Insurance Changes



*Left to right: Jean Giles and Nancy Goldstein*

Nancy Goldstein, Division Director of the State Health Benefit Plan Division of the Department of Community Health, was accompanied by Jean Giles of the SHBP and representatives from United Health Care and CIGNA to respond to GSRA members' questions on the latest changes in health benefits for retirees under age 65 and the policy changes for retirees age 65 and older. In addition to the 35 questions submitted to Director Goldstein, GSRA prepared answers to many common questions and distributed them at the Annual Meeting. The questions and answers by SHBP staff and those prepared by GSRA have been posted to the "Current Issues" on the GSRA website at [www.mygsra.com](http://www.mygsra.com).



## Congratulations to GSRA Members on a Great Meeting Turnout!



Remember our very first Annual Meeting in 2007, when about 200 retirees showed up to learn about GSRA? Then the next year, when gas was \$4/gallon and far fewer folks made it to Macon? Our third annual meeting in Forsyth, though, went way beyond our wildest dreams—with an attendance of well over 500 people, you are all to be congratulated on following through on your commitment to become involved in GSRA. The packed house surely has sent a message that GSRA is a growing, dynamic group of individuals determined to see that the state of Georgia follows through on its promises to retirees. Keep it up! Get your retired friends involved; educate your relatives on the issues (especially if they vote!) and stay informed.

How's this for dedication? Shown at left is GSRA member **Linda Stone**, who came all the way from her home in **Kearney, Missouri**, to attend GSRA's Annual Meeting. Linda said, "I may not be able to get to every meeting, but I stay up with what is going on thanks to GSRA and the GSRA website." Maybe next year we should give an award to the member who travels the farthest!

### Minutes—GSRA Plenary Session – October 21, 2009

President Vickers stated that the minutes of the Annual GSRA Meeting of October 15, 2008, had been posted to the GSRA website for members to view and that a copy of the minutes was attached to the plenary session handouts. A GSRA member moved to approve the minutes as distributed, a member seconded the motion, and the members unanimously approved the minutes of the October 15, 2008, meeting.

President Vickers announced that Treasurer Ronnie Mesimer had provided a copy of the Treasurer's report, which was attached to the Plenary Session Agenda. President Vickers made a few remarks regarding the expenses and financial status. A GSRA member moved to accept the Treasurer's report, a member seconded the motion, and the members unanimously approved the motion to accept the Treasurer's report.

President Vickers reported the activities that the various committees had completed. He stated that it was important for the Membership Committee to continue the efforts to create additional local chapters. He also stated that all committees had worked diligently during the year to complete communication articles of interest for the members and improve the website.

Vice President Bill Tomlinson reported on activities of the Legislative Committee. He outlined some of his thoughts regarding actions and legislation that would be appropriate during the next two legislative sessions.

President Vickers introduced Archie McEuen who is heading up the drive to add local chapters of GSRA. McEuen emphasized how important the local chapters are in achieving the GSRA goals and made an appeal to the members for assistance in establishing local chapters.

President Vickers presented GSRA By-Law amendments. He stated that the amendments had been posted to the website and notice provided to the members. A motion was made, seconded, and unanimously approved to approve the By-Law changes as published.

Jerry Crockett, Nominations Committee Chair, presented the nominations for officers and At-Large Board members of the Board of Directors. A motion was made, seconded, and unanimously approved to close the nominations. President Vickers declared the following officers and Board members approved by acclamation

#### Officers

BJ Bennett, President  
 Chuck Freedman, Vice President  
 Rachel Davis, Secretary  
 Jerry Goodroe, Treasurer

#### At-Large Members of the Board of Directors

Kaye Carter – 2009-2011  
 Harvey Nation – 2009-2011  
 Claude Vickers – 2009-2011  
 Luther Lewis – 2009-2010 (Fill the unexpired term of Chuck Freedman)

In addition, President Vickers appointed the following Local Chapter Presidents to the Board for the 2009-2010 term.

- Jim Burton, North
- Burton Carter, South East
- Lewis O'Neal, East
- Bob Pollock, South West

President Vickers thanked the Public Safety Training Facility staff, the volunteers who assisted with

registration, membership, and greeters, and thanked the GSRA Board for the successful Annual Meeting. In addition, incoming President BJ Bennett led a "thank-you" for Claude Vickers for his dedication and leadership over the past three years.

The Plenary Session of 2009 Annual Meeting of the Georgia State Retirees Association was declared adjourned.

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*Left: Outgoing GSRA President Claude Vickers, former Chairman of the ERS Board of Trustees as State Auditor. Right: Incoming Vice President, Chuck Freedman, a 2004 retiree from the Georgia Technology Authority after serving in the Office of Planning & Budget for 25 years.*

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*Left: Incoming GSRA President Bobbie Jean (BJ) Bennett, former Commissioner of Personnel Administration and GSRA Secretary since its inception. Right: Thomasville Members Elizabeth and Samuel Williams wait to register for the Meeting.*

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**GSRA STANDING COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS FOR 2009-2010**

<b>AUDIT</b>	<b>Jerry Crockett</b>
<b>COMMUNICATIONS</b>	<b>Zelda White</b>
<b>EDUCATION</b>	<b>Harold Grindle</b>
<b>LEGISLATIVE</b>	<b>Bill Tomlinson</b>
<b>MEMBERSHIP</b>	<b>Joan Couch</b>
<b>WEBSITE CONTENT</b>	<b>Steve Elmore</b>
<b>WEBSITE MAINTENANCE</b>	<b>Harvey Nation</b>

**LEGISLATIVE BILLS OF INTEREST**  
**Introduced in 2009 and Available for Passage in 2010**

The Georgia General Assembly will convene the 2010 session in January 2010. There are many issues to be addressed by the General Assembly, including the ongoing downturn in state revenues because of the current economic situation. The following table describes bills introduced in 2009 that are still active and could be passed by the General Assembly during the upcoming 2010 Session.

Bill Number	Short Description	Status (4/4/09)
SB 129 and HB 249	Amends Public Retirement Systems Investment Authority Law to allow retirement funds to be placed in "alternative investments". Applies to large retirement systems, including the Employees Retirement System (ERS), <u>but not</u> the Teachers Retirement System (TRS). HB 249 was amended in the House Retirement Committee to apply only to the Firefighters Pension Plan. <i>See GSRA's Feb. 13 Action Alert! HB 249 amended to apply only to the Firefighters Pension Plan.</i>	SB 129 assigned to Senate Retirement Committee 2/10/09. HB 249 favorably reported by House Retirement Committee 3/9/09, restricted to Firefighters Pension Plan only.
SB 161 and HB 426	Original bill amends the insurance code and the State Health Benefit Plan code to require coverage of autism. Later versions of SB 161 deleted reference to the SHBP.	SB 161 tabled by Senate. HB 426 assigned to House Insurance Committee 2/17/09.
SB 176	Amends Public Retirement Systems Standards Law to require full funding of any bill during the first year that creates liability so that no unfunded liability will be created. <i>(See GSRA Newsletter of 2/28/09 for analysis)</i>	Assigned to House Retirement Committee on 3/10/09 and was discussed on 3/18/09.
SB 257 and HB 740	Allows a Board of Regent faculty member or principal administrator to revoke his/her choice to participate in the Board of Regents optional retirement plan.	Assigned to the respective Retirement Committees on 3/18/09.
SB 260	Allows any school system employee to join the Teachers Retirement System.	Assigned to the Senate Retirement Committee on 3/17/09.
HB 54	Amends the Georgia Judicial Retirement System to allow members who initially rejected spouses' benefits to elect such benefits by paying an actuarially determined amount.	Assigned to House Retirement Committee 1/15/09.

If you are reading this, you are probably already a member of GSRA.

SO – What’s the best way to help your Association?

**RECRUIT NEW MEMBERS!!**

Challenge yourself: **“Every-Member-Get-a-Member!”**

Can you recruit at least one new member by the end of the year?